NINJATO

IN 12TH CENTURY JAPAN, the Minamoto and Taira clans vie for power while retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa plays his rivals against one another. One of the three factions will triumph to impose the coming social order. In the shadow of these elite powers, a few ninja scheme to exploit the chaos. Daring raids, skill mastery, and subtle intrigue are essential to establishing one's honor. When the new era dawns, one ninja will flourish as the Ninjato, the Invisible Sword of the ruling family.

1 Game Board. The board shows different locations for actions: the Dojo, the Sensei, the Palace, the Pavilion, and the 5 clan-controlled houses.

15 Clan tokens. There are 5 tokens for each clan. These are used to show which clan controls a house and the honor level of the house.

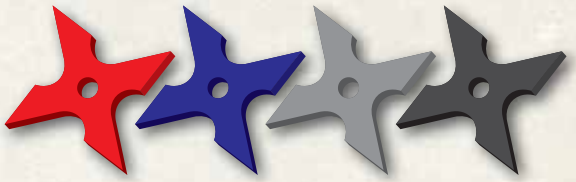
19 Sensei Skill tiles. These skills help ninja in various ways during the struggle.

90 Treasure tokens. Treasures are gained by defeating guards in the houses and are used to gain envoys and spread rumors.

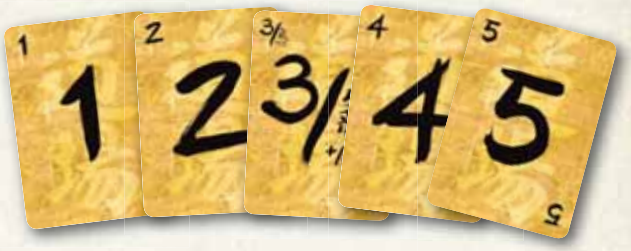
30 Rumor cards. These cards gain bonus honor at the end of the game.

1 Bag. It's an enchanted bag, but the enchantment is undetectable.

1 Round marker. Used to track rounds.



12 Shuriken (Throwing Stars), 12 wooden markers. Each player gets 3 shuriken in a color to indicate actions and 3 markers: one to indicate turn order and two to track honor.



52 Dojo cards. These cards are used to invade the houses and purchase skills.

21 Envoy cards. Envoys enable you to exhange treasure for honor and gain allegiance to clans.

40 Guard and 20 Elite Guard cards. Guards protect the treasures in the houses. Elite guards are more difficult to defeat than regular guards.

Game Setup

PLACE THE BOARD in the center of the table. Each player takes 3 shuriken of the same color and the matching wooden markers. Put one marker from each player in a container, then randomly draw them one by one and place them on the **Turn Order Track** 1 in the center of the board. This sets the turn order for the first round. The other two markers from each player are placed at the beginning of the **Honor Track** 2. Players keep their 3 shuriken in front of them.

Shuffle the **Guard Cards** 3 and the **Elite Guard Cards** 4 in separate face down stacks. Draw and place 1 guard card face up on each house 5 as the sentry protecting the house.

Take a 2 and a 4 honor value Taira (red) clan token and place them on different **Clan Houses**. Do the same for the Minamoto (blue) clan. Place the 6 honor value Go-Shirakawa (green) token 6. Place the remaining clan tokens in a pile off to the side of the board. Mix up the **Treasure tokens** in the bag and place 3 treasures in each house 7, plain side up (red side face down).

Separate the 3 *Hensojutsu* (Disguise) Skill Tiles from the rest, shuffle them, and place them in a face down stack next to the **Sensei** area 8. Now shuffle the rest of the skill tiles and place them in a large face down stack next to the *Hensojutsu* tiles 9. Draw a number of skill tiles equal to the number of players from the large stack and place them face up in the Sensei area.

Shuffle the E**nvoy Cards** and place 4 face up on the **Palace** 10 Put the remaining envoys in a face down stack near the board.

Shuffle the **Rumor Cards** and place 4 face up in the **Pavilion** 11. Put the remaining rumors in a face down stack near the board.

Shuffle the **Dojo Cards** and deal 4 to each player. Turn up 3 dojo cards on the dojo and place the deck next to the **Dojo** 12 face down.

Place the round marker on 1 on the **Round Track** 13.

You are now ready to play!

Playing the Game

IN THE ROLE OF A MASTER NINJA, each player practices in the dojo, learns esoteric skills from the sensei, raids clan-controlled houses to steal fabulous treasure, influences envoys, spreads rumors in the pavilion, and ultimately tries to become the most legendary ninja of the age.

In turn order, each player places 1 shuriken on a location and immediately follows the rules for that location. Once all players have placed 3 shuriken, the round is over. The game lasts 7 rounds. Rounds 3, 5, and 7 have special scoring at the end of the round. In the end, the player with the most honor wins.

You place one shuriken each turn to immediately perform the selected action. Here, you are attacking the house with strength.

Actions

In turn, each player places 1 shuriken on the board and takes one of the following actions:

THE DOJO: Take some dojo cards.

THE SENSEI: Learn a skill to use in invading houses.

THE CLAN HOUSES: Play dojo cards to defeat guards and take treasure.

THE PALACE: Discard and score treasure to take 1 envoy.

THE PAVILION: Discard and score treasure to take 1 rumor card.

Shuriken

Shuriken locations remain valid even with previously-placed shuriken on them.

The Dojo

PLACE A SHURIKEN HERE and take dojo cards in any combination from the face up cards or the draw pile. The number of dojo cards you take depends on how many dojo cards are already in your hand. If you have no dojo cards, take four. If you have one dojo card, take three. If you have two or more dojo cards, take two. After you take *all* of your cards, replace any face up cards taken with new cards from the draw pile. If there are no more cards in the deck, shuffle the discards and start a new pile.

Hand Limit

If you have over 7 dojo cards in hand, you must discard down to 7.

Always stack your shuriken on top of any previously placed shuriken on the dojo. At the end of the round, the dojo shuriken stack determines the player order in the next round. The player with the topmost shuriken goes first, and so on down through the stack (if a player placed more than 1 shuriken on the dojo, only his top one counts).

Example: *Suppose the current player order is Tom, Mike, Eve, and Brandon. During the round, Brandon places a shuriken in the dojo. Later, Mike places one on top of Brandon's. Tom and Eve do not place any shuriken in the dojo. So the stack order, top to bottom, is Mike – Brandon. The player order in the following round will be Mike, Brandon, Tom, Eve.*

Dojo cards range in value from 1 to 5.

The Clan Houses

Guards range in value from 1 to 5.

YOU INVADE HOUSES TO EARN TREASURE. Each treasure is protected by a guard. The Sentry is the face up guard you know about in advance, the other guards are surprises. Each time you defeat a guard, you put a treasure on your shuriken. Then you decide whether to leave or take on the next guard (and get another treasure). To take on the next guard, call *Banzai*. If you defeat all guards in a house, you will hurt the honor level of the clan that lost the house, and help the honor of the clan that will take it over.

Treasures range in value from 2-5 honor. Though Gold has variable value, it is considered the most valuable treasure in houses. The plain side of a treasure token indicates it is protected by a normal guard, the red side indicates an elite guard. As you defeat guards, you take the plain treasures first, from least valuable on up, then the red side treasures, from least valuable on up.

Here's a typical house controlled by the Taira clan. There is a 5 value Samurai turned up as the sentry guard, protecting the scroll (the lowest value plain treasure). There is an unknown guard protecting each of the other treasures—a vase and a gold.

Strength or Stealth?

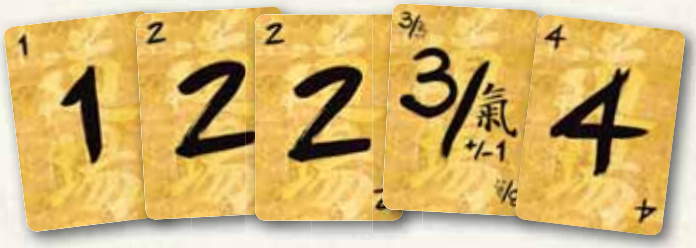
To start your attack, place a shuriken on the strength or stealth side of a house.

For **strength**, you must play a dojo card that is a *higher* value than the guard card.

For **stealth**, you must play a dojo card that is *lower* value than the guard card.

Ties do not win!

Suppose you hold this hand of dojo cards:



You have a good "stealthy" hand so you place your shuriken on the stealth spot. To beat the 5 sentry, you play your 4.

Then you take the lowest value plain side treasure, the scroll, and put it on your shuriken. You leave the sentry on the house for now.

You decide to call *Banzai*, which tells another player at the table to flip up a guard—a regular guard because there are plain side up treasures in the house. He turns up a 1 guard—you must play your 1 card along with your 3/氣 card as a -1 kicker to defeat this guard.

You take the least valuable plain side treasure remaining, the vase.

The "Kicker" A 3 dojo card may be played like a normal dojo card. But it may also be played along with another dojo card as a **kicker**—giving +1 or -1 to the dojo card. You may play multiple kickers on the same dojo card.

Calling Banzai

Let's take a moment to discuss the *"Banzai"* decisions. Saying *Banzai* tells another player to turn up a guard card, you're going to attempt to defeat it. If you call *Banzai*, but you cannot defeat the guard? Failure. You take only one treasure from your shuriken—discard any other treasures on it. If you decide to leave instead of calling Banzai, you take all treasures from your shuriken. In either case, leave any remaining treasures in the house.

Returning to our example, there is one plain side up treasure left in the house—gold. You call *Banzai*, and a guard with an alarm symbol is turned up!

Alarm!

When an alarm guard is turned up, immediately draw 1 treasure from the bag and place it plain side up in the house. Then select the most valuable plain side up treasure in the house and flip it to the red side. So an alarm increases the treasure in a house, but it also means the best treasure is protected by an elite guard card.

In our example, you draw a treasure for the alarm—a jade. Then you flip the most valuable treasure—gold—to its red side. Continuing play, you defeat the 3 guard by playing a 2 and then put the jade on your shuriken. The gold is still in the house! Facing another *Banzai* decision, you know that if you go for it, you will face a guard from the elite deck, because the remaining treasure is red side up.

You decide to leave. You take the vase, scroll, and jade from your shuriken and leave the gold, red side up, on the house. You draw another treasure from the bag and place it plain side up in the house. The sentry recovers and stays in the house.

Defeating an elite guard earns honor at the end of the game, shown here.

Some elite guards have different values depending on whether you're invading by stealth or strength. This one is a 5 against strength invasions, and a 1 against stealth invasions.

Some elite guards are actually 2 guards. You must separately defeat both a 3 guard and a 5 guard to defeat this one.

Alarm Guards

There is an alarm symbol on some regular guards.

Alarms are ignored on sentry guards. More than one alarm guard may be drawn in a house, so an unlucky ninja may face several elite guard cards in one invasion.

Succeeding

If you defeat all guards in a house, you take all of the treasure. You also replace the clan honor token on the house with a token from one of the other two clans. The house is left empty for the rest of the round—the Sentry guard is discarded.

Failing or Leaving

After you resolve the treasure on your shuriken (see *Calling Banzai*), add 1 treasure to the house, plain side up. Leave the Sentry on the house—he recovers. The house may be invaded again this round by you or another player.

Keep Defeated Elites!

All drawn guard cards are discarded after encounters except for beaten elite guards—keep those for end of game scoring.

*The Clan Control tokens show the actual **mon** of the clans. Japanese mon were analogous to European coats of arms, and similarly, were often displayed on banners and clothing.*

The mon were a butterfly for Taira, bamboo leaves for Minamoto, and the imperial chrysanthemum for Go-Shirakawa.

The Teachings

During rounds 1-4, there are skills available from the sensei equal to the number of players.

During rounds 5-7, the sensei only teaches one skill—the *Hensojutsu* (Disguise) skill—to a single student.

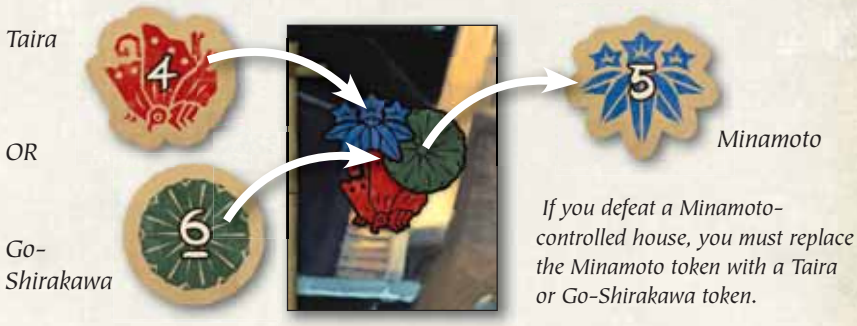
Reshuffling Cards

During the game, you may exhaust the supply of dojo or guard cards. Shuffle the discards and start a new deck.

Changing Clan Control

Each house is worth 2, 4, 5, 6 or 8 honor for one clan. Throughout the game, the control of houses changes from one clan to another. Such control changes occur when you defeat all guards in a house. You must return the house's clan token to the pile and replace it with any token of a different clan. The house is left empty of treasure until the end of the round. No one may place shuriken there.

Envoys give you influence with a clan—see *The Palace* on page 8. To see how honor on houses is awarded to players, see *Scoring Phases* on page 9.



If you defeat a Minamoto-controlled house, you must replace the Minamoto token with a Taira or Go-Shirakawa token.

The Sensei

PLACE A SHURIKEN TO VISIT THE SENSEI to learn one skill. Select a skill by discarding the dojo card shown on the skill tile. A **?** means that you may discard any dojo card. You may learn skills from different styles. Once you learn a skill of a certain style (snake, tiger, crane), you do not have to discard a dojo card to buy more skills of that style.

Example: *You discard a 5 dojo card to learn the skill* Kenjutsu, *a Tiger style skill. For future visits to the sensei, you do not have to discard cards to select a Tiger style skill.*

You may use a skill only once per round. When you do, turn the tile face down. If you learn the same skill twice, you may use each skill tile once per round. At the end of the round, turn your used skills back up.

Most skills help you invade clan houses. The *Hensojutsu* (Disguise) skill is unique in that it is used during a scoring phase (see *Scoring Phases* on page 9).

If you have no snake style skills, you must discard a 1 value dojo card to learn Shinobi-iri.

Gives a -2 to a dojo card.

"A puff of smoke, or a bit of breeze, going past a guard."

Gives a + 1 or a -1 to a dojo card.

"The way of the open hand."

Gives a + 2 to a dojo card.

"Distraction is a sword."

Changes the value of a played dojo card to 0.

"An artist of shadow."

Acts as if you played a 2 or a 4 dojo card.

"Inventive devil of a trickster."

Changes the value of a played dojo card to 6.

"Speed of the blade."

Example: *You are attacking a house with a 2 Sentry using stealth. You use your* Intonjutsu *(Concealment) skill to change a 5 dojo card into a 0 to defeat the Sentry. You call* "Banzai" *and an elite Tsuba appears—he is a 3 vs. stealth.*

You use your Boryaku *(Tactics) skill as a 2 dojo card to win—you don't need to play an actual dojo card. You keep the elite Tsuba card for end of game bonus scoring*

Swaps 1 treasure on your shuriken for any one treasure in the house.

This can be played at any point during a house invasion, even after a failure. If a red side up treasure in the house is exchanged for a plain side up treasure on your shuriken, you must flip the most valuable treasure remaining in the house to red side up.

"The heightened senses of a scout."

Flip any skill face up except *Henojutsu* (Disguise). The flipped skill may be re-used this round.

"Mind over body."

Example: *You are attacking a house with strength, only a red side up jade treasure is left. You confidently call* "Banzai," *but unfortunately, a two-guard elite card is drawn. Your remaining dojo card can defeat either one, but not both.*

Making the best of it, you use your Choho *(Espionage) skill to exchange a fan on your shuriken for the jade. Because the jade was red side up, the fan is flipped red side up in the house. Because you failed, you only keep one treasure from your shuriken, but at least it will be a valuable jade.*

Switches your attack from stealth to strength, or strength to stealth, for the rest of the house. This can played after a guard card is revealed. The change from stealth to strength or vice versa holds for the rest of the guards in the house.

Example: A 5 guard is revealed and you're attacking with strength. You use Seishin-teki *to change to stealth and play a 3 to defeat the guard.*

"The active mind must be clear."

Gain 1 additional influence from one of your bribed envoys, who must have the **mask** symbol. If you have more than one *Hensojutsu* skill, you must choose different envoys.

"The illusion becomes reality."

The Palace

PLACE A SHURIKEN NEXT TO THE PALACE to bribe one envoy by discarding the matching treasures and immediately scoring the value of those treasures in honor. Take the envoy and place it face up in front of you. During each scoring phase, the players with the most and second most envoys in each clan earn additional honor or a Rumor card. In case of a tie, the player with the oldest envoy in that clan wins. See *Scoring Phases* on page 9.

Indicates you can use the Hensojutsu *(Disguise) skill on this envoy.*

The symbol and color indicate the clan. The number is the age of the envoy.

This envoy requires 1, 2, 3 or 4 of any one kind of treasure.

This envoy requires 1 of any one kind of treasure and 3 of any one kind of treasure.

This envoy requires exactly 1 vase and 1 jade statuette.

Bribing Envoys

When specific treasures are shown on an envoy, those treasures are required. For example, if an Envoy card shows a fan and a jade, you must discard a fan and a jade, immediately scoring 7 honor.

Other envoys may take various kinds of treasure and thus score varying honor. For example, an envoy might require 1 of any treasure plus 3 of any treasure of the same kind. You could bribe this envoy with 1 vase and 3 jade (19 honor), or 4 fans (8 honor), or 1 scroll and 3 vases (15 honor), etc.

Gold is Wild

Gold may be substituted as any treasure you choose, scoring as that treasure. In the previous example, you could bribe the envoy with 1 fan, 2 vases, and 1 gold—the gold would have to substitute for a vase. This would score 14 honor.

Spent Treasure

Discarded treasure is kept in a pile off the board. If you exhaust the treasure in the bag, put the discards back in.

Hidden Rumors

After you buy a Rumor card, you may keep it face down until the end of the game. Rumor cards and Dojo cards are the only hidden player information.

The Pavilion

PLACE A SHURIKEN NEAR THE PAVILION to spread one favorable rumor among the nobility. You discard 1 or 2 treasure indicated on the rumor and take the rumor card. As with Envoys, you immediately earn honor from the treasure you spend. Some rumor cards may be bought with any treasure, some require specific treasure.

Rumors work best if there is some substance behind the rumor. For example, if you have one or more *"Greatest Warrior"* rumor cards, you'll score best if you have a lot of defeated elite guard cards.

See *End of Game Bonus Scoring* on page 10.

Indicates that you need to collect skill tiles to score bonus honor with this rumor.

This rumor card requires 1 jade statuette.

Ending a Round

AT THE END OF EACH ROUND, do the following:

Move Player Order Markers. The Dojo shuriken stack determines the player order in the next round. The player with the topmost shuriken goes first, and so on down through the stack. Players who didn't place shuriken in the dojo do not change position relative to one another. Afterwards, players gather their shuriken.

Reset Skills. Players turn all their skills tiles face up.

Reset the Sensei. Discard any leftover face up skills. Draw from the large stack a number of skill tiles equal to the number of players and place them face up. Any skills left over in the large stack after round 4 are discarded. Round 5 on, draw and place one *Hensojutsu* (Disguise) skill tile face up from the small stack.

Reset Cleared Houses. If a house has no treasures (all guards were defeated), draw out and place 3 treasures plain side up on the house. Next, place a new guard on the house who becomes the new Sentry. If the sentry is an alarm guard, ignore the alarm (do not add an additional treasure to the house for that alarm).

Refill Palace and Pavilion. If there are less than 4 Envoys in the Palace, draw and turn up Envoys until there are 4. Do the same for the rumors in the Pavilion.

Scoring Phases Advance the round marker to the next round. After rounds 3, 5, and 7, perform a scoring phase as shown below. After round 7, the end of game bonus scoring follows the scoring phase.

Scoring Phases

AFTER THE 3RD, 5TH, AND 7TH ROUNDS, there is a scoring phase.

For each clan, the first and second place players in envoy influence receive a reward. Each envoy in a clan counts as 1 influence in that clan. Ties are won by the player with the oldest envoy in that clan.

To begin, in player order, players with the *Hensojutsu* (Disguise) skill declare which envoy of theirs that they are targeting. Players may only choose envoys with the icon.

Example: *You have 2 Envoys in Go-Shirakawa, one has the icon. You decide to use* Hensojutsu *on this envoy, giving you a total of 3 influence.*

Players are rewarded in the clan order shown on the round track. For example, in round 3 scoring, Go-Shirakawa is rewarded first, then Taira, and then finally Minamoto. You reward first place for each clan in order, then second place for each clan in order.

The player with the most envoy influence in a clan has a choice—score the total honor on the clan's houses or get a free Rumor card from the Pavilion. No treasure is used or scored for a free rumor. After each first place player chooses, the second place player gets whatever the first player left.

Rumors are not scored until the end of the game (see *End of Game Bonus Scoring* on page 10).

Example

At the end of round 5, the clan houses look like this:

Taira

Minamoto

Go-Shirakawa

The player with the most envoy influence in Taira has first choice —he happily chooses the house honor and marks 14 honor with his scoring token.

The player with most Minamoto influence is miffed about the paltry 2 house honor, so he selects a rumor card instead.

The first place Go-Shirakawa player takes the 8 house honor.

Now second place players in each clan get the leftover rewards. Taira must take a rumor card, Minamoto must take 2 house honor, and Go-Shirakawa must take a rumor card.

Refill Pavilion Again

Refill the Pavilion with Rumor cards after scoring phases.

End of Game Bonus Scoring

"Greatest Warrior" *scores Elite Guard cards.*

"Goodwill of the People" *scores Rumor cards.*

"Powerful Friends" *scores Envoy cards.*

"Master of the Secret Art" *scores Skill tiles.*

These rumor cards score extra if you have 3 of the same type.

After the last round ends, following the last Scoring Phase, do the End of Game Bonus Scoring. The bonus scoring is for Rumors, Unused Treasure, and Defeated Elite Guards.

Rumor Bonus Scoring

Most rumor cards act as a "multiplier" for something else you collect—a full "set" is 3. If you have 1 rumor of a type, the multiplier is x1. If you have 2 rumors of the same type, the multiplier is x2. If you have 3 rumors of the same type, the multiplier is x4. If you collect more than 3 rumors of the same type, you're starting a new set.

Example: *Suppose you have 2* "Master of the Secret Art" *Rumor cards. Two matching rumor cards have a x2 multiplier. So if you collected 4 skill tiles, you score 8 honor. If you had 3* "Master of the Secret Art" *Rumor cards—a set—the multiplier would've been x4 and you would have scored 16 honor.*

Example: *Suppose you have 3* "Goodwill of the People" *Rumor cards and two other Rumor cards. This would score 20 honor.*

"Dishonorable Opponents" *scores uniquely.*

"Dishonorable Opponents"

These score in a unique way—there is no multiplier. If you are the only player with this type of Rumor card, each card scores 6 honor. If two players have this type of Rumor card, each card scores 4 honor for its owner. If three or more players have this type of Rumor card, each card scores 2 honor for its owner.

Example: *Suppose you have 2* "Dishonorable Opponents" *cards and another player has 1 of them. You score 8 honor and the other player scores 4. If no other player had a* "Dishonorable Opponents" *card, you would have scored 12.*

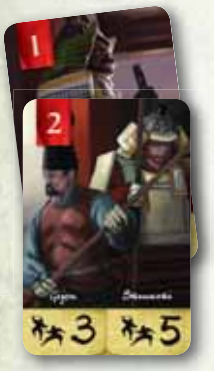
Unspent treasure tokens score 1 honor each.

Unused Treasure Bonus Scoring

You get 1 honor for each remaining treasure you have—no matter the type of treasure.

Defeated Elites Bonus Scoring

For each elite guard you defeated during the game, you receive 1 or 2 honor as indicated on the elite.



Elite Guards score the honor on their banner—these two would score a total of 3 honor.

Winning

THE PLAYER WITH THE MOST HONOR WINS! All other players must bow respectfully to the victor—and put away the game. When you bow, do it with humility! You are in the presence of a superior!

In the event of a tie, the player with the most envoys wins. If there is still a tie, the player with the oldest envoy (in any clan) wins!

Historical Notes

THE HEIAN PERIOD ("Hey-on") from 794-1185 was the last era of classical Japanese history. It was a golden age for Japanese culture, especially in the arts. Influenced by ideas in China, the Japanese blossomed in painting, architecture, poetry, and especially literature. Though the Emperor nominally ruled, power was shared between the emperor and several family clans and enforced with a rising bushi military class.

Perhaps the greatest artistic achievement was the *Tale of Genji*, written by a woman in the middle levels of the aristocracy, Murasaki Shikibu. This enduring classic has a claim as the first novel ever written. It is certainly the first with such a degree of psychological characterization. Life in the Imperial Court is shown with astonishing insight and detail. The formal social code emphasized grace, rank, manners, and custom. Nobles improvisationally modified short tanka poems to express their views in veiled allusions.

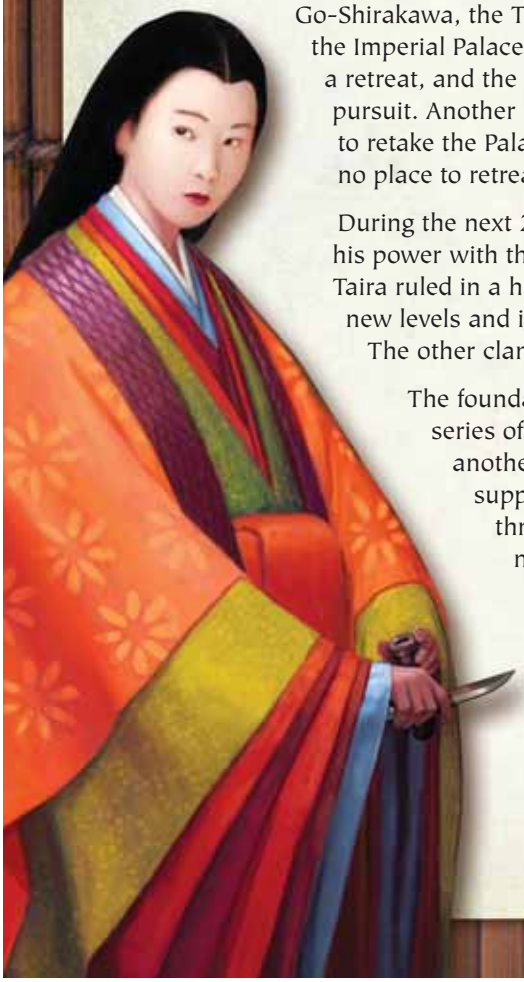
The power struggle that Ninjato plays upon began in 1156, in the wake of the suppressed Hogen Rebellion. Because of their assistance, the Taira and Minamoto clans gained new prominence in the government, and Go-Shirakawa became emperor. This cooperation did not last.

Go-Shirakawa soon "retired" to wield power behind the scenes as a cloistered emperor, more powerful than the series of emperors that followed. In 1159, the leader of the Taira clan, Taira no Kiyamori, went on a pilgrimage and left the Imperial Palace lightly defended. The rival Minamoto clan seized its chance and occupied the palace. Go-Shirakawa was imprisoned.

When Taira no Kiyomori returned, he negotiated his surrender to Minamoto. The Minamoto became careless and Go-Shirakawa escaped, finding refuge with the Taira. The surrender was a ruse. With permission from Go-Shirakawa, the Taira clan attacked the Minamoto clan at the Imperial Palace. After some skirmishes, the Taira staged a retreat, and the Minamoto poured out of the palace in pursuit. Another ruse. A second force of Taira swooped in to retake the Palace. Caught between the Taira forces with no place to retreat, the Minamoto were defeated.

During the next 20 years, Taira no Kiyomori consolidated his power with the help of Go-Shirakawa. Increasingly, the Taira ruled in a high handed manner, taking nepotism to new levels and ignoring the concerns of the provinces. The other clans felt slighted.

The foundation eventually cracked, beginning a series of events known as the Genpei War. After another emperor abdicated, Go-Shirakawa supported his son, Prince Mochihito, for the throne, but Taira no Kiyomori named his nephew Emperor Antoku. Relations with Go-Shirakawa soured. Prince Mochihito issued a call to arms against the Taira for their hubris. The Taira response was to chase Mochihito down and execute him.



Heian Gamers

A popular Heian game involved Tanka poetry, which had a meter of 5-7-5-7-7. The 5-7-5 was the upper phrase, and the lower 7-7 phrase often commented upon the upper phrase or took the thought in a new direction.

At a Heian party, there would be appointed judges, the nobles would divide into teams, and the game was on. Clever wordplay involved using puns, riffing from given descriptive words, using beginning and ending syllables that formed a word, etc. Sometimes one side would do the upper phrase, and the other side would answer with an ironic or humorous lower phrase. Being good at Tanka conferred significant status.

Design Notes

Several books influenced the design of *Ninjato*. One especially inspirational work was Souyri and Roth's wonderful book about medieval Japanese life, *The World Turned Upside Down*. Many more games could be made about this fascinating and complex historical period.

Conceptual game ideas arose from the flexible spending in Brunnhofer and Tummelhofer's *Stone Age*, the stress inducing push-your-luck in Faidutti and Moon's *Incan Gold*, and the critical advance planning in Kramer and Ulrich's *The Princes of Florence*.

Not only do we admire these games, but they often come to the table with our family and friends.

Design

Adam West
Dan Schnake

Illustrations

Drew Baker
(www.drewbaker.com)

Graphic Design

Peter Gifford
(www.universalhead.com)

Play Testers

Mark Anderson, Scott Arens, Greg Beilach, Gary Duell, A. C. Harrison, Chuck Jajuga, Don Jennings, Sean Johnson, Steve Labun, Scott McAhren, Jerry Matczack, Hans Messersmith, Carl Pacey, Sheamus Parkes, Daniel Patterson, Jessica Patterson, Kent Raquet, Eric Robbins, Jackie Ross, Charlie Schaefer, Abe Schnake, Izzy Schnake, Kristin Settle, Paul Settle, Peter Settle, Boyd Steere, Noel Stonehouse, Michael Strunk, John Taylor, Chris Weller, Scott Weller, Jason Wendling, Sean Wilson, Sam Zitin

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The denizens of
www.BoardGameGeek.com

Questions, opinions, etc. are welcome at

www.CrosscutGames.com

However, the fire was lit and Minamoto no Yoritomo took up arms with the support of Go-Shirakawa. The Taira suffered a blow when Kiyomori died of fever in 1181. A series of battles over the next few years culminated in the naval battle of Dan-no-ura, a famous event in Japanese history. Altogether, 1300 ships fought in the strait between two of Japan's four main islands. There was a series of archery duels, followed by boarding and hand-to-hand fighting, with the changing tides favoring one side, then the other.

The pivotal event occurred when a Taira General switched from the Taira side to the Minamoto. Not only did he bring his forces, but he informed on the location of the ship carrying Emperor Antoku and his regalia. The Minamoto focused their attack and annihilated the Taira. At the very end, Emperor Antoku, Kiyomori's widow Tokiko, and many Taira samurai retainers flung themselves into the waters rather than suffer capture.

Minamoto no Yoritomo became the first true Shogun with national reach in Japan. The Emperor became a mere figurehead, samurai power ascended, and the shogunate system established itself for the next 650 years. The Heian Period had come to an end.

The Ninja

WITH NINJA, ALSO KNOWN AS SHINOBI, it's difficult to ascertain where history ends and legend begins. As a specialized group, ninja did not appear on the scene until the 15th century. However, tales about individual ninja go back much further. The Kojiki, the 8th century "Record of Ancient Matters" for Japan, has an ninja-like account. In it, Yamoto Takeru disguises himself as a charming maiden and assassinates two chiefs of a rival clan.

Ninja have always been associated with stealth and invisibility. Daimyo feared their abilities as assassins, though there is little verifiable evidence of such deeds.

The famous ninja black pajama attire was an invention of the kabuki theater in the late 17th century. Real ninja preferred to disguise themselves as monks, guards, or whatever would let them pass unnoticed. In addition to their ninjato swords, ninja employed a variety of unusual weapons, including shuriken (which were sometimes half-planted in the ground to hinder pursuit).

The historical record on ninja exploits is sparse, consisting mostly of scattered accounts of sabotage and spycraft. Was their prowess merely legend? It must be noted that unlike the idealized samurai, ninja came from the lower classes, and propaganda about a loyal warrior code was far more useful to the ruling elite than underhanded "special ops." Perhaps the final ninja trick was leaving little trace for any of us.

Z-MAN games

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6 Alan Drive, Mahopac, NY 10541
www.zmangames.com

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