

“If you must ask what honor is, you will never know” -Ikoma Tsanuri

Explaining the true nature of honor is beyond the scope of ten essays this size. For the man who possesses it, honor is as simple as breathing, and even more constant. As a mechanic in Legend of the Five Rings, it is a way of measuring the character's belief in himself, using the Code of Bushido as his measuring-stick. Every samurai is brought up with an understanding of the Code. The original code was very simple, set down by the Kami Akodo One-eye when the empire was formed. A millennia of warrior-poets and philosophers have studied, copied, and commented on Akodo's words, forming the unique views each clan takes towards bushido. But the fruit has not fallen far from the tree, and even the most passive Isawa and aggressive Matsu can civilly discuss -for a time- the tenets of Bushido.

At the heart of Akodo's Way of the Warrior are eight virtues a great man must possess. While these are discussed below, a character's Honor Rank comes from how well he is able to hold to those virtues both in thought and in deed. One of the most important aspects of Honor is that when a character loses Honor, either from dishonorable actions or self-doubt, he loses the Honor regardless of whether or not anyone saw the deed or noticed the hesitation. Likewise, a man of honor might never be recognized for it despite a lifetime of service. The character is his own judge, and needs no one else to tell him he has lost or gained Honor, and he can never hide his nobility or wickedness from himself.

Because Bushido is such a demanding code, it is a common topic for plays and poetry (and an unfortunate part of daily life) when a samurai is trapped between the conflicting demands of different virtues. Only the greatest samurai are able to resolve these dilemmas gracefully, serving their lord and their honor well. Many find no solution to their plight, and commit seppuku to avoid the dishonor that any decision will bring them. Other samurai, without that courage or conviction, either dishonor themselves, or retire, abandoning bushido as too hard a road. Some samurai, after a single bout of dishonor, spend the remainder of their lives trying to atone, or recover their good name.

Understanding the Scale

A character's Honor is ranked on a 51 point scale. There are six ranks, 0 to 5 and for each rank other than 5 there are ten possible points. At the center of the scale is Honor Rank 2.5 (rank two with five points). 2.5 then is the typical samurai. At the bottom of the scale is 0.0 (zero rank with no points) and at the top is 5.0. When a character with Honor 4.0 loses a point of Honor, his Honor rank becomes 3.9. When a character with honor 1.8 gains 4 points of honor, her Honor Rank becomes 2.2. This is very important because the whole number portion of the character's Honor Rank influences a number of mechanics, while the points record how easily the character may slip into another rank.

But I'm not a Bushi!

While bushido is literally "The Way of Warriors" or "to do as a warrior does" its tenets have filled every corner of samurai life. Shugenja and courtiers may not practice the martial philosophies that make up the bulk of Akodo's Bushido, but any man can practice the virtues of nobility and honor. Non-bushi characters still judge themselves against the principles of bushido, determining their own sense of worth much as bushi do.

Why Does My Character Have a Low Starting Honor?

Some schools start play with a fairly low honor. The typical samurai of that school may be tremendously loyal, stalwart in his duties, or dedicated to the welfare of his clan. Even so, characters from these schools know that they do not measure up against the code of bushido as a whole. This lopsided devotion allows them to draw upon the strength of their honor for certain challenges, but on the whole their Honor rank tends to be low. Individual characters may choose to embrace the tenets of bushido more broadly, either paying CPs to start at a higher Honor Rank, or can seek to gain honor in play by behaving better than their past.

Why Does My Character Have a High Starting Honor?

Some schools instill their students with bushido at every step, filling the youth's mind with both the glories and demands of honor. While the character will still cling more to particular virtues, he is filled with deep reverence for all aspect of bushido. Some characters from these schools reject their teaching. Bushido does not sprout so fully from their soul. Characters may gain a pittance in CPs for being crippled in this fashion, or play their character as a less than exemplary samurai, shedding Honor over time.

The Eight-fold Way

It is said that when Akodo prepared to write his great volume on the Way of the Warrior he asked each of his siblings what they thought was most important in a good man.

Hida thought long, and grumbled, "It is the sense of Duty, or the man will cease to do good, for it is an unforgiving, lonely task."

Togashi sent his brother word, "Understanding, for the good man knows why he chooses to do right."

Lady Doji told him, "It must be Excellence, for in man it is not what he is able to do, but his drive to do better in all things that makes him great."

The twins said, "Compassion, for without it the man can do no good for any but himself" and "Loyalty, for through loyalty does the man contributes to the good that is greater than himself."

His sister Shinjo pondered, "Family, for only family can redeem his goodness when a man falls."

Akodo asked his youngest brother, and he replied "Courtesy, for the man may only know his place in the Celestial Order by the respect he gives and receives."

And then Hantei asked him his own question. Akodo considered the many wise answers his siblings had given him. The he replied, "Courage, for without it the man will never have the strength to try."

While all honorable samurai strive to uphold the ideals of the Code of Bushido, each Clan tends to emphasize the virtue of its founder. This can create significant differences in the behavior of honorable samurai. So while every samurai is measuring himself against Akodo's eight virtues, there is often one that he cares for most deeply.

Who Will You Betray?

In Rokugan it is said each man has three masters: his father, his sensei, and his lord.

The truth is even more complex.

Some samurai will make the fortunes of the family, or their clan, their spouse, or their Emperor their most critical concern, and their greatest loyalty. Some generals become more loyal to their men than their lords, ignoring orders that would see them

slaughtered. Many bushi will act on the wishes of their sensei over the edicts of the Emperor. A wife may choose to serve the will of her father over that of her husband. A tragic flaw associated with the Lion Clan is loyalty to one's own honor over anything else. A wise daimyo is always aware of these conflicting demands upon his vassals. A conflict of loyalties is one of the fastest routes to a samurai's destruction or disgrace.

Each character should make up a "loyalty list". This list should include at least as many names as his Honor Rank. Scorpion Characters should have two extra names on their list because of their extreme devotion to loyalty. Character's whose school upholds loyalty (see below) must include an extra item or person on this list. The loyalty list acts as a guide of who the character would side with when push comes to shove. This also serves as a tool for the player to understand the most intense passions of his character, and for a Game Master to present the most difficult of moral quandaries, because in Rokugan, an irresolvable conflict of loyalty is most often settled with seppuku...

Bushido, not Chivalry

While Bushido is a guide to the proper conduct of a warrior, it must be remembered that bushido is very different from western chivalry. When at war, a warrior does nearly anything to win. Sneak attacks, stealthy harassment, and dispatching spies are all standard fare. Bushido can be shockingly pragmatic. A general may yield certain advantages to his enemy, but this isn't to make a battle more "fair", but to show how truly superior his forces are.

At peace, the differences in a warrior's manner are subtle. While he is developing more graceful skills to balance his martial prowess, war - open or covert - could come again at any moment. And his enemy will expect him to be prepared or pay the price, just as he would should the opportunities be reversed.

The Test of Honor

The most common use for Honor mechanically is for a character to say "No!" A character who is about to have a moral lapse, is about to give in to temptation or sorcery or pain, and do something that is unquestionably wrong according to bushido, may call for a Test of Honor. The GM determines a TN based on the severity of the temptation or coercion affecting the character. The samurai then rolls and keeps a number of dice equal to his Honor Rank. If the roll is successful, the character is able to put aside the temptation, resist the coercion, or press on despite the pain. This situation has tested the character's deepest beliefs in himself, and found him worthy. The character gains a point of Honor. If the roll fails, not only does the character succumb to temptation, or yield to the pain, but he has shown himself the weakness that is at the root of his spirit. The samurai immediately loses one full Honor Rank.

A Test of Honor should never be taken lightly...

Honor Rank is also used to determine difficulties and bonuses for spells, techniques, and attempts to trick or bribe samurai. These actions and bonuses do not directly change the character's Honor Rank.

Clan and School Bonuses

Each clan favors one virtue over all others. This results in characters receiving two extra dice to roll but not keep during Tests of Honor relating to that virtue. Likewise each school instills a particular bias to its students. This grants an additional +1k0 to Honor Rolls for that virtue for the character's first school only. These two bonuses must always be to separate virtues. If a character's school bonus is the same as his Clan bonus because of the Different School Advantage, he gains a one die bonus in the same virtue as the Clan his school is from. For example a Unicorn (family) sent to the Hiruma

Scouts for schooling (also family) instead receives a one die benefit to the Crab virtue of duty from his schooling.

Offsetting this advantage is a serious penalty. If the character receive one extra die, but fails the roll, he loses 12 points of Honor. If he had received two extra dice and fails, he loses 15 points of Honor.

Crab: Duty

Hida Bushi: Family
Hida Berserker: Courage
Hiruma Scout: Family
Kaiu Engineer: Courage
Kuni Shugenja: Understanding
Kuni Tsukai-sagasu: Understanding
Yasuki Trader: Excellence

Crane: Excellence

Asahina: Compassion
Daidoji Scout: Family
Daidoji Yojimbo: Family
Doji Bushi: Loyalty
Doji Courtier: Courtesy
Kakita Artisan: Compassion
Kakita Duelist: Courage

Dragon: Understanding

Agasha Craftsman: Duty
Agasha Shugenja: Courtesy
Mirumoto Bushi: Excellence
Kitsuki Magistrate: Courtesy
Ise Zumi: Courage

Lion: Courage

Akodo Bushi: Excellence
Akodo Tactician: Understanding
Ikoma Omoidasu: Family
Ikoma Scout: Duty
Kitsu Shugenja: Courtesy
Kitsu Sodan-senzo: Courtesy
Matsu Bushi: Loyalty

Phoenix: Compassion

Asako Henshin: Family
Asako Magistrate: Courtesy
Isawa Ishiken: Understanding
Isawa Shugenja: Understanding
Isawa Tensai: Understanding
Shiba Bushi: Loyalty

Scorpion: Loyalty

Bayushi Bushi: Family
Bayushi Courtier: Family
Shosuro Butei: Excellence
Shosuro Shinobi: Courage
Soshi Shugenja: Duty
Yogo Assassin: Duty

Yogo Shugenja: Understanding

Unicorn: Family

Ide Emmisary: Courtesy

Iuchi Shugenja: Understanding

Moto Bushi: Duty

Otaku Shiotome: Excellence

Shinjo Bushi: Loyalty

Shinjo Magistrate: Duty

Hantei: Courtesy

Miya Magistrate: Duty

Otomo: Family

Seppun: Loyalty

Gaining & Losing Honor

Because honor is such a personal thing, it can be difficult for the beginning GM to adjudicate it properly. As a rule, when a character consistently acts like a character with a higher or lower honor than he has, his honor shifts towards how he is acting. To determine the changes determine the Honor Rank of the action, and subtract the Honor Rank of the character. So if the character's honor is greater than the action's, he loses Honor. Particularly outstanding acts can immediately change a character's Honor.

The character is considered one rank higher than he really is (to a maximum of 5) in matters of his clan's virtue. This makes it harder to advance and easier to fall where that virtue is concerned.

Rank 0- Only consistently dishonorable behavior can lower your honor points further. It is as difficult to reach Honor 0.0 as Honor 5.0. Rank 1 and 2 behavior does not increase you Honor. Behavior fitting for Honor 3 or higher characters gets you 3-5 points of Honor.

Rank 1- Rank 0 acts can decrease your honor. Rank 1 and 2 behavior does not increase it. Rank 3 to 5 deeds earn you 2-4 points.

Rank 2- You are balanced between exemplary and despicable. All acts that are not Rank 2 affect your honor.

Rank 5-you are at the pinnacle of bushido. Rank 3 to 5 behavior is the norm for you.

Rank 0 to 2 acts will cost you greatly.

Example: Excepting every challenge to your skills is Honor 3 behavior, from the virtue of courage. A character who has an honor rank of 3 or more will not have his Honor change for doing so. An honor rank 1 character would gain 2 honor for behaving so, and an Honor Rank 2 character would gain 1 point for it.