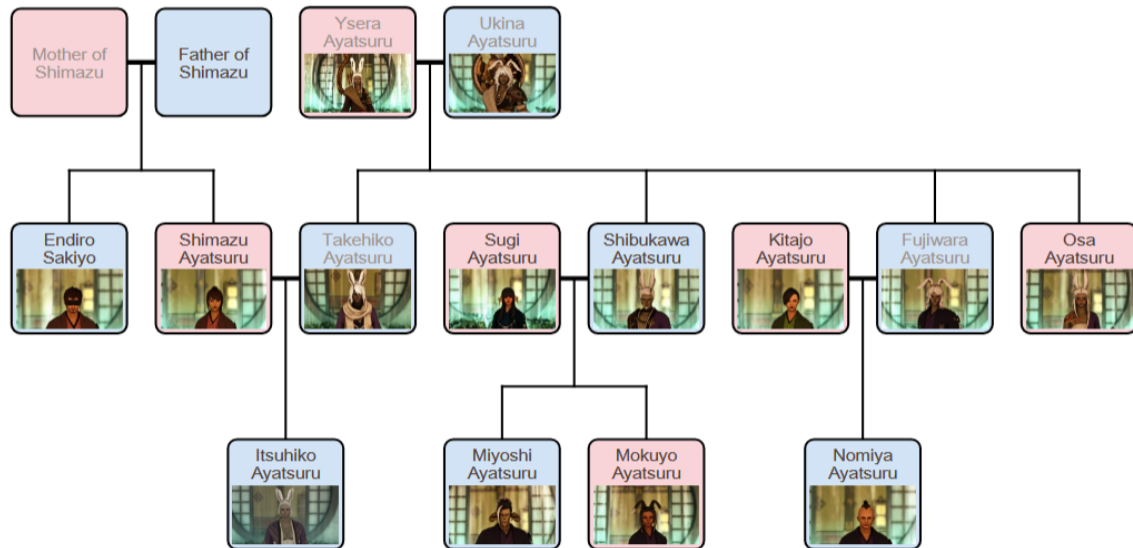


Ayatsuru Family



The story of Itsuhiko begins long before his birth, during the Age of Blood - Hingashi not yet entirely closed, if in part due to the state of its affairs, had occasional mercenaries come from abroad. Two such mercenaries were Ukina Rhew-Bidit and his wife Ysera Atoel, a pair who had left the Golmore Jungle together to make a new life for themselves. In this unfamiliar land, and with Ukina holding a gift of tongues - Able to speak to anyone despite not knowing their language - He managed to secure their safety in Hingashi despite the ongoing warfare. Yet, eventually, even they were brought into the vast armies which fought for control of the country.

During these battles, the aether grew thick, and Ukina and Ysera fought alongside one another - The excess aether in the air fueling their battle rage as they cut swathes through the enemy to aid in their lord's battles, becoming unbreakable centers of their lines or the spear tip which shattered enemy shields. Becoming invaluable, they were raised to the title of nobility - Honored landed samurai, and with it, the house Ayatsuru was born.

As the Age of Blood came to an end, their lord, having fought on the winning side and being gifted great lands by the Bugyo, their lord in turn granted greater concessions to these two foreigners who had been landed as nobles for their valor. Peacetime came, and with it a lack of newfound coin for the pair - Ukina at a loss, but Ysera having the ingenious idea of investing what funds they still had from before becoming landed in the arts. Chefs, Playwrights, Artists, all in their realm, were suddenly granted coin to work and bring their arts to further realms of Hingashi in hopes they would succeed and bring coin back to the newfound house.

It turned out successful, House Ayatsuru becoming wealthy off of its investments as culture began rising in Hingashi after so long of it being put to the wayside for warfare. With a plan to move forward and ensure their family was safe, the two finally began the new life they dreamed of together. They had a child, a man they named Takehiko - Or "Warrior Prince" - As a reminder of what they had gone through to get such a life for their child.

He grew in this peacetime knowing both the training of his parents, of traditional vieran fighting styles, combined with taking in controlled bursts of aether to enhance their natural skill - A trait which they decided would be passed down in their house to ensure their heirs would always hold a fighting edge should war ever break out again. He lived during peacetime, his father aging much slower due to their Vieran heritage, hundreds of years passing with Takehiko remaining the prince of House Ayatsuru, marriages denied until he was to take the seat as head of the household. They had other children at this time, three others: Shibukawa, Fujiwara, and Osa.

Eventually, Ukina and Ysera passed on, leaving Takehiko to rule House Ayatsuru, taking a wife - Shimazu Sakiyo - A hyur noblewoman to cement an alliance and have a child with. This child was Itsuhiko, born on the 10th Sun of the Third Umbral Moon 1555 by Eorzean standards. From an early age, his mother wished for him to become more integrated into Hingan custom, his father too busy dealing with the affairs of the countryside - Riding out to slay bandits and monsters, leaving his raising to Shimazu. She taught him the arts of Hingashi - Things a samurai should know, raising him to be the perfect lord to inherit after his father.

Thus did he learn little of his grandparents' heritage, save for the technique of entering a controlled berserk state with an influx of aether. Instead he was immersed in the arts that House Ayatsuru so often patroned - music, theatre, paintings, and calligraphy alike were all taught even if only some did he have aptitude with. On top of this, he was not trained to fight primarily by his father; rather, his mother brought her brother Endiro into the household to teach Itsuhiko the way of the samurai.

Daily, they would spar, and daily, Itsuhiko would be sprawling on the ground, bruised and battered. Always told to fight with honor, underhandedness only earned him twice the beatings on the training field. When, finally, in his teenage years he won his first bout, there was no fanfare from Endiro despite his elation, instead only cold steel handed to him, proclaiming it was time for him to learn with a real blade. They dueled once more, the tactics he had used before being countered predictably by his opponent, a single slash ending the duel and leaving a scar under Itsuhiko's eye as a reminder.

When Takehiko returned that night, he was furious and banished Endiro from his realm, beginning to teach his son himself instead. From noble politics to bloody battles against beasts and bandits - Itsuhiko and Takehiko fought together as training. Things went well until his untimely death, a bandit's blade cutting deep during a fight and slaying the head of House

Ayatsuru in the year 1573, elevating his son to take the throne. His mother took leave of the house now that he was an adult and could rule the realm himself.

There were years of duty, of bowing to the higher houses, and expecting groveling from those lower on the rungs, of mountains of paperwork and hours of pleading from the subjects he could not all help, of veiled threats and hidden blades, poison tasters and personal guards at all corners. This was too much for him, his passions and desires all lying on the stage and pages of scrolls and books, on the battlefield and in poems, so it was that he hatched a plan and began to work toward it.

He met with officials from Kugane to assure safe passage through the city in secret, and began shifting funds from his house into personal accounts held in Kugane under an alias. Finally, he wrote a will and prayed to the shrine of the kami and his ancestors, praying they would forgive him for his choice, yet resolved to perform it no matter the consequences.

Leaving the scroll on the throne of his castle, he left in the night with little more than the clothes on his back and a straw hat to help hide his features. He made his way across the countryside as a lone ronin of no name, fighting for coin while making his way on foot to Kugane before finally entering the city and being able to reveal himself once more in a place that some may recognize him, but most would never know him and he would not stick out from his heritage, a place to begin his new life.