Imperial Histories

Legend of the Five Rings

Imperial Histories

Written by: *Shawn Carman, Rob Hobart, Brian Yoon, Brian Bates, Kevin Blake, Jason Bianchi, Adrian Burton, Dave Laderoute, Max Lemaire, Ryan Reese, Thomas Sarachan*

Edited by: *Robert Hobart, Todd Rowland*

Art Director: *Todd Rowland*

Cover Design: *Hal Mangold*

Cover Art: *Aurelien Hubert*

Layout *Hal Mangold*

Original Graphic Design: *Edge Entertainment*

Artists: *Christopher Appel, Steve Argyle, Gonzalo Ordonez Arias, Mathew S. Armstrong, Daren Bader, Drew Baker, Jason Behnke, Tom Biondolillo, Leonardo Borazio, Beet, Manuel Calderon, Mike Capprotti, Paul Carrick, Miguel Coimbra, Conceptopolis, Audry Corman, Ed Cox, Edwin David, Molly Denmark, Thomas Denmark, Randy Elliot, Steve Ellis, Jason Engle, Anthony Francisco, Carl Frank, Randy Gallegos, Joachim Gmoser, Gong Studios, Anthony Grabski, Troy Graham, Andrew Hepworth, Jeff Himmelman, Quinton Hoover, David Horne, Aurelien Hubert, IFS, Paul Prof Herbert, Jonathan Hunt, Llyn Hunter, Hugh Jamieson, Michael Kaluta, Michel Koch, Michael Komarck, Heather Kreiter, Amandine Labarre, Stephanie Law, April Lee, Monika Livingston, Eric Lofgren, Anson Maddocks, Slawomir Maniak, Thomas Manning, Britt Martin, David Martin, Malcolm McClinton, Patrick McEvoy, Peter Mohrbacher, William O'Connor, Glen Osterberger, Jim Pavelec, Ben Peck, Ramon Perez, Eric Polak, Mark Poole, Angga Satriohadi, Erich Schreiner, Chris Seaman, Douglas Shuler, Steve Snyder, Ron Spencer, Florian Stitz, Beth Trott, Charles Urbach, Luis Vasquez, Diana Vick, Franz Vohwinkel, Byron Wackwitz, Corene Werhane, Mario Wibisono, Matt Wilson, Jarreau Wimberly, Wackwitz & Daily*

Production Manager: *David Lepore*

Senior Brand Manager: *Todd Rowland*

Chief Executive Officer: *John Zinser*

Head Playtester: *Brian Bates*

Playtesters: *Team 1 (Dave Smith, Patrick Chen, Aien Elmi, Jason Kang, Ki Chang Kim, Roger Liang, Arthur Nguyen); Team 4 (Becca Hobart, Kevin Blake, Todd Stites, Daniel Briscoe); Team 6 (Timar Long, Erykah Fasset, Chad Kirby, Mike Brodu, Maxime Lemaire, Ray Rupp); Team 7 (Jason Shafer, Nathan Shafer, Matt Strout, Liza Strout, Joe White, Terry Moore, Eric Newlin); Team 8 (Edward Reynolds, Brebouillet Mathieu, David Whitney, Richard Whitney, Stuart Biggs, Robert Knight); Team 8b (Michael Hill, Shane Pheeney, Chaedy Ritherdon, Tarl Cowly); Team 8c (Thomas Atwood, Ryan Castilla, Henry Joiner, Brandon Woodmen); Team 17 (Tom Lewis, Jamie Kipp, Gavin O'Hearn, Shawn MacLean, John Taylor); Team 18 (Dave Laderoute, Mike Clark, Chris Talarico, Chris Masdea, Lee Vollum, Richard Hewitt, Bill Hrenchuck); Team 19 (Charles Caswell, Vincent Stantion, Eddie Sweeden, Chuck Sweeden, Justin Cross, Fox Whitworth); Team 20 (Matt Tyler, Timothy Hill, Stephen Mumford, Matthew Linkswiler, Paul Casagrande, Robert Zapf); Team 21 (James Freeman-Harris, Sarah Koz, David Wright, James Mosingo); Team 22 (Scott Shepard, Dawn Dalton, Andrew Doud, Justin Davidson, Jon Huskey, Trista Lillis); Team 23 (James Wagner, Kevin Pason, Ryan Bataglia, Chris Foster, Jim Friedman, Jason Whiston, Phil Jenicek, Dan Sulin, Izzy Lombardi-Friedman); Team 24 (Tony Love, Kassandra Mullin, Brian Tieken, Kimberly Wajer-Scott, Phillip Scott, Nicholas Love, Jerry Fleenor, Patrick Wiliams)*

A Note on Art:

The Legend of the Five Rings 4th Edition RPG carries a great legacy of an amazing world. Imperial Histories turns back the clock on some of the earlier times from Legend of the Five Rings, and some times that were alluded to, but never featured in the game before. As such, art for the book was tricky. In the case of times such as the Clan War and the War of the Spirits, we tried to use as much original art from those eras as possible. Some has been lost to time, some was simply not of high enough resolution to use in a published book, but we tried our best! Some eras such as the Battle of White Stag never truly had art commissioned for it, so we used art that we felt fit the mood of the era, while it may feature characters that were somewhat anachronistic. We hope you'll appreciate our efforts to continue to bring you a beautiful book while staying true to the roots of Legend of the Five Rings.

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Introduction

The young Ikoma scribe grunted as he struggled to place an armload of scrolls on the low table in the library. He wiped the dust from his hands and admired his handiwork for a brief moment before the barking sound of his master's voice interrupted his reverie. "Have you located the scrolls I require?"

"I have, master," the young man replied. "I do not wish to seem improper, master, but are you certain these are the scrolls you need?"

"Quite certain," the old man said.

"Is our purpose not to attempt to decipher the intent behind the recent hostilities with the Phoenix in court, my lord?"

"It is."

"But master," the boy said, gesturing to the scrolls, "these are unimportant. Historical accounts of court exchanges, minor details of a century's worth of border patrol observations, some items of personal correspondence over the course of decades... there is nothing here!"

"Don't be a fool, boy," the old man said harshly, gesturing at the table. "Everything is here. Everything. We simply have to understand how to look at it properly."

Welcome to **Imperial Histories**, the fourth major sourcebook release for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game, 4th Edition! This is a book that has the potential to shape your entire L5R RPG experience, helping you realize the full potential of this latest edition of the game to explore and change the world of Rokugan.

What Is This Book?

The purpose of **Imperial Histories** is to provide GMs and players with the information necessary to create campaigns and play characters in a variety of different eras of Rokugan's history, some of which have never been detailed before. The information contained here gives GMs a host of background and detail for planning and running a new campaign in these eras. Perhaps more importantly, it also gives players the tools they need to make characters which are intimately tied to the eras in question, both thematically and mechanically. The information in this book isn't just about letting you run games in certain time periods, however. Each chapter is also a blueprint on how to create your own era, and is rife with material that can be mined for your own gaming group's unique creations.

The eras detailed in this sourcebook include the following:

The Dawn of the Empire

This chapter describes the first days of Rokugan, when the Kami Hantei forms the Empire and his divine siblings gather followers to create the Great Clans. The first war with Fu Leng threatens the survival of the new civilization, and while the dangers are great, the opportunities for heroism are even greater.

The Reign of the Gozoku

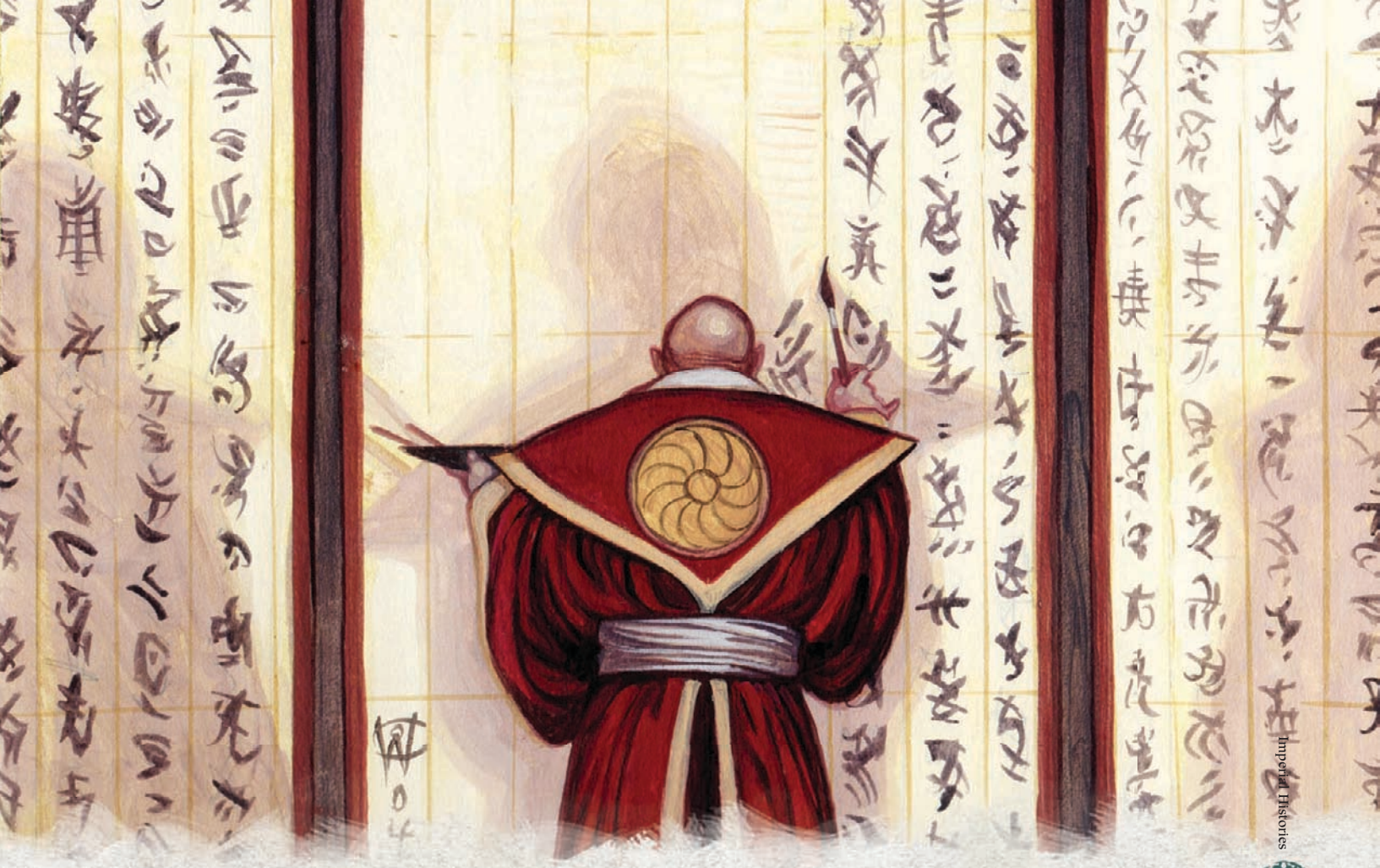
The first Gozoku conspiracy was conceived as a means of bringing progress and sophistication to the Empire. By subverting the authority of the Emperor, however, the conspirators began a downward spiral that eventually led to near-ruin, and left the Empire vulnerable to...

The Era of White Stag

In the wake of the Gozoku conspiracy, the Empire sought to restore Imperial authority and faced a new challenge from strange foreigners. This chapter describes the disastrous effects of allowing gaijin into the court at the Imperial City, culminating in the Battle of White Stag.

The Great Famine

This era is one of the most unique features of this book. The author of this chapter, Jason Bianchi, was selected from almost one hundred entries to find the most innovative and interesting new eras for L5R role-play. The Great Famine examines the breakdown of society due to a persistent and



dire famine in the seventh century, leading to wide-spread unrest and rebellion.

The Pre-Coup Era

This chapter describes Rokugan at the end of the so-called Thousand Years of Peace, the oldest and perhaps the most popular setting for the L5R RPG. It also details the events leading up to the Scorpion Clan Coup that changed the shape of the Empire forever.

The Clan War

The quintessential epic conflict of L5R, depicted in the original L5R card game in 1995-97. This chapter describes the great war that led to the second Day of Thunder, with the insidious influence of the Shadowlands causing destruction and evil throughout the Empire.

The Hidden Emperor

This chapter describes the Empire in the aftermath of the Clan Wars, when the clans are still settling into their new roles under the reign of the Toturi Dynasty. The Empire's hope for peace and stability is torn asunder when the machinations of the primal entity known as the Lying Darkness come to the fore.

The War of Spirits

This chapter depicts a disastrous internal conflict born from Rokugan's past. In the aftermath of the Battle at Oblivion's Gate, thousands of ancestral spirits returned to Rokugan and proceeded to swear their loyalty to the insane tyrant Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum.

The Heroes of Rokugan

This chapter describes an alternate future of Rokugan, one in which the Toturi Dynasty survives and the Empire faces strange new challenges. The setting is based on the Heroes of Rokugan "living-type" role-playing campaign that ran from 2005 to 2010, with thousands of players all over the world shaping its storyline.

The Thousand Years of Darkness

This chapter describes another alternate setting, one of the most frequently requested eras in the history of the L5R RPG: the dark and corrupted Empire that results from Fu Leng's victory on the second Day of Thunder. The Great Clans are broken or subverted and men of honor are rare indeed, while those corrupted by the Taint rule over a dying Rokugan.

Using Campaign Settings

Much of the enjoyment of a role-playing game comes from interacting with a world completely different from everyday life. At its heart, the L5R Role-Playing Game is focused on the interactions between the player characters and the world and culture of the Emerald Empire. When a GM develops and uses a specific setting within Rokugan, he is establishing the basis of those interactions. This means a wise GM will tailor the setting to promote the sort of interactions the players will enjoy the most. If your group prefers classic samurai tragedy, you might decide to build a setting around themes of hopeless struggle and moral conflict—expressed in this book by eras like the Great Famine or the Gozoku. If your players prefer a more epic game in which they play pivotal roles in Rokugani history, your setting should accommodate this with large-scale conflicts or supernatural threats—the sort of thing offered by eras like the Clan War or the Hidden Emperor.

Once the GM decides what sort of setting will best fit the players, there are essentially three choices: Original Setting, Canon Setting, and Hybrid Setting.

Canon Settings are what this book offers—established eras in the history of Rokugan. These are easily used because most L5R players are at least somewhat familiar with them, making it easier for them to enjoy the storyline. Many of these eras have been described in detail in earlier publications, creating a large pool of resources for GMs who are developing adventures and storylines in these settings. However, Canon Settings do have a few potential pitfalls for GMs and players. The foremost concern is that well-informed players will "know" the story's inevitable outcome. There is little suspense in sending your players on a quest to find and stop Iuchiban's resurrection in the Four Winds era if the players are already aware that he will indeed escape his Tomb and rampage across the Empire.

There are two ways to resolve this sort of problem. The simplest is to "turn off the safeties" and allow the players to change the canon history. In the example above, the players should have an honest chance to stop Iuchiban's escape and thereby avert the subsequent Rain of Blood. To drive this point home, other changes to the canon storyline can be made along the way, signaling the players that while the canon may be the starting point it is not necessarily the ending. A less obvious and more challenging solution, one that will not work with every group, is to let the players know they are on a quixotic quest and cannot change fate. They are samurai and have a role to play regardless of outcome. In this case, the interaction with the setting is not the ability to change history but learning their own place within that history.

Original Settings take a good deal more prep work than Canon Settings, since the GM must construct the entire history that is taking place and all the NPCs within it. However, this also means they are free to develop in whatever direction the GM and players might desire. The GM is not left entirely adrift in developing an original L5R setting, of course; there is still the established background of Rokugan to use as a starting point. Primal events such as the Fall of the Kami and the First War against Fu Leng are going to be part of the world regardless. Building an Original Setting within the official Rokugani histories can be a challenge, but there are plenty of "holes" in the history where the GM can insert major events—the Great Famine chapter in this book is an example of this approach. Alternatively, the GM can move an Original Setting into the future of the canon history, perhaps even into a "modern" technological era of the sort sometimes depicted in various L5R fan-fictions. The Heroes of Rokugan setting presented in Chapter Nine of this book is another example of an Original Setting located in Rokugan's future, and a good example of the kind of stories an ambitious GM can create.

GMs who do not have the energy to construct an entirely original vision of Rokugan can instead develop a **Hybrid Setting** that mixes elements of the established canon with alternative histories or personal inspirations. For example, imagine a Rokugan if Akodo had bested Hantei in the ancient Tournament of the Kami, or if Hida Kisada had fallen to the Taint. Most of the chapters in this book contain sidebars marked "Alternate Paths" which offer starting points for creating these sorts of Hybrid Settings. In general, the further along the established storyline that changes are made, the smaller the 'footprint' of those changes will be—Fu Leng subduing his siblings at the Dawn of the Empire creates a world bearing almost no resemblance to the canon storyline, but Hida Kuon surviving his charge against the Destroyers during the Kali-Ma Invasion has a significantly smaller impact.

Ultimately, it is up to the GM and the players how many changes to make and how close—or how far—to stick to Rokugan's canon.

Villains and Antagonists

Enemies are a key part of any good role-playing setting. The antagonist is usually the reason behind the adventure, after all. Presenting compelling antagonists is an important part of a GM's job. A poorly-played villain typically leads to an uninteresting adventure and disappointing game sessions. Conversely, a compelling and memorable villain will enhance the game experience—and hence player enjoyment.

A common problem with introducing and playing villains is that the GM can sometimes "fall in love" with the villain and make him or her into the center of the game. The GM should always remember that the purpose of a good villain is to create effective and memorable inter-

actions with the player characters. A good GM uses a villain as a story device, not a favored character to be protected and loved in the same way that players identify with their characters.

In any story, but especially a large-scale or epic-style campaign, there is usually a perceived need for a few villains, or maybe just one villain, to take on the role of the "Big Bad"—the primary source of danger in the story, the ultimate antagonist who must be defeated if the PCs are going to prevail. Many of the settings presented in this book contains such "Big Bad" antagonists—Fu Leng in the Dawn of the Empire and the Clan War, the Lying Darkness during the era of the Hidden Emperor, Hantei XVI during the War of the Spirits, or Akodo Gintaku in the Heroes of Rokugan setting. This sort of major villain is usually the focus of a long story arc or even an entire campaign, and defeating such a foe is traditionally the climax of the whole story. Of course, such mighty villains can usually only be confronted be equally powerful PCs, making them best suited to the ending of a long campaign.

Smaller-scale villains, however, can still be the "Big Bad" of a more limited story or side-plot. A single-villain game session can be an enjoyable and fulfilling diversion from longer and more convoluted storylines, and makes fewer demands on the GM as well. The leader of a political conspiracy, an enemy general, a bandit chief... any of these can be the source of the PCs' troubles and the elimination of such a person serves as the focus of their adventure. Of course, this is not something solely limited to combat scenarios—in a game of courtly intrigue, the villain could be an evil Scorpion Instigator attempting to ignite a war between two otherwise friendly clans. The party would then maneuver in the courts to discredit the Scorpion.

An alternative approach to using antagonists is to set the characters in opposition to something less tangible, such as a moral quandary or a natural disaster. These types of stories may require more effort from both the players and the GM, especially since they are often dependent on an in-depth understanding of Rokugani culture. Getting the players to stay true to Rokugan's alien culture can be difficult, but the pay-off can be very rewarding by presenting them with truly memorable challenges that do not fall into the standard structure of fighting a villainous NPC. For example, a group of veteran PCs might be sent by a magistrate to aid in subduing a town that is rebelling because the peasants believe their role in the Celestial Order is unjust. (The Great Famine setting presents this sort of challenge.) The Code of Bushido leaves the PCs no choice but to harshly suppress such a rebellion, but their human empathy may rebel at such an act. As another example, the party might be sent to rescue the brother of a powerful nobleman from an angry mob, only to find they are angry because he recently killed another samurai in cold blood. In these sorts of scenarios, although the PCs are encountering tangible threats, the real antagonist is their own conflict between the demands of society and the demands of human empathy. Morally complex interactions can stress the PCs to their limit without any need for a Big Bad villain.

In addition to tangible and intangible antagonists, there is a third way of introducing antagonists to a role-playing game: the players themselves. Traditionally, RPGs present the PCs as a united group sent off to some dramatic adventure against an unknown enemy. However, some scenarios can create a situation in which the real threat to the PCs is an inter-party conflict. The GM need not worry about external threats if the PCs supply conflict for him! For example, in a game set in the era of the First Yasuki War, Crab and Crane PCs in a court setting will be cast into the role of antagonists. Of course, this sort of play can be risky with less experienced or more emotionally intense players—the conflict between their characters can potentially spill over into real life, leading to hurt feelings and a failed gaming experience. But with experienced players who are able to maintain a firm separation between themselves and their characters, inter-party tension can add considerable enjoyment to a campaign. Instead of opposing some nameless bandits or anonymous evil daimyo, the PCs are facing their fellow players, who are just as determined to win as they are, and just as ingenious in finding ways to do so. At that point, the GM is truly nothing more than an arbitrator of the players' actions.

The Dawn of the Empire

Akagi, chieftain of the Seppun people, master of the spear, slayer of Oniku the Merciless, fell to his knees and wept. Before him lay the bodies of eight of his tribe, killed in the most recent skirmish with the tribe of Noriaki. Among them were two of his sons, including Hiro, his eldest.

Akagi let the grief seize and shake him until it passed, then rose to his feet and wiped the tears from his face. He turned to the other tribesmen assembled in the village square. "The Noriaki have dealt us a sore blow today. This is true. But even they would not attack us here at the home of the Seppun, she who is the holiest of the servants of the gods. It will be as it has always been, they will discover who it is they attack and leave off, go back to raiding other tribes. That is how it has always been and that is how it shall be this time. Return to your homes and patrols and let your minds be eased. The tribe of the Seppun shall stand undiminished and undefeated as we always have."

The tribesmen and women nodded to each other, and looks of hope and resolve crossed their features. They began to leave the square, returning to their duties and their lives. Akagi smiled at each one, a look of unfelt hope on his own face.

Lying to his own people made him feel hollow and useless. But what else could he offer them? Without hope their doom was certain.

When the square was clear, Akagi climbed to the top of the hill which stood above his village. He crossed the verdant green field that covered the top of the hill and knelt before the simple stone shrine. There his wife waited, her face serene, her eyes closed in the depths of prayer.

After a short time, the woman called the Seppun opened her eyes and looked up. "You are troubled, husband."

"I am, wife. We will not survive a concentrated attack by the Noriaki. I fear we live in the final days of the tribe of Seppun."

She looked at Akagi searchingly. "Do you truly believe that? The gods cannot allow us to fall. We are the holist of their servants, they cannot stand idly by and allow us to be destroyed."

"The Noriaki have already killed two of our sons!" Akagi cried, feeling his suppressed anger swell up like a vast bubble, choking him.

A shadow covered the ground. Akagi froze. The Seppun rose to her feet, her eyes wide.

The shadow filled the sky, plunging the hill and the surrounding land into darkness. The two tribe members looked up to see that the Sun itself seemed to have turned black.

"What does it mean?" Akagi whispered. His wife would know, she was the tribal priestess, the voice for the gods' will. But she only shook her head, silent.

A light appeared, golden and pure, where the Sun had been. Then another, and another, each dropping toward the ground like glowing snowflakes. Seven lights fell in quick succession, and then the shadow began to move off of the Sun. An eighth light appeared out of the sky as the sunlight burst forth once more. For a moment Akagi thought there had been a ninth light in the south, just before the Sun reached her full light again, but it was impossible to be sure.

The eight lights descended toward them, swelling into blazing stars as large as a man. Akagi fell back in terror, shielding his face with one hand, clutching his stumbling wife with the other.

The lights settled on the top of the hill, their glow slowly fading. Figures emerged from them, men and women clad in robes and armor of shining gold. Two women and six men, tall and beautiful beyond any mortal form, their eyes blazing with the light of Heaven itself. Their clothing shifted and changed, assuming bright colors and patterns of such depth and complexity that Akagi felt dizzy just looking at them.

The light faded, and the eight strangers looked at each other as though confused. One of the women tilted her head back, looking into the sky, and whispered, "Is that what the mortals see when they look to the heavens? It is beautiful."

One of the men began to speak. "What happened to..." He was cut off by another man, the only one whose garments still held the gold of the Heavens. He bore a long curved sword, a blade so perfect it looked like a piece of starlight. "They are gone."

All eight bowed their heads for a moment. Then one of the men said, "Brothers and sisters, I believe there are mortals here."

The celestial creatures turned toward the Seppun and Akagi. The man with the sword stepped forward and spoke, his voice echoing like a great bell. "I am Hantei. These are my brothers and sisters. Name yourselves, mortals."

Akagi flinched, his limbs shaking so badly he could not even stand. But next to him his wife stepped forward and knelt, touching her forehead to the grass. "I am called Seppun, priestess of the gods, and he is Akagi my husband. We are your servants, my Lord. All that we have and all that we are is yours. We are your servants."

The Dawn of the Empire is the earliest time known to Rokugan, when the eight Kami came to earth and forged the peoples they found into a single unified kingdom. It was a time of chaos and opportunity, of birth and transformation. All the traditions and structures of Rokugan were born in those earliest days, and the Empire faced the terrible evil of Fu Leng and the First War which he unleashed. The Kami walked the earth alongside mortals, and great heroes arose to confront the Dark Kami and his armies.

An L5R campaign set in this era will allow players to interact with the primal myths and founding heroes of the Empire, or even to become such heroes themselves. They can witness and participate in the creation of Rokugan's most famous institutions and be part of the original birth of the clans and their families. Truly creative GMs can experiment with letting the PCs take the place of historical figures and change the Empire in profound ways, but even without such extreme variations the PCs will nonetheless influence the shape of Rokugan in all manner of ways. On the other hand, the mechanical options for the PCs will be more limited in this era than in almost any later one, since only the most basic schools and spells exist and most other mechanical systems (kata, kiho, Paths, Advanced Schools, etc) will not start to be invented until the second and third centuries. GMs whose players enjoy a wide variety of mechanical options should probably think carefully before using the Dawn of the Empire as a setting for play.

Ikoma's "Comprehensive History of the Empire"

According to the writings of Ikoma Karaku, a daimyo of the Ikoma from the sixth century, the founder of the Ikoma family began writing something he called "The Comprehensive History of the Empire of Rokugan" shortly before his death. The rather grandiosely (and perhaps satirically) titled document was never finished, and Karaku discovered the ancient scrolls centuries later. He compiled the "Comprehensive History" and added notes and annotations to fill some of its gaps before presenting it to the Imperial Court in the year 512.

The document proved to be controversial, since it expressed Ikoma's rather mischievous and iconoclastic character in the fullest. Ultimately it was consigned to the back shelves of the Ikoma Libraries, where it remains largely unread. Karaku insisted to his dying day that the document was absolutely authentic, and a handful of Lion scholars have studied it for insight into the Empire's earliest days. Excerpts from Ikoma's account are scattered throughout this chapter, showing the views of Akodo's follower on the epic events of his time.

Pre-History: The Fall of the Kami

The people who inhabited the lands of Rokugan perceived the great battle of Hantei and Onnotangu as a solar eclipse, a great darkness that lay across the land. In its wake, the eight Kami fell to earth. The tribe of Seppun, the people who lived around the hill where the Kami fell, immediately swore fealty to these divine beings. Some legends claim the Seppun were immediately attacked by a rival tribe and the Kami, relying on the skills of Akodo and the strength of Hida, drove them off. Other legends claim the power and majesty of the Kami was so potent that the rival tribe submitted instantly.

Regardless, all accounts agree that the Kami soon set off from Seppun Hill in order to explore and understand this mortal world they had fallen into. Some of them took the tribemates of the lady called Seppun with them as guides or escorts, while others traveled alone. Many legends speak of what they saw and did during the five years they traveled the lands which would become the Empire. While the individual events that occurred were often important to those who experienced them, the true significance of those individual journeys was that they convinced the Kami humanity was worthy of their protection and leadership.

After five years, the Kami returned to Seppun Hill to find it changed. The formerly small village had grown into a large town with many surrounding farms; thousands had flocked to the settlement, assembling together to worship the Kami as gods. The Kami had brought civilization to the world even when they were not physically present.

The eight Kami gathered alone atop Seppun Hill, the very place they had fallen to earth five years earlier, and discussed the world they were now part of. Many of them spoke of the barbarism and atrocities they had seen in their travels, but they also recalled moments of beauty and the intrinsic nobility of the human soul. Legend claims it was the beautiful Lady Doji who proposed the solution to the chaos the Kami saw everywhere in their travels. "As the Sun and Moon gave shape to the formless, so must we create order out of this chaos. These mortals are not without worth, merely without direction. We must offer them that direction." After her eloquent words the others agreed: the Kami would create order where there was none, an Empire where there were only tribes and villages. To do so, however, they would need a leader to take charge of this effort. They would need an Emperor.

Year 5: The Tournament of the Kami

After they agreed to form an Empire, the Kami could not agree on who should be the Emperor. After some debate, they organized a tournament to decide the issue. It is not known how they chose the order of the combatants, but the results of the battles have been remembered through all the centuries since.

Interestingly, Togashi chose not to participate in the tournament at all. When his siblings asked why, he replied that he already knew the outcome. This is the first instance in Rokugani history and legend of Togashi expressing the gift of foresight which guided his actions—for good and ill—throughout his long life.

Hida versus Shinjo

The first match pitted the mighty Hida against his sister Shinjo. Hida thought his greater strength would carry him to victory, and it almost did. However, he failed to account for Shinjo's speed, and in the end her swiftness overcame him. Hida carried the shame of his defeat on his shoulders for years afterward, and not until a discussion with the Little Teacher, Shinsei, did he come to terms with that failure. Hida's ultimate acceptance of his one great failure and his willingness to learn from it were much of what made him such an implacable warrior in his later years, for he learned to judge strength in more than one way and resolved to never again lose by underestimating his foe.

Shinjo versus Bayushi

Having prevailed against her mighty brother Hida, Shinjo expected a swift victory against Bayushi, but just the opposite occurred. Bayushi deceived, teased, and outmaneuvered Shinjo until her own fury and humiliation undid her, leaving his blade at her throat. Shinjo was bitterly humiliated and resented the defeat for long afterwards.

Bayushi versus Shiba

Akodo's *Leadership* remarks that the same tactics rarely work twice if your opponent is aware of them. This is certainly applicable to the third match of the tournament, when Bayushi faced his twin brother Shiba. Shiba had closely observed his sister's defeat and did not allow himself to be tricked as she had been, forcing Bayushi to fight him on even terms. Eventually, Shiba's patience and wisdom won him the battle. However, the Scorpion Clan has long claimed within its own ranks that Bayushi threw the battle, perhaps due to advice from Shinsei, perhaps simply because he did not truly want to be Emperor. Only Bayushi himself knows the truth of the matter.

Shiba versus Doji

The match between Shiba and his elegant sister Doji is a source of some debate by later scholars. While Doji was skilled in the art of the sword, she was far more of a courtier than a warrior. And though Shiba was at heart an intellectual, he had seen his share of battle during his five years' travels and was a potent warrior. There are those who believe Shiba saw that Doji would make a better leader than he and conceded with only token effort. But there are also those who believe the battle was hard-fought and the techniques of the Lady of the Crane were superior to those of Shiba.

Doji versus Akodo

This battle was quick. Akodo was a mighty warrior but also a shrewd one. He had watched the previous fight, learned all of Doji's fighting techniques, and devised tactics to counter them. Doji conceded defeat after only a few exchanges.

Akodo versus Hantei

The final battle in the tournament matched Akodo against Hantei, who had rescued all his siblings from the belly of Lord Moon before they fell from the Heavens. Akodo was the finest tactical mind the mortal world had ever seen, but Hantei had been taught the art of battle by the Celestial Dragons and his divine mother Amaterasu. He had also been instilled with a boundless love for his family, and when he fought Akodo he held back, unwilling to risk harm to his brother. Akodo, however, fought with all the

Ikoma's Introduction

Men forget. History remembers. I think I said that some time in the past; well, if it wasn't me, it was someone wise. The Empire deserves a true history of the events that occurred after our rulers, the Kami, fell to the land to dwell among mere mortals like myself. A true tale of the founding of this Emerald Empire and the way the Kami brought civilization and all the wonderful things that came with it, like sake and geisha houses, to us all. I should rightly begin this history with the tale of the beginning and how the Kami fell to earth, but there are already dozens of fancy plays and religious texts written about that very thing, so I'm going to skip it.

I was young and stupid when Lord Akodo and his siblings landed on Seppun Hill, but I was also half a world away. It wasn't until years later that I even heard the tale of the gods falling to the earth. Oh, sure, I remember the eclipse, but it didn't seem significant at the time. I was a little busy when it occurred. (*Karaku's note: Here Ikoma relates the tale of what he was doing at the time, which involves a large amount of drink, two village girls, and a granary. I have omitted the tale for the sake of brevity.*) In those days life was uncertain, and we humans were—quite frankly—well, not entirely human. We lived in small tribes or crude villages. Warriors preyed on those weaker than themselves and were in turn preyed upon when they were weak. Things were not good; I still have the scars to prove it. Then, five or so years after the eclipse, I began to notice a change.

People began to speak of gods walking the land, gathering followers, bringing changes. They did not take or prey upon others, they gave or traded with other tribes. They protected the weak and even stood up to the trolls and ogres that wandered the lands and killed whole villages. Well, not the villages I lived in, of course. (*Karaku's note: Ikoma gives lengthy and extremely detailed descriptions of the times he fought off trolls and ogres who meant to destroy his village. I have omitted them for brevity.*)

I am not exaggerating when I say the Kami are the best thing that has ever happened to humanity. Because of them we still exist, we enjoy food and fine houses and beautiful art. I truly believe if they had not come, we would all have been subjugated or eaten by ogres, trolls, nezumi, or some other horror.

fervor of a hardened veteran battling for his life. In the heat of combat he knocked Hantei to his knees and raised his sword to finish him. At that moment Hantei turned his own blade so their mother's light reflected from the edge, shining into his brother's eyes. Akodo came to his senses, realized he had been about to kill his brother, and saw that Hantei had been holding back and could have beaten him all along. He surrendered and bowed before Hantei, ending the tournament. According to legend, at that moment Togashi spoke: "When the last Akodo falls, so falls the last Hantei."

Hantei's Orders

After the tournament, Hantei immediately ordered his brothers and sisters to gather followers beneath their banners so that together they could bring order where there was only chaos. He declared the land would be called Rokugan, which meant "Emerald Land" in the language of the Celestial Heavens—the language which would become High Rokugani. He also proclaimed any who wished to could gather beneath the banner of the Empire, but those who did not wish to join would have only two options: they could leave the borders of the Empire, or they would be defeated.

Year 5 to Year 41: Gathering Followers

After the Great Tournament concluded, most of the Kami set out to gather followers to form their new clans. Hantei stayed at Seppun Hill to begin organizing a government for the new Empire. He ordered the town expanded into a capital city which he named Otosan Uchi.

Each of the Kami traveled across the lands of Rokugan once more, gathering followers who believed as they did, and each of them adopted an animal as the symbol of their new clan. Hida gathered the strongest warriors into the Crab Clan. Doji assembled the most elegant and well-spoken into the Crane Clan. Akodo sought out brave and disciplined soldiers to create the militant Lion Clan, while Shiba assembled scholars, sages, and warriors to protect them into the Phoenix Clan. Bayushi found those who would do what others would not, creating the Scorpion Clan. Shinjo called out to those who cared about others or who were curious about the world to make the Ki-Rin Clan.

Togashi, standing

Alternate Paths: Another Emperor

A GM who wishes to explore a truly different version of Rokugan can examine the possibilities behind one of the other Kami winning the great tournament. In the original 'canon' version of Rokugan, Hantei was destined to win (which is why Togashi did not participate in the contest). But in your version of Rokugan, perhaps another of the Kami was destined to win, or perhaps the arrival of the Kami in the mortal realm freed them from the control of fate. Regardless, an Empire ruled by one of the other Kami would be quite different from the normal vision of Rokugan and, of course, the GM would have to devise a new Great Clan to be led by Hantei.

Emperor Hida: The Kami of the Crab was a man who admired strength above all things. His Empire would have been ferociously militant and extremely pragmatic, with little room for either the subtleties of politics or the moral complexities of Bushido. On the other hand, it would probably have done considerably better during the First War against Fu Leng, and Hida would have dedicated much of the Empire's strength to defeating the forces of the Shadowlands. GMs who wish to explore a straightforward "heroic fantasy" version of Rokugan should consider the possibilities of a Hida Dynasty.

Empress Shinjo: Shinjo was a woman of boundless curiosity and deep compassion. An Empire ruled by her would have been far less hostile to foreigners and would probably have softened the strict rules of the caste system. GMs wishing to explore a "kinder and gentler" Rokugan might wish to examine the possibilities of a Shinjo Dynasty.

Emperor Bayushi: The founder of the Scorpion was a man of cunning and deception who felt little respect for the idealistic morality of most of his siblings. His Empire would have been strong but also dangerous, a place where politics would be a blood sport and deceit a way of life. GMs who wish to make Rokugan more closely resemble the deadly and treacherous world of Sengoku-era Japan may wish to try to idea of a Bayushi Dynasty.

Emperor Shiba: Although he was a capable warrior, Shiba is best remembered as the scholar who recorded the *Tao* of Shinsei and the selfless leader who bowed to the Isawa. An Empire ruled by Shiba would be a place of peace, erudition, and magical power, but would have little room for warriors and battle. On the other hand, the power of *maho* would probably find more adherents in such a variant Rokugan. GMs who wish to design their campaigns around magical themes or intense character development while avoiding combat and war may find Emperor Shiba suitable to their needs.

Empress Doji: Considering the heavy influence she exerted on Rokugani culture in the canon history, it can only be imagined how civilized, elegant, and artistically splendid Doji would have made Rokugan had she sat upon the Emerald Throne. On the other hand, she would likely have seen little reason for a large Imperial army, and the followers of Akodo would have been unhappy under her reign. A GM who wants to focus a campaign on themes of art, romance, and court can examine the world built by a Doji Dynasty.

Emperor Akodo: Stories of the final duel between Akodo and Hantei often speak of Akodo's words: "I shall build an Empire as strong and merciless as the stars in the sky. It will shine as our Mother herself, and be as cold as ice." Akodo's Empire would have been a place of strict ascetic warrior training and unrelenting warfare, both against those within Rokugan who earned the Emperor's displeasure and (more often) those exterior cultures who had not yet bowed to the dictates of the Son of Heaven. On the other hand, compassion and art would likely find little home in the world of the Akodo Dynasty. A GM who wishes to run a campaign focused heavily on war, especially war against outside civilizations, might wish to explore this alternative.

Emperor Togashi: If Togashi had been destined to defeat Hantei, he would have built an Empire far different from anything imagined by his siblings—a place of mystery and enigma, where religious contemplation and individual enlightenment were the highest goods. A GM who wishes to make Rokugan closer to the sort of mystic martial arts setting depicted in many Asian films might find a Togashi Dynasty suitable to the task.

always apart, chose not to gather followers and retreated to the mountains... but those who felt the call of his wisdom sought him out anyway, and they became the Dragon Clan.

In those early days the seven Great Clans were not quite as they would become in future years, for they were not yet granted any specific duties. Their lands were not fully established and their principle task was simply to spread the rule of the Hantei and forge Rokugan's people together into a single Empire. Many of them did not even have permanent homes, but simply camped where they stopped each day's travel. It was a time of fluidity and flux, assembling a single people out of hundreds of disparate tribes and wandering loners.

It was in these days that the Kami first devised a term for their primary followers: samurai, "those who serve." It was an apt term in more ways than one. The samurai served and obeyed the Kami, but they also served the common people by protecting them. Although all mortals were allowed to follow the Kami, only a select few were given the title of samurai, and only gradually did the idea develop that these people should be able to take the family names of their lords.

Year 5

The Seppun Family is formed when the priestess called Seppun and her tribe reaffirm their fealty to Hantei; they are the first mortals to do so.

Mirumoto and Agasha seek Togashi in his mountain home and become the first of his followers.

Year 7

The Otomo Family is formed when Otomo and his followers swear fealty to Hantei.

Year 11

The first appearance of the Shadowlands.

Year 12

Ikoma decides Akodo is worthy and joins the Lion Clan.

Year 15

Matsu becomes Akodo's second notable follower.

Year 17

Bayushi encounters a girl calling herself Shosuro. She becomes his most trusted follower as he creates the Scorpion Clan.

Year 23

The first Emerald Championship. Kakita wins, defeating and humiliating Matsu. Kakita seeks to marry the Lady Doji; angered by his presumption, she gives him an impossible series of tasks if he is to become her husband.

Ikoma on the Founding of the Empire

You might ask yourself, where was I during all this? A good question! You see, I had a falling out with the leader of my tribe when I was a young man, so after that time I wandered the lands, fighting when I needed to, drinking as much as I could, and loving any woman who would let me. Like the Empire I was without direction or purpose. I knew I was fighting for something, but I didn't know what. Then one day I met Lord Akodo and he gave me purpose. I imagine that is how it was for most of the people who met the Kami in those early years. They gave us something we didn't know we were missing.

To be sure, not everyone wanted order. There were many tribes that enjoyed the chaos; it allowed them to prey on those weaker than themselves. We rescued a good number of tribes from extinction at the hands of others. Those we saved were very grateful, of course. (*Kurako's note: Ikoma describes the ladies of many tribal villages he and the Lion saved from hostile neighbors. I have omitted these details for brevity.*) Some of the hostile tribes banded together and attacked the Kami and their followers. Well, that usually didn't go well for them. They could not stand against the divine power of the Kami or the skills of we who followed them. I picked up a few more scars in those years! Usually the aggressors ended up with their tribes destroyed or driven out of the land, and those who remained swore fealty to the Kami, recognizing they were gods who could protect them better than their former masters. I think a few dozen tribes fled the Empire altogether, mostly to the north, although an unfortunate few went to the south. No doubt they became the zombies and other foul Tainted creatures we had to fight later, during the First War.

Year 24

Helped by the cunning of a woman named Yasuki, Kakita is able to complete the tasks given him by Doji. She marries him gladly. In thanks for Yasuki's assistance Kakita offers her and her sons a place within the Crane Clan.

Year 25

Shiba convinces the sorcerer Isawa to say his tribe is part of the Phoenix Clan so they may stay peacefully within the Empire.

Year 26

Hantei marries Doji Mioko.

Year 30

A woman named Asako, a skilled healer, comes to the attention of Shiba. She and her husband Yogo join the Phoenix Clan.

Year 31

Otaku and her husband Ide join Shinjo's Ki-Rin Clan.

Days of Darkness: The War Against Fu Leng (years 33 to 42)

The task of building an Empire was going smoothly until the Lost Kami Fu Leng, He Who Must Not Be Named, invaded the Empire and unleashed the horror of the First War. The Crab were the first to notice Fu Leng's threat. They had begun building what is now Kyuden Hida in the south when their scouts noticed more and more twisted, dangerous creatures traveling the land. Soon they encountered the first attack waves of Tainted creatures, led by a strange and terrible figure who called himself Fu Leng. Due to the battle prowess of Hida and his half-mortal son Hida Atarasi the Crab were able to drive the creatures back, but that was only a brief respite; soon the invaders returned in far greater numbers, spilling into the fledgling Empire and slaughtering all in their path. Even worse, the Kami realized the being called Fu Leng was actually their missing brother, who they had believed lost forever after he fell far away from the rest of them.

For the next ten years Fu Leng led the creatures of the Shadowlands in an endless, relentless series of attacks on the Empire. They destroyed hundreds of villages and towns. Tens of thousands died and thousands more were swallowed by the Taint. It was during this dark time that Hantei ordered everything that could be a threat to the Empire be killed, a decree which would later result in the Lion Clan virtually exterminating the prehumen race known as the kitsu (although Akodo eventually made amends for that tragic mistake). The Kami fought against the Shadowlands invasion with all their might, and their followers paid a bitter price in lives and pain. Nor did the Kami themselves escape unscathed. Akodo lost an eye in the fighting (earning him his later title of Akodo One-Eye), and Hantei himself was grievously wounded in battle in the year 42.

That year saw the climax of the First War as Fu Leng's forces launched a final push into the heart of the Empire. Although the Rokugani and their rulers fought with unswerving fervor, they were outmatched, and not even the superior tactics of Akodo or the raw strength of Hida could save them. There were simply too many of the terrible Shadowlands creatures, and they perpetually supplemented their own forces with Rokugan's dead.

It was then that the Little Teacher Shinsei requested an audience with Hantei, claiming he knew of a way to save the Empire.

The story of Shinsei and the Seven Thunders has been told many times, but real details are few. It is known that Shinsei spoke with the Emperor for an entire night, and their conversation—recorded by Shiba—became the basis of the sacred *Tao*. Afterward Shinsei traveled through the Empire collecting the heroes who became the Seven Thunders—sometimes with the cooperation of their lords among the Kami, sometimes without it.

Details are sparse about what actually happened during the Day of Thunder itself. What is known is that the Thunders—Hida Atarasi, Isawa, Otaku, Matsu, Shosuro, Mirumoto, and Doji Konishiko—ventured into the Shad-

owlands alongside Shinsei. There they faced and defeated Fu Leng, somehow trapping his soul within twelve black scrolls. Only Shosuro and Shinsei returned to the Empire, and even they only made it back because Shiba went seeking them and died protecting them from the First Oni.

Year 33

Fu Leng attacks the Empire in force, beginning the First War.

Year 35

Akodo loses an eye in battle.

Year 36

Yogo is cursed during a battle with Fu Leng's forces. Bayushi recruits him into the Scorpion Clan.

Year 42

Hantei is wounded in battle.

The Day of Thunder; defeat of Fu Leng.

After the First War: Building the Empire

After the defeat of Fu Leng at the Day of Thunder, his Shadowlands armies collapsed and the Empire swiftly drove them back, restoring the borders and cleansing the land. Rokugan entered a time of peace, rebuilding from the horrors of the First War and establishing the structures and customs of future civilization. Complete peace did not come at once, of course; there were still some rogue tribes that fought against the followers of the Kami, and the scattered remnants of the Shadowlands armies continued to plague the Empire's remote corners for years. Moreover, the Emperor's command to destroy all inhuman creatures within Rokugan led to an ongoing Lion campaign against the kitsu race, a near-extermination that only ended when Akodo realized his error and brought the last five kitsu into his clan.

Fu Leng's Challenge

Certain legends of dubious repute claim Fu Leng did not simply launch an invasion without warning. Instead, he appeared suddenly in the court of Otosan Uchi, wearing a mask of porcelain, and confronted his siblings. He condemned them as cowards and demanded they face him and fight for the throne of Rokugan. Togashi, who had stood apart from the original tournament, answered the challenge.

"Pick a weapon, brother," Fu Leng snarled. "This time you will learn what I know about destiny."

Togashi answered, "You ask my weapon. I choose all that lives in Rokugan."

This tale is not found in any official history of Rokugan. It is repeated only in stories and plays... and among the Lost.

Who Was Shinsei?

Who was the Little Teacher? Even in his own era very little was known about Shinsei, and in later times all manner of tales circulated around him and his true nature. It is claimed within the Brotherhood that before he became enlightened Shinsei spent time with another early teacher, a woman named Sakura who sought out the truth of the universe, but whether he gained wisdom from her or merely was inspired by her efforts is a mystery.

A few things are known with certainty about Shinsei. He was a mortal man, he was enlightened, he fathered children who remained within the ranks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and he left the Empire soon after the Day of Thunder. (Some who have traveled to the Burning Sands claim Shinsei may have been the man called "Mekham" who helped build civilization in the city of Medinaat el-Salaam.) Beyond that, he is an enigma, and no information on his parentage has ever surfaced. Some legends suggest he was more than just a mortal, that the Thunder Dragon made him and his various descendants responsible for guiding heroes to their destiny. Other tales speculate he may have been a kenku who wished to guide humanity (it is undeniable that the kenku race seem to have an affinity to Shinsei's teachings). Most Rokugani, however, believe Shinsei was nothing more than a supremely wise man, the first to gain enlightenment.

Ultimately it is up to the GM to decide exactly who or what Shinsei was. Whatever his secrets, Shinsei was a crucial force behind the survival and success of the Empire of Rokugan.

With the war over, the Emperor gave each of the clans an official duty to the Empire. This solidified and deepened the roles they had already been playing, and established the pattern of their existence for the foreseeable future. The clans quickly settled into their new roles and built new castles and towns in their lands, establishing the early outlines of the Empire's interior borders.

Three years later, after receiving permission from Hantei, Shinjo and most of her followers left the Empire to explore the surrounding lands. They would be gone for eight centuries. A small remnant of the Ki-Rin Clan remained behind, holding Shinjo's lands for her promised return.

Later that same year, Hantei died. Most accounts agree he never recovered from his wounds received in the First War, but a few others claim he simply ascended back into the Heavens. Either way, he was replaced by his eldest son Hantei Genji, whose long reign as Emperor Hantei II was so magnificent that he became known forever as the Shining Prince. The future of the Empire looked as bright as its ruler's glorious court.

Notable Events after the First War

Year 42

'Soshi' joins the Scorpion Clan, founding the family which bears her name. She is actually Shosuro under another name. Officially, Shosuro dies this year from wounds suffered during the Day of Thunder.

Year 43

Hiruma, Kaiu, and Kuni defeat the monstrous Hatsu Suru no Oni and are given permission to form their own families within the Crab Clan.

The Soul of Shiba appears in the Phoenix Clan, bestowing its power on his son Shiba Tsuzaki. It also reveals the Path of Man to the lady Asako, who founds the mystical *henshin* order.

Year 44

Akodo makes amends for wiping out virtually every one of the kitsu by bringing the final five of

The Death of Hantei

The official histories of the Ikoma record that Hantei survived several years after his injury in the First War. According to them, the first Emperor spent those years showing his son how to reign over the now peaceful Empire. Then one day he simply vanished in a cloud of smoke and sunlight, returning to his original home in the Celestial Heavens.

However, there is another version of Hantei's death, rendered most famously in the play 'Death of the First Hantei' by Shosuro Furayari. In this version, Hantei's wounds bring him down within a few months of the Day of Thunder. Doji, Bayushi, and Akodo stand at their brother's bedside, tending his wounds until he succumbs. In his final hours, Hantei asks if he is going to die, and confesses his fear that his soul will be alone. Doji tries to comfort him with gentle words, promising he may yet recover. It is Bayushi who tells Hantei the harsh truth: "Yes, Hantei-sama. You are going to die, and you are going to be alone. But one day, we will come after, to be by your side again." Hearing these words, Hantei closes his eyes and faces his death with peace.

It is left up to individual GMs as to whether this story is actually true in their version of Rokugan.

the creatures into his clan, marrying them to his daughters. They form the Kitsu family.

The youngest son of Kakita and Doji, Doji Hayaku, travels to the Shadowlands to search for his missing sister Konishiko, the Crane Thunder.

Alternate Paths: The Kami Eternal

The perceptive reader will notice that while the Kami can die, none of them ever perish from old age. Although their complete divinity is lost the moment they fall to the earth, the Kami retain many aspects of their Celestial nature. They can die of injury or illness, but they do not age—indeed, when Shinjo finally returns to the Empire in the twelfth century she is physically unchanged from her original appearance. Thus, it is entirely possible that if Hantei had not been severely wounded in the First War he could have served as Emperor for centuries.

An Empire ruled forever by an immortal semi-divine lord would look very different from the Rokugan we know. Many of the catastrophes, wars, external threats, and political struggles which Rokugan faced in later centuries would be averted by the continuing reign of Hantei. On the other hand, an eternal Emperor would provoke growing resentment from mortal subjects who felt alienated from his rule, not to mention his disenfranchised and powerless descendents. The Kolat conspiracy would probably find it quite easy to win recruits in such an Empire. Likewise if Iuchiban or someone like him appeared from the ranks of the Otomo he would be able to recruit followers much more readily and could well provoke a full-scale civil war rather than a brief but dangerous uprising.

Year 45

Shinjo and most of her followers depart to explore the lands outside the Empire.

Hantei dies, finally succumbing to wounds suffered during the battles with Fu Leng's forces.

Year 46

Hantei Genji, the Shining Prince, is crowned Emperor Hantei II. His younger brother Yamato gives up the Hantei name and swears fealty to the Otomo, beginning a tradition which will endure to the end of the Hantei Daynasty.

Doji Hayaku returns from the Shadowlands with his hair turned white and his voice lost to a grievous wound. He bears his sister's sword, Shukujo. He is proclaimed the first of the Daidoji, defenders of the Crane.

Kakita duels Mirumoto's son Hojatsu on the battlefield of an inter-clan skirmish. Hojatsu dies, but Kakita is lethally wounded and kills himself by falling on Hojatsu's sword.

Year 48

Hida Osano-Wo, son of Hida and the Thunder Dragon, is born.

Year 59

Soshi/Shosuro disappears from Scorpion lands. In actuality, she travels to Dragon lands and pleads with Togashi to save her from the Shadow corruption which is consuming her. Sensing that Shosuro still has a destiny to fulfill, Togashi imprisons her in a tomb of crystal.

Year 63

Hida passes leadership of the Crab to his son Osano-Wo. Hida lives for many more decades, but no longer takes any part in ruling his clan.

Year 65

Hida Osano-Wo marries a prominent Matsu. She bears him a son named Kaimetsu-Uo. Unfortunately, a peasant woman also bears Osano-Wo a son in the same year.

Year 80

Osano-Wo names his half-commoner son Kenzan as his heir. Kaimetsu-Uo, his mother, and their followers leave Crab lands and found what he calls the Mantis Clan on the Islands of Silk and Spice. The Mantis are not officially recognized as a Minor Clan until the fifth century.

Year 83

Bayushi disappears, leaving behind only a note reading, "I have lost her forever." Legends claim his soul can thereafter be occasionally seen in the waters of a lake hidden in caverns deep beneath Kyuden Bayushi.

Year 88

Shortly before his death, Otomo Yamato (Emperor Genji's younger brother) publishes the *Divine Branch*, an esoteric collection of myths and legends dealing with the relationship between the Kami (especially Hantei himself) and the Sun Goddess Amaterasu.

Year 90

The Lion Clan take over the former lands of the Ki-Rin, crushing the remaining followers of Shinjo who dwell there. Emperor Hantei Genji gives the former Ki-Rin new lands in the south and proclaims they are now the Fox Clan, the first Minor Clan in the Empire. He also issues a proclamation forbidding full-scale warfare of Great Clans against Minor Clans.

Year 97

Hida Osano-Wo is murdered; the assassin flees to Phoenix lands. Kaimetsu-Uo travels to the Phoenix lands seeking vengeance, and calls upon his father at the gates of Kyuden Isawa. In answer a bolt of lightning destroys the gate, aweing the Phoenix into surrender. Soon after, Hantei Genji declares Osano-Wo the Fortune of Fire and Thunder.

Year 99

Akodo encounters a force of what appear to be dangerous Shadowlands creatures (actually tsuno) traveling north to threaten the rest of the Empire. He lures them into Seikitsu Pass and then releases the last spark of his own divinity to collapse the pass, destroying the hostile force at the cost of his own life.

Year 101

Togashi officially "dies" and is replaced by his son. In reality, he has merely changed his name and continues to rule the Dragon Clan.

Year 102

Lady Doji learns of Togashi's death and believes herself alone save for her brutish brother Hida. She stands on the headlands above Kyuden Doji and allows the sea to take her away.

The Great Clans at the Dawn of the Empire

At the beginning of Rokugan's history the Great Clans were small and their nature and roles were still very much in flux. Although each of the founding Kami was ultimately given a specific task by Hantei, those tasks were not yet defined. What did it mean to be the Left Hand of the Emperor? Thus many of the duties which in modern Rokugan are specifically associated with one clan were performed by multiple clans at the dawn of the Empire, with varying degrees of success.

Until the First War many of the clans were very mobile. They followed their Kami as he or she traveled around the Empire. Hantei assigned each Kami a section of the Empire to civilize and colonize but these regions were enormous and there were few settlements within them. Permanent or fortified towns were rare, although a few major strongholds did begin construction during this time, most notably Kyuden Hida and of course Otosan Uchi itself. Essentially, though, many of the clans were little more than roving war bands that gathered individual tribes beneath their banners; only the Dragon and the Crane were largely stationary from their origins.

After the First War the clans began to settle into their true and enduring forms. As peace and prosperity replaced war, castles and cities were built and fortified all across Rokugan and the Empire became a true civilization.

The Crab Clan

Hida chose his followers for strength and led them south to face the strongest enemies they could find. The proximity of the dangerous and decadent Kingdom of the Trolls made the south a dangerous place and the human tribesmen there were hardy and strong, greatly to Hida's liking. Although the Crab Clan had not been officially proclaimed as the defenders of the Empire's southern border, they nevertheless formed a buffer between Rokugan and trolls,

ogres, nezumi, and other strange creatures who lived in the south.

Those who were sworn to the personal service of Hida were the strongest and toughest of the tribesmen he encountered in his travels. Often he would defeat a tribe and then offer to allow their strongest warriors to swear personal fealty to him. Sometimes they would only do so after a contest of strength, which Hida inevitably won.

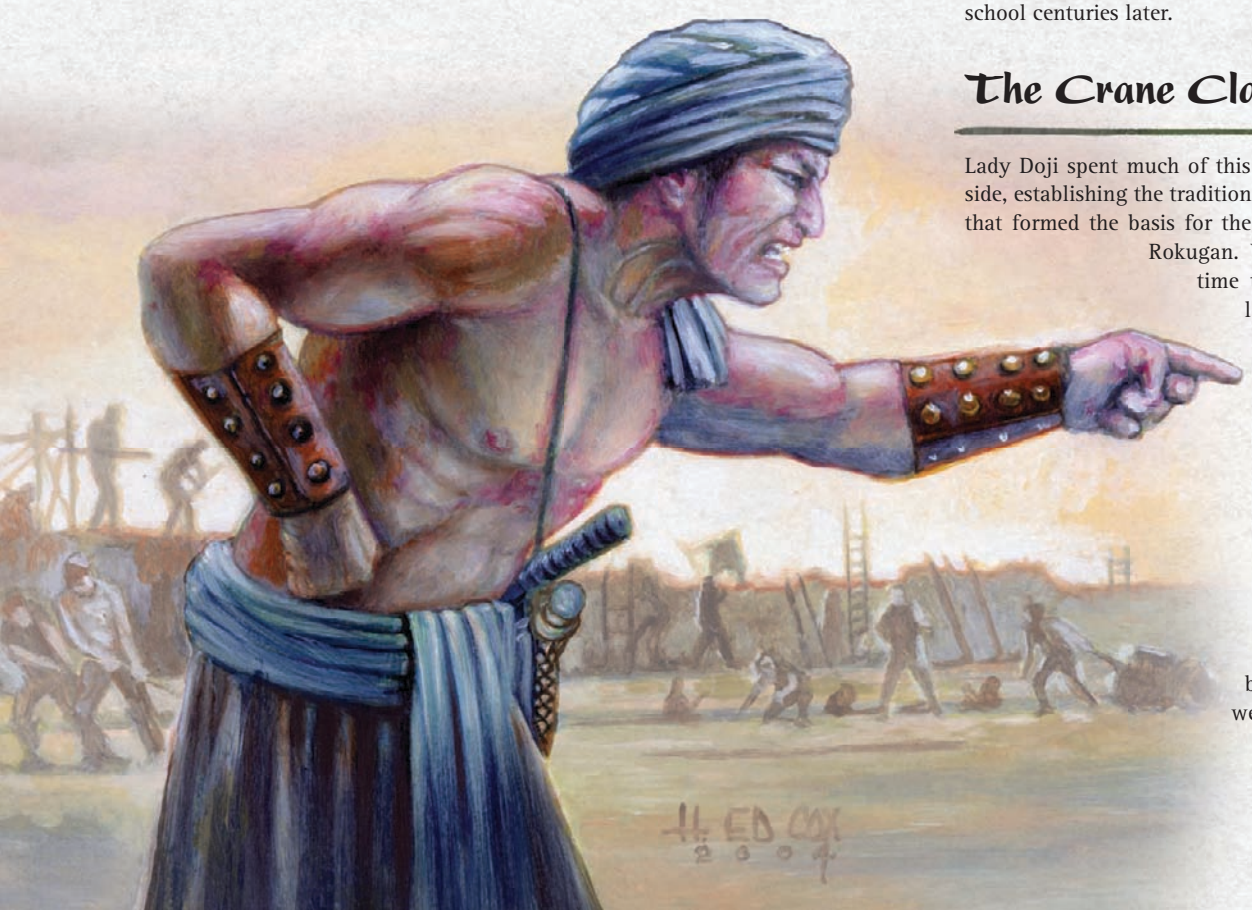
The strength of the Crab provided vital help to the Empire when Fu Leng invaded a few years later, but Hida was angry that even his great might and the courage of his formidable followers could not withstand the Shadowlands assault. After the Day of Thunder, Hida swore to battle the Shadowlands until Lord Moon and Lady Sun fell out of the sky. When Hantei heard this vow he charged Hida with protecting the Empire from further attacks. "Our safety is on your shoulders, brother, for only you are mighty enough to bear its weight," he proclaimed. Hida traveled back to the south, driving out the Shadowlands creatures who had overrun those lands and building castles and fortifications to prevent their return.

The other three original families of the Crab—the Kaiu, Hiruma, and Kuni—came into being soon after Hida's return to the south. The Kami asked for the best of his followers to step forward and help him fulfill his sacred duty to Hantei. Three men stepped forward: Hiruma, Kaiu, and Kuni. When Hida asked them what they had done to be worthy of his trust, each said they had done nothing. Hida tasked them with defeating the demon Hatsu Suru no Oni, a lieutenant of Fu Leng whose touch brought unending pain. The three Crab ventured into the Shadowlands, where Kaiu set up a makeshift forge and crafted a weapon that could defeat the creature. Hiruma stalked the surrounding area, locating their prey and determining how the terrain could be used to defeat it. Kuni studied the records of the shugenja who had fought Fu Leng's creatures during the war. He devised a plan to trap and defeat the demon, and together the three men managed to lure Hatsu Suru no Oni into the trap and slay it. When they returned to Hida each gave the other credit for the victory. Hida was impressed and granted each of them the right to create a family based around their respective strengths.

The early followers of Hiruma were both scouts and warriors, relying on speed and agility to defeat their foes. Early on, Hiruma also concentrated on teaching his followers archery, although this never became a primary focus when experience showed it was difficult to carry enough arrows into the Shadowlands during lengthy scouting expeditions.

Kaiu drew his early followers from the ranks of the craftsmen and builders who were helping construct the castles and fortifications in the lands of the Crab. Kaiu chose them personally based on their skills and intelligence, making sure to cover every sort of skill he believed would be important even if it wasn't immediately necessary.

The Kuni during the Dawn of the Empire were a very small family. Few among those who followed Hida could utilize magic, and they were often the castoffs from other magical traditions. Many were antisocial misfits, but Kuni looked into each of their hearts and saw their true value. He assigned each one research close to their hearts. A few of the more cerebral and inquisitive warriors of the Crab joined Kuni as well, assisting him in his "research" trips into the Shadowlands. The martial techniques they learned for defeating the creatures of the Shadowlands would eventually form the basis of the Witch Hunter school centuries later.



The Crane Clan

Lady Doji spent much of this era at her brother Hantei's side, establishing the traditions, protocols, and procedures that formed the basis for the government and courts of Rokugan. While she did spend some time traveling, most of her followers came to her, drawn by her legendary beauty, poise, and elegance. Kakita himself was the most famous of these, of course, and his eventual marriage to Doji is considered by many Crane to mark the true founding of their clan. Kakita was a simple warrior from a small northern tribe who believed speed and accuracy were more important in war-

fare than mere strength. When the Emperor proposed his Tournament of the Emerald Champion, Kakita entered without the sponsorship of a Kami or clan. He defeated all of his opponents swiftly and with grace, bowing respectfully to each after he beat them. In the finals, however, he faced Matsu, who had humiliated her opponents throughout the tournament. Kakita defeated her swiftly and deliberately refused her the courtesy he had offered to his other foes. The battle started the great feud between the Lion and Crane, which would continue for over a thousand years.

The Crane Clan formed four of its five families during this era. The Doji and Kakita were both forged from the children of the clan's founding Kami and her husband, with different samurai swearing fealty to each branch according to their skills and loyalties. Those who followed Kakita were generally swordsmen who favored his swift and deadly style, both in personal combat and in warfare. Toward the end of the Dawn of the Empire era, Kakita's dueling style developed into the Empire's standard format for resolving conflicts of honor or law.

The Yasuki were founded from the family and allies of the wise and cunning woman who aided Kakita during his quest to marry Doji; in reward, Kakita married his sister to Yasuki's eldest son and granted the family status as vassals of the Crane. Yasuki had many contacts throughout the burgeoning Empire and used them to begin building up the wealth of her new clan. Her children traveled through Rokugan, arranging trade routes and mercantile contracts, recruiting more Yasuki into their growing family. Those who followed Yasuki were usually shrewd traders, though many were also skilled warriors—the trade routes during this early time were very dangerous. There were no established patrols or border wardens, and bandits and other more dangerous threats were common. Ultimately, it was the shrewd and industrious Yasuki who made it possible for the Empire to fight an extended war against the forces of Fu Leng. Their trade routes and resources fed and armed military forces across the entire Empire.

The Daidoji were founded by Doji Hayaku, the youngest son of Doji and Kakita, after the First War. He retrieved his sister Doji Konishiko's sword from the Shadowlands, a long and grueling quest that left him with a nasty scar across his throat and stark white hair. His mother proclaimed him Daidoji ("defender of the Doji") and he was given leave to create his own family to protect the Crane Clan. The long-standing Crane tradition of bleaching their hair white began as a tribute to Hayaku's courage, spreading from his own family to the rest of the clan. The Daidoji in those early years were a very small family and often drew recruits from those warriors who just weren't quite fast enough to master the Kakita style. Daidoji Hayaku spent the rest of his life developing the family's own fighting techniques, devising the first two ranks of what became the Daidoji Iron Warrior school; the rest of the techniques were created in later centuries as the Daidoji evolved into the true martial arm of the Crane.

The birth of the Asahina family still lay many years in the future, and during the Dawn of the Empire era there were almost no shugenja among the Crane.

The Dragon Clan

Togashi was in many ways the most disconnected of the Kami from the mortal realm. When his brothers and sisters set off to gather followers, he retreated to the mountains, the closest he could get to the Heavens and still remain in Ningen-do. He possessed the gift of foresight and knew followers would come to him, so he did not seek them out. Later Rokugani claimed only those worthy of following Togashi were able to find him in the mountains. Regardless, those who ventured to seek Togashi were allowed to join his Dragon Clan. Like his siblings, Togashi allowed some of those who sought his wisdom to swear fealty directly to him and take the Togashi name, but the exact origins of the monastic order known as Ise Zumi are obscure. They first appeared in the rest of the Empire after the First War began in the year 33, causing some historians to speculate that they represented an attempt by the Kami to project some of his own power into the outside world to fight Fu Leng. As with so much else involving Togashi, the truth is shrouded in mystery.

Not all of Togashi's followers took his name, however. Two of his earliest devotees actually followed him into the mountains. One was Mirumoto, a tall and rather unattractive man with large hands who had trained himself to fight in an unorthodox manner, wielding two swords at once. The other was Agasha, a small unassuming woman able to hear the voices of the spirits, who fervently believed peace was the answer to all of mortal man's woes. Together with Togashi they erected a temple to Amaterasu and a castle

to protect it, and there they received those who ventured into the mountains.

Mirumoto was a controversial man, sometimes derided as a thug or a bully; his unusual swordfighting style drew criticism from the Crane and led to a feud with the Kakita. He was already an adult when he met Togashi and when he turned forty he chose to become a monk, shaving his head and even giving up his swords. Some years later he encountered a group of assassins at a river crossing; he used an oar as an improvised bokken and killed them all. Realizing his quest for nonviolence was doomed, he took up his swords again and later became the Dragon Thunder. Well before Mirumoto's death his adopted son Mirumoto Hojatsu had embraced and continued his traditions of swordsmanship, intensifying the family rivalry with the Crane. This eventually led to Hojatsu's famous lethal duel with Kakita in the year 46.

Agasha was a very different person from Mirumoto, an avowed pacifist filled with a boundless curiosity about the natural world. Her magical gifts were considerable, and the family she founded was one of the few groups of shugenja in the Dawn of the Empire who could rival the skills of the Isawa. Agasha remained a dedicated pacifist throughout her long life, despite nearly dying when she was kidnapped by roving goblins. She was also noted for her deep understanding of the natural world and detailed studies of animals and plants. Centuries later, her notebooks would give birth to the techniques of alchemy.

An Unconventional Campaign: Journeys of the Ki-Rin

This chapter is dedicated primarily to depicting conditions inside Rokugan during the Dawn of the Empire. Consequently, the Ki-Rin play a relatively small role, with most of them departing soon after the Day of Thunder.

However, a GM seeking a more unusual game experience may find it interesting to run a campaign in which the PCs are Ki-Rin samurai accompanying Shinjo in her early journeys across the Burning Sands. The adventures of the Ki-Rin in the gaijin lands have been described at some length in Chapter Eight of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*.

The Ki-Rin Clan (Unicorn)

In the Dawn of the Empire Shinjo emulated her siblings and traveled around the new Empire, gathering followers. Travelers and explorers flocked to her banner. Shinjo welcomed all of them; she was among the most compassionate of the Kami, rivaled only by Shiba. In fact, she even felt compassion for her fallen brother Fu Leng and made an unsuccessful attempt to make peace with him.

The two most notable of Shinjo's early followers were a married couple, Ide and Otaku. Despite their marriage the two mortals were very different from one another. Otaku was quiet and soft spoken, to the point that many believed she could not speak at all. Her silent assurance and undeniable martial prowess led other young women to emulate her, forming the beginnings of the Battle Maiden tradition. Otaku taught them women could have their own strength, not dependant on a husband or family, and molded them into a formidable fighting force. They were not yet the mighty cavalry of the family's future, however; they rode only Rokugani ponies and had saddles without stirrups, forcing them to frequently dismount and fight on foot.

Otaku's husband Ide was gregarious and socially adept, making friends easily. The Kami sent him to try to bargain with the barbarian tribes to the north (the ancestors of the Yobanjin), trying to get them to join the Ki-Rin Clan. They refused, but the fact that Ide returned to the Empire alive is a testament to his diplomatic prowess. He had fewer followers than his wife, but their negotiating skills were quite important to the nascent clan, making certain the Ki-Rin could travel throughout the Empire without difficulty.

Otaku died at the Day of Thunder, and rule of the family she founded passed to her daughter Otaku Shiko. Ide continued to lead his own family and served Shinjo for many more years, accompanying her on her journey into the Burning Sands.

It was also in the aftermath of the Day of Thunder that Shinjo acquired her third famous follower, Iuchi. An inquisitive and courageous young shugenja, Iuchi accompanied Shinjo in her journey and eventually would pioneer unusual magical practices such as Meishodo.

The Lion Clan

Akodo was the most proactive of the Kami in his gathering of followers. He actively sought out the best warriors and leaders from every tribe he encountered. Soon people lined up to try to become one of Akodo's samurai; indeed the very term "samurai" seems to have been pioneered by Akodo to describe his followers. However, the warriors Akodo trusted the most were those who did not step forward to be considered, but rather those who wanted nothing to do with him, who initially thought Akodo was a bully and a blowhard. Akodo respected not only their courage and strength but also their determination to live according to the tenets of their own honor, no matter what the consequences. Foremost among these followers, of course, were Ikoma and Matsu.

Ikoma was already an older man when he met Akodo; the story of their first encounter is described in Chapter Four of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*. Ikoma had wandered the lands of Rokugan for many years, fighting numerous enemies and telling stories of his exploits. He traveled at Akodo's side for decades more, long past the age when most mortals of his era would have died, watching the great events of his time and telling stories about them (in which he often figured prominently). He attracted like-minded followers, founding a family which became the historians and storytellers of the Lion Clan. Although they were not yet officially recognized as the Empire's principle historians (a role which would solidify in the second and third centuries), they quickly became famous as heralds and historians, recounting the great tales of the Kami to eager audiences. During this era the Ikoma were also far more likely to be warriors than their later descendents, due to the influence of their founder's martial ways.

The relationship between Matsu and Akodo was a tempestuous one, a mixture of both attraction and rivalry, and is likewise described in *The Great Clans*. She was a violent woman in her youth, often raiding other tribes and killing anyone who stood in her path, but by the time she met Akodo she had realized there was nothing fulfilling about a life of murder. She fled her original tribe and settled in a small village where she taught the populace how to use weapons to defend themselves.

Matsu's followers were some of the greatest warriors in the land, and when she swore fealty to Akodo they became the shock troops of the Lion Clan. Matsu famously remarked of her soldiers, "Strategy is fine as long as we get to drown our opponents in their own blood." The warriors of Matsu were primarily men, but she recruited female warriors as well, forming them into a personal honor guard—the origins of the modern Lion's Pride. The family's tradition of requiring men who marry Matsu women to take the Matsu name also found its origins in this era with Matsu's own marriage.

The third Lion family, the Kitsu, did not come into being until after the First War when Akodo belatedly realized the cat-like creatures he was hunting and destroying were not Shadowlands monsters. The five remaining kitsu took human form and married Akodo's daughters, joining the Lion Clan. The new Kitsu family was of course quite small: five shapeshifted men and their human wives. The few other Lion samurai with the gift of speaking to the kami also swore fealty to the Kitsu, but it still took many years for the family to grow to any significant size. The early Kitsu generally kept to themselves, exploring the spirit realms and watching over the newly constructed Hall of Ancestors. It would be centuries before the rest of the Empire paid them any heed.

The Phoenix Clan

The early Phoenix Clan was almost nothing like its later incarnation. The Kami Shiba spent the early years of the Empire traveling and learning all he could, making friends with those who were as inquisitive and insightful as he was. Shiba was one of the most compassionate of the Kami, and when he met the Tribe of Isawa he did not react with the ferocity of his brothers and sisters. The Tribe of

Isawa was one of the most advanced groups of humans in the world when the Kami fell, and they did not believe they needed anything the Kami had to offer. The lived in their own lands and used their magic to keep outsiders away, and they were unwilling to either leave the new Empire or bend their knee to the Emperor. Shiba did not fight them; instead he offered to allow them to be a part of the Phoenix Clan in name only, continuing with their lives unhindered and unchanged. Isawa was the most powerful magician of his time, the founder of what became Rokugani magic; he was understandably proud to the point of vanity, but he recognized the practical value of avoiding conflict with the Kami. He agreed to Shiba's proposal, and when the Shadowlands attacked and nearly destroyed one of his cities, he and his people joined with the rest of the Empire to fight.

It was not until the Day of Thunder, however, that the Isawa truly became a part of the Phoenix Clan. When Shiba knelt before Isawa and pledged to protect his family forever, the great shugenja finally agreed to become the Phoenix Clan Thunder and died fighting Fu Leng. It was his magic which trapped Fu Leng's soul in the twelve Black Scrolls, saving the Empire. The Shiba have protected the Isawa ever since.

The Isawa family in the Dawn of the Empire was composed mainly of Isawa's tribe, although they did occasionally take promising students from elsewhere. After the Day of Thunder, when the Isawa were fully integrated into the Phoenix Clan, they became more accepting of others and many promising shugenja joined the family, diversifying its bloodlines.

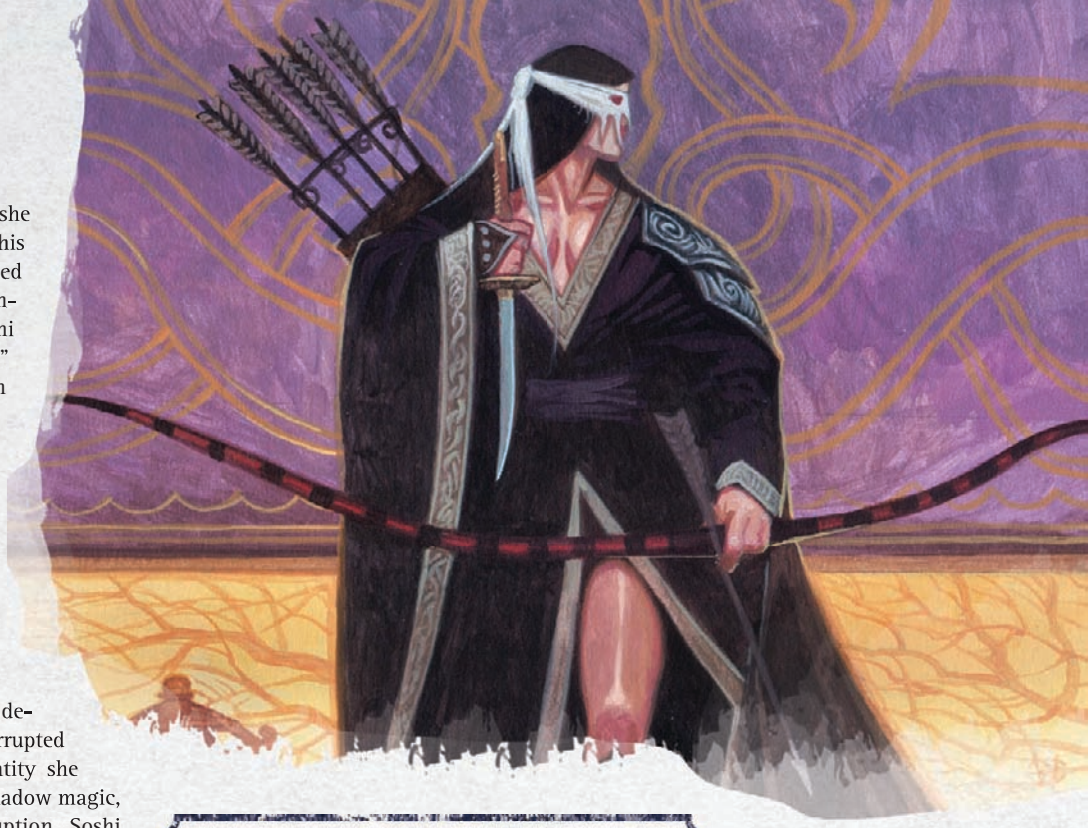
The other Phoenix family was founded by the lady Asako, a healer who became a close friend to Shiba. She and her husband Yogo, a skilled magician, traveled with Shiba, serving him loyally. After the First War began, Asako tended to the wounded while her husband used his powers to fight against Fu Leng's forces. It was not until after the First War, when Yogo was cursed and lost and Asako was deeply in depression, that a singular event led to the creation of the true Asako family. Shiba imparted the secret of the Path of Man to Asako and she led her few followers onto that path. By the end of her life the Asako family was large enough to carry on without her, but it remained one of the smallest families in the Empire. Only the most faithful inner circle of the family were *henshin*, and they had only just begun to master the techniques of the Path of Man. The rest of the family were shugenja or warriors, drawn to Asako by her wisdom and compassion.

The Scorpion Clan

Bayushi was the most cautious of the Kami, and it was several years after the Tournament of the Kami before he began to openly build a clan. Instead he traveled the portion of the Empire assigned to him and watched its people, learning their ways and studying their leaders while quietly recruiting his own followers. He learned the political lay of the land, which factions were in charge, which were powerful, and which could be easily toppled. He brought down tyrannical leaders by subtly influencing their followers or through the occasional strategic assassination.

Bayushi was Shiba's twin brother and shared many of Shiba's traits, but he expressed his compassion for the people of Rokugan in very different ways. He trained his followers to accomplish their missions with the least amount of exposure possible so as to cause the least damage and harm to the Empire.

Shosuro was one of Bayushi's first followers. She was a mysterious young girl who could disguise herself almost perfectly, and Bayushi was fascinated (and perhaps smitten) by her. They traveled together constantly and she recruited a small circle of assassins to serve him, folk who disguised themselves as actors and entertainers. While Bayushi's own followers were generally warriors, Shosuro's were used for clandestine missions: spying, assassination, and sabotage. Both families suffered heavily during the First War, and when the time came for the Scorpion to send a Thunder to confront Fu Leng,



Bayushi refused to let Shosuro go. He knew she would likely die and could not bear to lose his most beloved follower. However, Shosuro defied her lord's command and went with the Thunders anyway. (Some later tales claim Bayushi publicly refused in order to "play the villain" but then sent Shosuro secretly so the mission would succeed. Whether these tales are true or are merely later attempts to protect Bayushi's repute is unknown.)

Shosuro returned to the Empire as the only survivor of the Seven Thunders. She falsified her death and took on the name and form of a young shugenja, Soshi. With Bayushi's assistance she formed a new family, recruiting Scorpion with magical talents (including some of Yogo's followers) and teaching them methods based on stealth and deception. Unfortunately, Shosuro had been corrupted by the Lying Darkness, so in her new identity she also taught her new family the methods of Shadow magic, sowing the seeds of later danger and corruption. Soshi pioneered the creation of the fabled shadow brands and many other unique aspects of the family's magic.

Yogo was originally a follower of Shiba, but fled the Phoenix Clan after he was cursed by Fu Leng in the year 36. Doomed to betray the one he loved, Yogo wandered alone and contemplated suicide until Bayushi offered him a place within his clan. Yogo asked why Bayushi would trust a potential betrayer, and Bayushi replied simply, "But Yogo, you do not love me." He was right. Yogo used the knowledge he had gained from the Isawa to form the first shugenja school of the Scorpion (although after the year 42 it was eclipsed in prominence by the Soshi). Once the Soshi were formed, the clan established a division of responsibilities, with the Yogo protecting Scorpion secrets while the Soshi ferreted out other clan's secrets. The Yogo also began to develop their own form of ward magic, although they would not perfect it until several generations later.

The Minor Clans: The Mantis and the Fox

During the Dawn of the Empire era there is only one officially recognized minor clan: the Fox, formed from those of the Ki-Rin who chose to remain in Rokugan after Shinjo departed. In the year 90 the Lion Clan announces its intention of annexing the Ki-Rin lands, claiming they need them more than the remnants of Shinjo's departed clan. The brief battle results in a decisive Lion victory, but Hantei Genji stops the war and gifts the Ki-Rin remnants with lands in and around the Kitsune Mori. (Their difficult early history is recounted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 85.) The Emperor also issues a decree forbidding the Great Clans from waging all-out war against Minor Clans.

The Mantis are founded during this era but are not officially recognized as a clan until many centuries later. Dur-

Alternate Paths: The Corrupted Scorpion

In the canonical history of the Dawn of the Empire era, Shosuro (in her second identity as Soshi) eventually realizes she is being consumed by the Lying Darkness and flees to the Dragon lands, where Togashi imprisons her in crystal. A heartbroken Bayushi sets out in search of her and never returns. All histories agree Bayushi died during this quest, but there is disagreement as to what happened to his soul afterward. It is known that Bayushi's soul became linked to a secret lake in the caverns beneath Kyuden Bayushi, and appeared there from time to time in order to continue the search for Shosuro. However, some legends claim Bayushi merely visited the lake periodically, while others suggest his soul was actually trapped there.

All that aside, however, creative GMs will recognize there was nothing inevitable about Shosuro's decision to flee to Togashi. If the Shadow's influence had overwhelmed her faster, she would likely have remained within the Scorpion Clan and continued to spread the power of the Lying Darkness. Under such circumstances Bayushi himself might have fallen victim to the Shadow and the entire Scorpion Clan would have become a direct agent of the Shadow's infiltration of reality. This would greatly change the subsequent history of the Empire, naturally, and would allow the GM to present a far darker, creepier, and more paranoid version of Rokugan, a world where the Shadow is deeply intermeshed with every aspect of the Empire. Of course, the GM should also be aware that in this campaign environment the Scorpion are pretty much relegated to the role of NPCs, which may not be pleasing to every player group.

ing this time period they are essentially a band of ronin under the command of Kaimetsu-Uo, living on the Islands of Silk and Spice, exploring the surrounding waters, and occasionally hiring out as mercenaries.

The Imperial Families

Unlike his siblings, Hantei did not travel the Empire seeking followers. Nevertheless, he did attract a few notables who swore direct allegiance to him, and all three of the Imperial Families were formed during this era.

The woman later known as Lady Seppun and the tribe she led were the first to offer allegiance to the Kami the moment the eight fell to earth. After the Tournament of the Kami they renewed their allegiance to the newly minted Emperor Hantei. Hantei accepted their service, knowing he would need guards, advisors, and priests if he was to truly be an Emperor. The Seppun family during the Dawn of the Empire era was originally formed entirely from Seppun's tribe, but over the years it accepted allegiance from a few others who traveled to Otusan Uchi and showed exceptional skill with the blade or with the ways of magic. The Seppun began to teach the arts of war as they pertained to protecting the Emperor and his family as well as the spiritual arts derived from their original traditions.

The second man to offer direct allegiance to Hantei was Otomo, a small man who was the younger son of a great tribal warlord. He was not physically imposing and some of his fellows even suggested he had the bearing of a serpent, but he proved to have a knack for gaining allies and turning his enemies against one another. When he was five years old he was fostered to the tribe of Seppun and became a childhood friend of the woman who would later swear fealty to Hantei. Later, he returned to his own tribe and became chief advisor to his older brother.

Otomo's brother was a good warlord but a bad man. In five years he attacked three other tribes and butchered their populations. He ruled his tribe with an iron fist and sired four children with women who were married to other men. Finally he died in battle, leaving his tribe weak and vulnerable to those it had bullied. Otomo somehow managed to arrange a truce, then led his tribe away from its enemies to the new settlement building at Otosan Uchi. When Hantei heard of Otomo's skills he was impressed and invited him to explain his methods. The conversation ended with Otomo swearing fealty to the Kami.

The early family was composed of those who Otomo deemed capable of helping to keep peace in the fledgling Empire. They were devious negotiators, often responsible for starting and ending conflicts with a few words to either side. They worked alongside the Doji to establish the early traditions of the Empire's courts and later became the home to those of the Hantei line who did not inherit the throne—a tradition started by Hantei Genji's younger brother Yamato, who abdicated his Hantei name and swore fealty to the Otomo.

The Miya family was created from one of Otomo's followers who was near the Emperor when he received the news the Thunders had defeated Fu Leng. Hantei gave Miya a sacred charge: make certain everyone in the Empire knew they had won. Miya rode out into the Empire to spread the good news, traveling from one province to another for months. For his courage and resourcefulness Hantei Genji granted Miya the right to form his own family and appointed him the first Imperial Herald. The family remained very small throughout this era. The new Miya were trained in running, riding, and memorization. They served primarily as heralds, spreading news between the clans and carrying messages as needed. Despite their small numbers, their efforts played a major role in forging the disparate lands and tribes of Rokugan into a single Empire.

The Shadowlands

The Shadowlands first came into being during the Dawn of the Empire era, as Fu Leng enslaved the ogres and trolls, created the race of goblins, and summoned forth hundreds of oni from the Festering Pit. These creatures roamed far and wide, ravaging the lands and killing any mortals who fell into their hands. As the First War got fully underway, undead also began to appear as the Taint animated the corpses of the slain. The Lost, however, were few and far between, and most Rokugani did not truly understand the Taint's effects on its victims.

After Fu Leng was defeated by the Thunders, the organized Shadowlands invasion dissolved into thousands of directionless monsters, wandering across the land without any purpose beyond destruction. A few of the more powerful oni, ogres, and trolls managed to gather small groups of followers, making themselves thorns in the side of the Empire for decades, but most of the creatures were quickly hunted down or fled to the south, ultimately gathering in the lands surrounding the newly formed Festering Pit.

The Day of Thunder as a Campaign Event

The Day of Thunder was one of the most important single events in Rokugan's early history, exceeded only by the actual arrival of the Kami. It seemed the fledgling Empire was certain to be destroyed and the world ruled by Fu Leng and the creatures of the Shadowlands, but seven heroes stepped forward and defeated the Dark Kami, ending the threat. According to legend, Shinsei recognized the invasion of Rokugan by Fu Leng and his Shadowlands creatures was the result of Jigoku's effort to conquer all of creation, and Fu Leng was only one of many Champions who would be created by the Realm of Evil. Ningen-do was the battlefield for this eternal struggle between Jigoku and Tengoku, and it was up to the champions of Ningen-do to confront and defeat Jigoku's representative. Only mortal champions could prevail, for only mortals had the power to change destiny and forge their own fates. So the later tales have claimed, at any rate, and certain odd legends among the kenku and even the ogres seem to support them. (Ultimately, of course, it is up to the GM and the players as to whether this is true in their version of Rokugan.)

When Shinsei met with Hantei and offered to save the Empire with a small group of heroes, Hantei's first thought was to gather his siblings and confront their brother directly. But Shinsei insisted mortals would have to fight for the mortal world. Hantei accepted the Little Teacher's judgment and ordered his siblings to let Shinsei choose one of each of their followers to confront Fu Leng. Some-

The Problem of Shosuro

Supposedly when Kaimetsu-Uo arrived on the Islands of Silk & Spice, he met a koumori spirit named Unmei who told him a series of tales about the Seven Thunders and their battle with Fu Leng. According to Unmei, Shosuro was not truly a mortal at all. Rather, she was created by a kenku out of a sliver of Nothing he had found. She was, in essence, a living sentient piece of the Shadow. This was the source of Shosuro's astonishing powers of mimicry and deception, as well as her later ability to use Shadow magic when she took the name Soshi.

The problem with Unmei's story, of course, is that if Shosuro was truly formed from Shadow, she was not a mortal and was therefore not eligible to be a Thunder any more than Shiba or Hantei. If this is the case, and Seven Thunders were required, it must be assumed that Shinsei himself was truly the seventh Thunder. However, this cannot be true because a thousand years later Shosuro's descendent Kachiko became the Second Thunder for the Scorpion, and later sacrificed herself to free her ancestor Shosuro's soul from the grip of the Lying Darkness.

Of course, the koumori's tales were intended primarily to inspire Kaimetsu-Uo and there is no reason to assume they were literally true. Ultimately it is up to individual GMs to decide whether Unmei's tale about Shosuro's origin contained any truth or was merely a tale.

how Shinsei knew who to choose, sensing which mortals carried souls of Thunder within.

For the most part, the Kami were more than willing to allow their most devoted followers and even their children to accompany Shinsei into the Shadowlands. Hida, for example, made no objection even when Shinsei chose his only son and heir, Hida Atarasi. However, the tales of the Seven Thunders do record a number of memorable and dramatic incidents during the choosing of the Thunders.

When Shinsei named Doji and Kakita's son Yasurugi as Thunder, an oni appeared and slew the young man, seemingly dooming the Thunders before they could even leave for the Shadowlands. However, Yasurugi was a twin, and his sister Konishiko stepped forward with the light of Thunder in her eyes. Although she had no training as a warrior, she claimed her brother's sword and took his place as the Crane Thunder.

When Shinsei asked for Shosuro to serve as Scorpion Thunder, Bayushi refused. He had lost many of his people in the First War and could not bring himself to lose his closest follower. However, Shosuro defied him and slipped away to join the Thunders on her own. Ironically, she was the only Thunder to survive the battle with Fu Leng.

When it came time for Shinsei to choose a Lion Thunder, he asked for Ikoma, but Matsu stepped forward and knocked the old man to the ground. When the others demanded to know why she should be Thunder, Matsu replied, "Because there is no one else."

When Shinsei traveled to Phoenix lands, Isawa refused to serve, saying he must stay and protect his people. Shiba, in an act of humility never seen from the other Kami, knelt before Isawa and swore to protect his family if Isawa would protect the Empire. Isawa agreed and became the Phoenix Thunder.

Initially, the Seven Thunders could see no possible hope of success against the Dark Kami, who had already proven himself stronger than any of his divine siblings. They rode to the Shadowlands with every expectation of death. However, at some point during the journey Isawa hit on the plan of trying to trap Fu Leng's soul within twelve scrolls, thus removing his influence from the world. With the help of a map provided by a nezumi the Thunders finally reached the place of battle—what would in later years be called the Festering Pit. There the Thunders fought valiantly to protect Isawa long enough for him to complete the ritual for the twelve scrolls, and ultimately they succeeded—albeit at the cost of most of their lives. Isawa himself died as he completed the twelfth and last scroll, sealing away Fu Leng's spirit for a thousand years. Ultimately only Shosuro and Shinsei himself survived to make their way back to the Empire with the twelve scrolls, now blackened and Tainted by Fu Leng's dark spirit.

No one truly knows how the battle with Fu Leng was fought, although many dramatic accounts have circulated in Rokugani culture. The koumori Unmei also told a spectacular version of the combat to Kaimetsu-Uo. Ultimately, though, the true details of the fight are known only to its participants, and individual GMs can adjust the tale to fight their vision of Rokugan.

Player Characters as Thunders

If the GM is running a campaign set during the Dawn of the Empire, it is perfectly reasonable for player characters take on the role of some or all of the Seven Thunders. In fact, there is no hard-and-fast rule saying the Thunders must be chosen from all seven of the Great Clans. After all, the Thunders were the champions of the mortal world and the greatest heroes of their time—if the GM feels the PCs fit that role, he should not let clan identity obstruct a good story. In fact, there is not even a requirement to have a full seven Thunders, although matching the number of clans and the number of Bushido virtues obviously has appeal.

It should be noted that a campaign in which the PCs serve as Thunders is likely to be a campaign with a classically Asian ending: a complete or near-complete wipeout for the PCs. Fu Leng is a foe unlike any other, incredibly powerful and capable of impossible feats that violate both the natural order of the world and, mechanically, the rules of the game. In addition he has an immense army of powerful followers, including beings like the First Oni that can defeat entire armies on their own. If the fight is to be credible, the PC Thunders will need to be very experienced, and they will still have to go into the fight with the expectation of a lethal finale.

Of course, if the PCs are willing to die for the Empire the GM should also give them a fair chance of winning the day in exchange for their heroic sacrifice. Properly handled, such battles are the sort of gaming experience that players will remember for a lifetime.

Magic and Religion During the Dawn of the Empire

History is uncertain as to when the first human discovered the ability to speak with the spirits of the land, but it was certainly well before the arrival of the Kami. Likewise, well before Fu Leng's fall wrenched open the connection between Jigoku and Ningen-Do and allowed innumerable *kansen* into the world, the tribe of Isawa and a few others in the world discovered and practiced a pure and voluntary form of blood magic. However, once the Festering Pit unleashed large numbers of *kansen*, they began to be drawn to blood sacrifices and Taint those who used them for power. The blood magic the Isawa used was no longer always safe. It was Shinsei's insights into the ways of the elements and kami that allowed the Isawa to set aside their blood magic in favor of the elemental magic which they practice in modern times. Meanwhile the connection between spilling blood and the *kansen* became ever stronger, eventually leading to the foul new form of magic known as *maho*.

The villagers gathered in a circle around the ancient stone altar. As they approached, Isawa Kiro rose from where she had been seated cross-legged. "Is everyone here? I cannot perform the ritual without everyone's assistance."

The headman of the village stepped forward. "Hai, Isawa-sama, all are assembled."

The woman in the orange robes nodded and stepped into the center of the circle to stand by the stone altar. "Today we celebrate the coming of Spring and ask the Fortunes to bless the crops these villagers will soon plant." She removed a large stone bowl from a bag at her feet and set it on the altar. "In this bowl I place the seeds of the future season." She emptied a small bag of mixed seeds into the bowl. "We place our offering and ask you to show favor to these crops and those who farm them, that they may see health and prosperity in the year ahead."

As Kiro finished her incantation a slight glow arose from the altar, enveloping the stone bowl. She drew an ornamental iron dagger from her belt and pierced the end of one of her fingers, allowing the blood to fall into the bowl. Finished, she raised the bowl and held it out toward the others. "Those who will benefit from this blessing must make an offering as well." She stepped forward and each of the villagers pierced their own finger, adding a little blood to the bowl. When they were finished Kiro returned to the altar and placed the bowl upon it reverently. "Blessed Fortunes, please accept this offering and know these people are committed to reverencing you in all things. By helping them you show how truly compassionate you are. We beg you to accept this gift of life and return it in kind."

The light from the altar enveloped the stone bowl and seemed to pour into the center of it. For a moment it became unbearably bright and then faded completely. Isawa Kiro looked into the bowl, nodded to herself, and presented it to the headman. It was now full of beautiful golden seeds. "Plant some of these in each of your fields and you will be prosperous. You are blessed for another year." The villagers cheered wildly.

The blood magic used by the tribe of Isawa was usually a highly ritualized affair wherein a gift of life—the blood sacrifice—was offered in exchange for a blessing from the Fortunes and spirits; in some ways this was similar to the later method of importuning a spirit to cast a spell. For example, a priest might gift Jurojin some of his own blood in order to plead with the Fortune to cure the sickness of a young child. A circle of blood droplets might be used to ask a Fortune to ensure a field was protected from vermin during a lean year. Modern shugenja have no real counterpoint to this form of symbolic sacrifice in magic, although it survives in perverted form in the practice of *maho*.

Blood magic quickly fell out of favor after the Phoenix learned about Shinsei's teachings and discovered how much better their magic could work by following his principles. At the time, they did not fully recognize the threat from *kansen*—it was not until centuries later that the true nature and threat of *maho* became apparent—but they did notice that blood magic was starting to attract evil spirits of some kind, a recognition which further accelerated the transition to the new form of pure elemental magic. The Emperor's official proclamation of Shintao as the Imperial religion also accelerated the process, as the Phoenix took the lead in merging Shinsei's teachings with the traditional Fortune-worship which had prevailed before.

In terms of religion, shugenja at the Dawn of the Empire were usually priests dedicated to the worship of the Primal Fortunes (the seven Great Fortunes and a handful of other Fortunes who pre-dated the rise of humanity—see Chapter Eight of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* for more information on the Fortunes). Most of the people dwelling in what became Rokugan worshipped the Fortunes well before the Kami fell, although this worship was crude and unorganized compared to what it became later. Worship of the ancestors and of natural spirits was also widespread, although equally disorganized. The Kami themselves were quickly incorporated into the developing Rokugani religious belief—they were, after all, quite obviously of divine origin and nature.

To be sure, not everyone venerated the Fortunes and ancestors—there were plenty of strange cults and divergent beliefs in the Dawn of the Empire. Once the Kami began to organize the Empire, those who did not follow the main forms of belief were gradually driven out, defeated, or forced to change their faith. This process became much more organized after the Day of Thunder when the Emperor proclaimed the *Tao* of Shinsei to be a holy text and commanded the entire Empire to adopt Shintao. The fledgling Phoenix tribe was instrumental in spreading this new merged religion, for after the death of Isawa his tribe had pored over the *Tao* in depth to discover why their late

leader had been so willing to listen to the Little Teacher. (A few of the more resentful even hoped to find proof that Shinsei had misled Isawa, but they were disappointed.)

By the end of the first century, the Shintaoist religion—merging traditional Fortunism with Shinsei's teachings and veneration of the ancestors—was approaching its modern form. The monastic tradition of the Brotherhood of Shinsei was also forming as retired samurai, religious ascetics, and dedicated scholars joined together to embrace Shinsei's dictum to seek enlightenment and reject the distractions of mortal life. The latter years after the Day of Thunder also saw the appearance of the first of the new Fortunes, such as Osano-Wo. By the end of the second century, Rokugani religion would be fully formed and continue forward largely unchanging save for the appearance of new Fortunes from time to time.

The First Tournament of the Emerald Champion

In the year 23 the palace at Otusan Uchi was finished and Emperor Hantei held an enormous festival in honor of its completion. At this festival he held a contest to decide who would be his personal champion. In modern times this tournament is referred to as the First Tournament of the Emerald Champion, though the title of "Emerald Champion" did not yet exist and would not be formalized for over a century; the earlier tournaments were intended simply to choose the Emperor's personal defender.

The First Tournament's focus was almost entirely martial; the elaborate secondary competitions would not be introduced for some time. The laws of the Empire had not yet been codified and the winner was not expected to be the arbiter of Imperial justice that later Emerald Champions became. Instead, the First Tournament saw contests of athletics, wrestling, and strategy that culminated in a kenjutsu tournament.

Contrary to later popular mythology, iaijutsu had not yet been formalized. Although the idea of resolving disputes with duels already existed, these were simply battles of martial skill without the elaborate traditions and rituals of the iaijutsu duel that developed later on. (Kakita himself, of course, would go a long way toward developing these traditions, although they did not fully take root until the reign of Hantei Genji.)

Hundreds of warriors from all over the Empire competed in the First Tournament. Many of the Kami's best followers took part, as well as a good number of independent warriors who came seeking glory and opportunity. This was a chance for them to be noticed by the Kami, to win a place in the new Empire that was coming together. However, only one major story is remembered from the contest: the performance of Matsu and Kakita, and the final battle in which they met face-to-face.

Matsu was already one of the most famous and feared warriors in the Empire; she was Akodo's favored follower and often led his army in his absence. She was also quite proud and through the entire competition she looked at her opponents with disdain, not believing they were worthy to be on the same field as she. Her scorn seemed well-founded as she advanced to the finals without a scratch. Kakita, on the other hand, was an unknown quantity: a small man from a remote northern tribe, not sponsored by any of the Kami, who fought using a slim blade and an unorthodox style. He treated each of his opponents respectfully, bowing to them as they were defeated and in a few cases even helping them to their feet.

When Kakita faced Matsu, the fight ended swiftly with the mighty Lion woman flat on her back. Kakita did not offer her the same bow he had given to others, for he believed her arrogance made her unworthy of his respect. Matsu was furious, claiming insult from the man. Kakita replied she did not deserve the respect she denied to others. "We all tread on the same earth, breathe the same air, and live and die in the same way," Kakita said. "We are all equally worthy of respect, or none of us are." Hantei agreed and declared his champion would not only be the Emperor's personal guardian but also the protector of the people, entrusted with their care.

Matsu glared at the new Emerald Champion and snarled, "From this day forth, there will be enmity between us, little man. Remember this." Her foe replied simply, "My name is Kakita." Thus was born the thousand-year feud between Lion and Crane.

The Age Before the Kami

Life in the lands that would become Rokugan was very difficult before the Kami fell. The people were split into thousands of tribes, the larger tribes preying on the weaker ones. There was no law, no civilization, no unity. Monsters such as ogres, trolls, and nezumi wandered the southern lands and sometimes ventured deep into the north. If the Kami had not arrived to organize the Empire, it is likely that the Nezumi or the Trolls would have eventually expanded northward and Rokugani humanity would have been enslaved or exterminated.

Most human tribes originated as small family groups who banded together for safety, following the strongest or most charismatic personality among them. More often than not, such leaders were not content with what they had and preyed on other tribes for more land, food, population, or weapons. Moreover, folk migrations, droughts, floods, and other natural disasters could lead to war even when the tribes had peaceful leaders.

Wars aside, there was no universal system of laws and thus no formalized way to settle even minor disputes between tribes, so blood feuds were common and sometimes lasted for generations. A few tribes sometimes allied together to temporarily form a larger tribe or to trade with each other, cementing the arrangements with marriages between sons and daughters of tribal leaders to create a blood connection; in a world without higher civilization, only blood ties were considered binding. In some cases this would eventually lead to a permanent merger between the tribes, but just as often the alliance would eventually break down in betrayal and war.

Swearing Fealty to a Kami

Why would someone swear fealty to the Kami? Aside from gaining a position within the new Empire and potentially becoming a daimyo once those positions are created, there are potentially direct physical advantages to such a choice. The early followers were all long-lived (unless they died in battle) and in particular the followers of Shinjo aged extremely slowly during the Ki-Rin Clan's wanderings. Some scholars have speculated that the power of the Kami bestowed physical blessings on those who swore themselves directly to their service. GMs may wish to explore this idea in play by awarding extra Experience Points or free Advantages to characters who swear fealty.

Many of the tribes were nomadic, following herd animals or raiding enemy tribes, returning to a home territory in the winter months. Others such as the Tribe of Seppun or the Tribe of Isawa built more permanent homes or even fortified villages, although their defenses seldom amounted to more than a wooden stockade wall. The more advanced tribes relied on farming for most of their food, or raised animals such as goats or pigs. (The Rokugani taboo against eating red meat did not develop until after the Kami fell.)

Although life was hard it was not wholly without pleasures. Most tribes held religious or seasonal festivals each

Alternate Paths: The Emerald Tournament

Historically, the First Emerald Tournament was won by Kakita, who went on to establish many of the Empire's early traditions such as the primacy of iaijutsu dueling. However, other outcomes could have pushed the early Empire in different directions. The most obvious difference would have been a victory by Matsu—the Lady of Lions would have been a very different sort of Emerald Champion and would likely have pushed the early Empire's customs in a much more martial and rigidly disciplined direction. Whether this would still have resulted in a long-term feud between Lion and Crane is debatable, given the differences in temperament between Matsu and Kakita. For that matter, if Kakita lost it is entirely possible he would have left Otosan Uchi immediately thereafter and never married Lady Doji.

The lack of information on the other competitors at the Emerald Tournament offers all sorts of possibilities to creative GMs. What if some of the competitors were from tribes who resented the Kami? A victor of that sort might have tried to assassinate Hantei as he congratulated them for their victory.

And of course in an L5R campaign there is always the possibility of player characters taking part directly. While it is unlikely that a PC will win the tournament, it is still a great way to introduce the characters to the politics and factions of early Rokugan. Anyone who distinguishes themselves here may be able to find a place in the early clans, so a creative GM can use the First Tournament as an introductory adventure to establish the PCs within the new Empire and help them to choose a clan.

From a mechanical standpoint, the contests during the tournament are primarily martial but the event as a whole will certainly offer many chances for non-combat characters to shine, such as participating in the festival itself, helping to set up and administer the tournament, performing religious rituals, or simply treating the wounded.

year. They welcomed the spring and autumn with celebration and gathered to dance and drink for weddings or the birth of children. Of course, art and technology were nowhere as advanced as they would become in the later Empire; the only really technologically advanced culture in pre-Kami Rokugan was the Tribe of Isawa, who founded the first human settlement that could properly be called a city: Gisei Toshi. The Isawa actually had an intricate series of internal laws and some fairly advanced crafts, including paper-making and advanced pottery and metallurgy—at the time of the Kami's fall, they were the only people in Rokugan who could forge steel.

Most of the tribes in pre-Rokugan fought with simple weapons: spears, axes, sometimes bows. A few had developed metalworking technology far enough to make swords and armor, but outside of Gisei Toshi such gear was rare and expensive and was usually made from simple iron rather than Isawa steel. The Kami, however, each brought splendid clothing, armor, and weapons from their home in the Celestial Heavens, and the sight of such wonders inspired mortal craftsmen all across the land to seek new ways to advance their craft. As the Kami forged peace and unity among the different tribes, knowledge spread and advancements came swiftly. The first true human-forged katana was wielded by Kakita at the First Emerald Tournament and the design was quickly copied by other craftsmen; by the time of the First War, the katana and wakizashi were beginning to emerge as symbols of the new caste known as samurai.

The age of the Kami also brought the spread of new ideas. Prior to the Fall of the Kami, most tribes worshipped

Tsukiro crouched behind a clump of bushes and waited for the signal. His eyes narrowed as he stared down into the encampment of the enemy. The so-called Tribe of Jikoju were heretics, believing the Fortune of the East Wind was superior to all other Fortunes. Two days ago they had attacked his village, killed a dozen men, and taken many of the women and children away to work in their rice fields. Such a crime could not go unanswered, and now he and his comrades would see that the Tribe of Jikoju paid for their villainy. He tightened his grip on his spear and waited.

A few moments later a warcry echoed through the narrow valley. Tsukiro rose and charged into the camp, screeching in fury, his face turned demoniac by the warpaint which covered it. The Tribe of Jikoju was caught by surprise, scattering and reaching for weapons even as Tsukiro and his fellows rampaged through them. Seven of the enemy fell dead before they even drew weapons. Tsukiro's brother Karatsuki rushed to the captives and cut the ropes binding them. Most of them fled toward home, but a few of the tougher women snatched up spears from the fallen enemy and joined the fight.

In very little time, none of the Tribe of Jikoju were left standing. Tsukiro raised his spear overhead and cried out in victory. They had won and could return to their village in peace.

A large rock sailed through the air and crushed Karatuski's skull. Tsukiro's gaze whipped around and he blanched at the sight of a huge ogre coming over the edge of the valley, a large stone in each of its enormous hands. Tsukiro and his companions turned and ran, scrambling back up the slope down which they had charged only minutes before.

The last thing he saw was the tree-trunk club the second ogre swung at his head.

one or two of the primal Fortunes, and only the Tribe of Isawa venerated all of the Fortunes equally. Tribal wars over religion and heresy were common, though individual beliefs tended to spread throughout a single region fairly swiftly. Once the Kami arrived, however, universal Fortunism spread quickly and was joined by Shinsei's teachings after the Day of Thunder.

Notable Personalities from the Dawn of the Empire

Many of the family founders, Thunders, and other heroes from this era have already been mechanically depicted in the various chapters of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*. The following sections offers a few more of them along with a sample depiction of a Kami for GMs who wish to represent the Empire's founders in game terms.

Doji Konishiko

the Twin Thunder

When Doji Konishiko was a child, she was always smaller than the other children around her, but she was the apple of her mother's and father's eyes. When the time came for her to choose which of her parents she wanted to study under, Doji or Kakita, she told them she could not decide between two she loved equally. They both taught her, but Konishiko was not an exceptional student of either the path of the blade or the ways of civilized life—unlike her twin brother Yasurugi, who was both a superb swordsman and a brilliant artisan, creating many legendary items. Still, Konishiko's parents did not worry—they knew that given time she would surely come into her own and excel as her siblings did.

She never got that time.

When Shinsei came to the Crane seeking a hero to join the ranks of the Thunders, he picked Doji's son Doji Yasurugi. Soon afterward, as Yasuragi was visiting his infant son, an oni attacked and killed the Crane Thunder. Shinsei himself nearly despaired, believing all was lost... but then Konishiko stepped forward and took up her twin brother's sword. The light of Thunder shone within her eyes, for she and her brother shared the same soul, kharmicly linked. Matsu scoffed at her, pointing her sword at the little Crane girl and mocking her weakness and lack of vigor. All gasped when Konishiko suddenly lashed out with her brother's sword and knocked Matsu's blade from her hand. Glaring, Matsu snarled, "You will die in the first moments of fighting, girl."

"That may be my kharma," Konishiko replied, stared up at mighty Lady of Lions. "But I only need to hit him... once."

Doji Konishiko rode to the Shadowlands alongside Shinsei and the other Seven Thunders, and never returned.

Doji Konishiko, Crane Clan Thunder, Daughter of Doji and Kakita

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 4
Awareness: 4		Agility: 4	Perception: 3	

Honor: 9.2 *Status: 6.5* *Glory: 9.1*

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 1/Kakita Bushi 2

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Iaijutsu (Focus) 3, Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu 2, Perform (Singing) 3, Perform (Storytelling) 3, Sincerity 3, Tea Ceremony 2

Advantages: Great Destiny (Seven Thunders), Kharmic Tie (Doji Yasurugi), Multiple Schools.

Disadvantages: Small

Ide

Follower of Shinjo

Ide was a young man when he joined Shinjo's clan. Despite his youth he was already married to the warrior woman Otaku and they had two small children. In contrast to his wife, who rarely spoke and focused all her energies on riding and fighting, Ide was a gentle and talkative man, a consummate diplomat whose gentle words often turned aside the wrath of enemy tribes. In the compassionate Lady Shinjo he saw a great soul who shared both his wife's fierce protectiveness and his own underlying kindness, and he did not hesitate to tie his destiny to hers. Shinjo quickly learned to trust Ide's skills and often relied on him to recruit new tribes into the Ki-Rin Clan. At one point she even sent him to try to convince the Yobanjin to join in the War against Fu Leng, but there even his legendary persuasiveness proved insufficient.

Ide left the Empire with Shinjo in year 45, three years after his wife died on the Day of Thunder. Although he mourned Otaku's loss, he remained loyal to Shinjo and did not hesitate to accompany her on her quest. Ide was responsible for many of the peaceful contacts the Ki-Rin made with cultures outside of Rokugan, and it is said that while he always wore his katana he never once drew it. Ide continued to serve the Kami Shinjo faithfully for decades, aging only slowly. Legends claim he lived for well over a century, perhaps even more, although given the lack of written records among the early Ki-Rin it is difficult to say if this is true. Regardless, he continued to pursue his soft-spoken ways to the end of his life, and passed on his tradition of peaceful negotiation to his children. They would perfect his techniques into the true Ide Emissary school.

The following stats depict Ide late in life when he was traveling with Shinjo across the Burning Sands.

Ide, Follower of Shinjo, founder of the Ide Family

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 5

Awareness: 6 Intelligence: 5

Honor: 7.1 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 7.0*

School/Rank: Ide Emissary 3 (Insight Rank 5)

Skills: Calligraphy 5, Commerce 6, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Etiquette (Conversation, Courtesy) 7, Horsemanship 4, Investigation (Notice) 5, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (numerous skills in a range of 1 to 5 ranks), Sincerity (Honesty) 8.

Advantages: Voice, Benten's Blessing, Balance, Great Destiny (founder of the Ide family), Languages (Many), Precise Memory.

Disadvantages: Lost Love (Otaku).

Chosaku

Warrior in the Tribe of Hikaru

Chosaku was in many ways typical of those mortals who refused to accept the rule of the Kami. He was always stronger and taller than the other children in his tribe, and as soon as he was old enough his father began to teach him ways of fighting. Chosaku took to the spear like a duck to water, and as an adult his skill with warfare led his tribe to victory against six other neighboring tribes, all of whose survivors quickly joined the Tribe of Hikaru. Chosaku never hesitated to fight for his tribe, whatever the reason; he was quick to anger and weak of mind. By the time the Kami fell to earth, Chosaku was the acknowledged war leader of his tribe, a master of the spear who had killed dozens of men in battle.

When Akodo reached the Tribe of Hiraku, Choasku was filled with fear. He had already heard hundreds of horror stories about the things the Kami had done to other tribes. He led a group of one hundred warrior against Akodo's forces; they were slaughtered almost to a man. Chosaku survived, and on the battlefield Akodo confronted him and offered him the chance to join the Lion Clan. Chosaku refused, snarling that he would be no man's dog, and fled with his few remaining fellow warriors. They retreated north, toward the mountains, trying to get as far away as possible from the terrible Kami and his armies.

Beyond the mountains, Chosaku and his men encountered others who did not wish to become part of the Empire. These people called themselves the Yobanjin, and they were eager to have the help of a mighty warrior like Chosaku. He joined with them and spent the rest of his life fighting to keep the Yobanjin free from the rule of the Kami.

Chosaku, Warrior in the Tribe of Hikaru

Air: 2 Earth: 4 Fire: 2 Water: 3 Void: 2

Reflexes: 4 Agility: 4 Strength: 4

*Honor: 0.0** *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 4.5* *Infamy: 3.2*

**Chosaku does not acknowledge Bushido*

School/Rank: Forest Killers Path (Insight Rank 3)

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 2, Defense 3, Hunting 3, Intimidation (Bullying) 5, Knives 4, Spears 5, Stealth 4.

Advantages: Strength of the Earth, Large.

Disadvantages: Brash, Frail Mind.

Shiba

the Phoenix Kami

Shiba was among the most compassionate of the Kami, and the first of them to notice that two of his brothers—Ryoshun and Fu Leng—had not fallen to earth with the rest of them. He was also among the first to feel care and admiration for humankind. Although like most of his siblings he initially did not feel connected to the world, he was fascinated by human compassion, arrogance, and hu-

mility. Soon he came to truly love mortals, not just individuals but all of them, a feeling that only his sister Shinjo truly shared. However, it was not until he met Shinsei and spoke with the Little Teacher at length that Shiba came to understand that the lives of the mortals were linked to the divine; his understanding for them was an instinctive recognition of that fact.

Like his siblings, Shiba gathered a clan of like-minded mortals under his command. He taught his followers to protect one another and to guard the Empire of which they were a part. His compassion was such that he protected the Isawa even though they were not truly willing to join the Phoenix.

It was Shiba who recorded the long conversation between Hantei and Shinsei that later became the Tao. When Shinsei proposed that seven Thunders travel into the Shadowlands to face Fu Leng, Shiba immediately offered to go, willing to give his life that the Empire might live. However, when Shinsei rebuffed him, Shiba accepted it willingly and threw all his efforts into making sure the Little Teacher could find the mortal heroes he needed. Without hesitation he knelt before Isawa and swore to protect his people if Isawa would protect the Empire by serving as a Thunder.

Shiba's compassion and dedication did not end there. It was he who traveled into the Shadowlands to save Shinsei and the last of the Thunders from the terrible power of the First Oni. His valor saved Shosuro and Shinsei but he was mortally wounded. However, true to the Phoenix symbol he had chosen for his clan, Shiba ultimately transcended death. His soul remained in the mortal world to watch over his descendents, and he passed on the secret of the Path of Man to one of his most loyal and devoted followers, the Lady Asako.

Shiba, Kami, Founder of the Phoenix Clan

Air: 7 Earth: 7 Fire: 7 Water: 6 Void: 8

Awareness: 8 Intelligence: 10 Perception: 9

Honor: 10.0 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 10.0*

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 3 (Insight Rank so much higher as to be meaningless)

Skills: Athletics 7, Battle 4, Calligraphy 9, Courtier 8, Defense 10, Divination 6, Etiquette 8, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 7, Kenjutsu 10, Kyujutsu 7, Lore (Many, ranging from 3 to 8), Medicine 8, Meditation (Void Recovery) 10, Spears 10.

Advantages: Great Potential (all skills), Clear Thinker, Enlightened, Paragon (Compassion), Prodigy, Precise Memory, Sage, Touch of the Spirit Realms (Tengoku)

Disadvantages: Fascination (mortals)

Special Ability: Divine Resilience. Due to their quasi-celestial nature, Kami are less susceptible to normal weaponry. They are considered to have a Reduction rating of 10 against normal weapons, although magic, the three sacred substances, and nemuranai bypass this. All Kami are functionally immortal—that is, they do not age, although they can still die from injury, disease, or heartbreak.

The Kami in an L5R Campaign

The Kami were beings of immense power, and in truth there are few situations where their game statistics are truly necessary. If statistics are desired, however, the depiction of Shiba here can be used as a general template with a few changes for any of the Kami.

Each Kami is considered to have Great Potential with every skill and may use any skill in which he or she is untrained (except for Lore skills) as if possessing one Rank in the Skill. Each Kami is considered a Paragon of the Bushido virtue most closely associated with their personal nature and their clan, and all Kami are considered to be Touched by Tengoku.

Fu Leng is of course an exception to these patterns. He is not a Paragon at all and is Touched by Jigoku instead of Tengoku.

All Kami, whether corrupt or pure, have extremely high Traits and Rings, though of course their exact Ranks will vary according to their nature (Hida would have a higher Strength and lower Intelligence than Shiba, for example).

All of the Kami who founded Great Clans know their iconic school at Rank 3. Kami who live to the end of the first century, such as Hida or Lady Doji, also develop the fourth Rank of their School. The exceptions are Fu Leng (who had no school of his own, though with the immense power of Jigoku he hardly needed one) and Hantei (whose martial training in the Heavens was a secret he never shared with mortals).

New Game Mechanics

The following section provides mechanical guidelines for running games set in the Dawn of the Empire, as well as a few iconic foes from that era.

For the purpose of mechanics, the Dawn of the Empire may be divided into three chronological sub-sections: the pre-Kami era, the first fifty years of the Empire (including the First War), and the post-War second fifty years. Extensive changes happen during this three periods, and these changes impact what game mechanics can be used in a campaign set within them.

The pre-Kami Era: Characters Without Rokugan

Before the Kami fell there were many people living in the land that became Rokugan, and they had developed primitive tribal societies and even a few cities. GMs and players who are interested in a truly unusual L5R experience may wish to set a campaign in this time, allowing the players to seek adventure and fight for survival in a primitive world and then witness the awesome transformation wrought by the coming of the Kami.

Characters created for this era are very unlikely to have Schools in any normal sense of the term. Courtiers, Artisans, Monks, and other Schools derived from civilized life do not exist at all. As far as bushi go, most tribes manage at best to develop a single basic fighting Technique which they teach to their warriors; the GM may represent this by using the Rank 1 and/or Rank 2 Ronin techniques presented in the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook and in the 'Ronin' chapter of *Enemies of the Empire*. A tiny handful of notable warriors have begun to develop more sophisticated fighting methods, but teach these only to members of their own tribe, or trusted friends. These would include the Lady Matsu and the Lady Otaku, for example, as well as a handful of others. In general even these legendary figures have only developed the first two Ranks of their namesake Schools.

Shugenja are extremely rare outside of the Tribe of Isawa. Isawa priests in this era would use the Isawa Shugenja school, but their spells are cast using blood magic (see sidebar) and they cannot cast anything higher than Rank 3 spells in any Element. Shugenja outside of the Tribe of Isawa also use blood magic, but should generally be represented by the Ronin Shugenja Schools in *Enemies of the Empire*, and will not be able to cast anything higher than a Rank 2 spell. Many of the spells used in future centuries do not yet exist in this time period, although it is also believed that many other spells from this time became lost; creative GMs should encourage their players to create new spells of appropriate power level.

In terms of Skills, no High Skills exist, and some of the more sophisticated Skills in the other three categories (Bugei, Merchant, and Low) will probably be absent as well. For example, the primitive Rokugani had no significant sailing or ship-building skills, and commerce usually consisted of little more than barter. Gisei Toshi is an exception to these rules, and many High Skills are known there.

Monks and kiho do not exist, nor do kata, ancestors, and other such secondary mechanics. Likewise, since the concept of Bushido does not yet exist, characters most likely do not have an Honor Rank (although creative GMs may choose to substitute a more basic concept such as "Reputation"). Any Advantages or Disadvantages associated with Bushido do not exist either. Status in a recognizable form only exists in Gisei Toshi, although most tribes recognize some sort of hierarchy.

The First Fifty Years: Forming an Empire

During the initial reign of the Kami and the subsequent desperate trial of the First War, the basic outline of the Empire appears but most of the details are not yet present. PCs can become samurai in this time period, swearing fealty to one of the Kami or to a high-ranking follower of that Kami (such as Matsu, Kakita, or Shosuro). However, options are still quite limited compared to later times.

In this era, a samurai will not yet gain a Family Trait bonus, for samurai families as they later appear have not yet truly come into existence. However, a number of early Schools now exist, and samurai who are inducted into those

Schools after swearing fealty will be able to gain the appropriate Trait bonus. However, these Schools are not yet even close to being fully developed. In general, no School in this era can advance past Rank 3, and in some cases they are still only at Rank 2. Even the Kami can only invent so much.

The specific Schools that come into existence in this time period comprise the following:

Crab Clan: Hida Bushi

Crane Clan: Doji Courtier, Kakita Bushi

Dragon Clan: Togashi Ise Zumi, Mirumoto Bushi

Ki-Rin (Unicorn) Clan: Otaku Battle Maiden, Shinjo Bushi

Lion Clan: Akodo Bushi, Matsu Berserker

Phoenix Clan: Shiba Bushi (Isawa Shugenja predates this era)

Scorpion Clan: Bayushi Bushi, Shosuro Infiltrator

Outside of these specific Schools, most samurai and shugenja are still mechanically considered Ronin of an appropriate type. (This includes the lady Agasha and the priests of the Seppun, for example.) Spells are still limited to those of Mastery Rank 3 or less, and the only monks who exist are the ise zumi. Kiho and kata still lie in the future.

On the other hand, the array of available Skills expands nearly to the full assortment as the Kami set about creating a civilization where things like art, culture, and etiquette actually matter. Bushido is created by Akodo and soon spreads to the other clans, so by the end of this era an Honor Rank is a meaningful mechanic for all characters. And the emergence of the Empire as the overarching social construct means that Status begins to matter as well.

The Second Fifty Years: Consolidating a Civilization

In the aftermath of the Day of Thunder, Hantei's death, and the ascension of his glorious (and very long-lived) son Hantei Genji, the Empire finally begins to come together into something resembling its true form. Civilized arts flourish, knowledge and culture spread widely, samurai families and traditions take shape, and so forth.

Characters in this era will usually be awarded a Family Trait bonus, as the various Great Clan families are beginning to develop recognizable shape and tone. The number of Schools continues to grow as other early heroes develop their Techniques and the new magical techniques based on the Tao proliferate. During this time, the original "founding" Schools (listed in the previous section) develop their Rank 4 Techniques, with a few even achieving Rank 5 Techniques by the start of the second century. In addition, a host of new Schools appear, all of which initially have only 2 or 3 School Ranks:

Crab Clan: Hiruma Bushi, Kaiu Engineer, Kuni Shugenja

Crane Clan: Kakita Artisan, Daidoji Iron Warrior, Yasuki Courtier

Dragon Clan: Agasha Shugenja

Ki-Rin (Unicorn) Clan: Ide Emissary, Iuchi Shugenja, Ujik-Hai (Moto) Bushi

Lion Clan: Ikoma Bard, Kitsu Shugenja

Phoenix Clan: Asako Henshin, Asako Loremaster

Scorpion Clan: Bayushi Courtier, Yogo Shugenja, Soshi Shugenja

GM's Toolbox: Pure Blood Magic

Primitive blood magic, as it was practiced at the Dawn of the Empire, was not *maho* and did not carry any risk of Taint or social stigma. Almost all spells of that era were powered by blood sacrifice, since shugenja had not yet gained a true understanding of the Elemental kami and did not know how to importune them for help.

In game terms, any shugenja from the first two chronological portions of the Dawn of the Empire must perform blood sacrifice in order to cast spells. The shugenja must cut or otherwise injure himself to draw blood, suffering Wounds in an amount equal to the Mastery Level of the spell. (This injury/bleeding should be treated as part of the Complex Action required to cast the spell.) Spells cast in this manner cannot normally benefit from Raises unless additional blood is spilled (the same amount for each Raise) to enhance the power of the sacrifice.

Much early blood magic was ritual, with multiple spellcasters joining together and contributing their blood to the effort. The GM can represent this in any situation where two or more shugenja know the same spell and work together to cast it. In such circumstances, one shugenja should be designated as the "lead" caster; he receives a Free Raise for his Spell Casting Roll for each additional shugenja who joins in the ritual and sacrifices the appropriate blood.

Ritualized voluntary blood sacrifice, often with the participation of non-spellcasters, was also used for a variety of general blessings and prayers, such as entreating the Fortunes for a good harvest. These are not really spells as such, although the GM can allow some minor mechanical benefits from them if it seems appropriate.

During the third portion of the Dawn of the Empire, the presence of kansen from the Festering Pit begins to disrupt the traditional blood magic rituals, while the rise of Shintao ushers in a new and better way to entreat the kami. The GM may represent this by increasing the TNs for blood magic spells as the kansen begin to disrupt the pure magic. PCs may even begin to run the risk of Taint, although the initial risk of corruption will be small (Earth roll at TN 5 or 10 to resist, depending on GM judgment).

Minor Clans: Kitsune Shugenja, Mantis (Yoritomo) Bushi

Imperial Families: Seppun Guardsman, Seppun Shugenja, Miya Herald

Brotherhood of Shinsei: Temple of the Thousand Fortunes, Shrine of the Seven Thunders

Magic also advances rapidly. Blood magic quickly fades from use in favor of "true" Rokugani magic, and spells of Mastery Rank 4 become widespread, with even a few Mastery Rank 5 spells starting to appear. At the end of the era, leading into the second century, a few kata and kiho begin to appear as well.

All Skills are available at this point, and systems such as Honor and Status function normally.

The First Oni

The true nature of the First Oni is uncertain. Some believe it was the first oni ever brought through the Festering Pit into Ningen-do, and this accounted for its immense power. Others claim that Fu Leng actually gave his name to an oni to cement his position as the champion of Jigoku, and this gave the First Oni far more power than others of its kind. Whatever the truth, the First Oni was immensely potent, easily a match for the later Oni Lords, and served as the chief war-leader of Fu Leng's armies. The Dark Kami trusted the demon so much that he allowed it to command its own independent forces, and it was far within Rokugan when its master fell on the Day of Thunder. Sensing the defeat of Fu Leng, the First Oni traveled back to the Shadowlands to see what had happened, and encountered Shosuro and Shinsei returning from the battle with the twelve Black Scrolls. Thankfully, the Kami Shiba had also come seeking the Thunders, and he managed to slay the First Oni at the cost of his own life.

There are persistent rumors that the First Oni continues to plot against humanity from within Jigoku, and may even have been involved in the creation of the spirit realm known as the Realm of Thwarted Destiny. Its blood has been used by maho-tsukai to create a variety of dangerous Tainted artifacts. In the twelfth century, spawn of the First Oni begin to come through the Festering Pit into the mortal realm, suggesting the demon may indeed be an Oni Lord or at least have power comparable to one.

Physically, the First Oni is a shapeshifter with a wildly variable body, often warping randomly in the midst of combat. It is huge, the size of a small house, and regardless of form it always has massive razor-sharp claws that drip a deadly poison.

The First Oni (original)

Air: 5	**Earth:** 9	**Fire:** 6	**Water:** 5
Reflexes 7	–	**Agility** 7	**Strength:** 9

Initiative: 10k8 — *Attack: 10k10 claws (Simple)*

Damage: *9k4+poison (claws)* — *Armor TN: 50*

Reduction: 20 (10 against crystal or obsidian) — *Wounds: 90: +5; 180 +10; 260: Dead*

Taint Rank: 9

Skills: Battle (Mass Battle) 7, Hunting 6, Intimidation 8

Special Abilities:

Fear 6

Huge

Magic Resistance: The First Oni has three levels of the Magic Resistance Advantage.

Poison Claws: Anyone struck by the First Oni's poison claws begins losing Stamina at the rate of 1 Rank per minute until the victim reaches zero Stamina and dies. This cannot be averted by any normal treatment or resistance, although magical spells and other supernatural effects that purge poison or disease will stop the effects. Lost Stamina will heal at the rate of 1 Rank per month.

Shapeshifting: The First Oni can freely change and warp its form as a Free Action, and will often mutate its body in the midst of battle to intimidate its opponents. However, no matter what shape it takes it cannot increase or decrease its massive size and bulk.

Superior Invulnerability: The First Oni takes only half damage (rounded down) from jade weapons.

The First Oni (spawn)

Air: 4	Earth: 7	Fire: 4	Water: 4
Reflexes: 6	–	Agility: 6	Strength: 7

Initiative: 19k6 — *Attack: 10k6 claws (Simple)*

Damage: *7k3+poison (claws)* — *Armor TN: 40*

Reduction: 15 (5 against jade, crystal, or obsidian) — *Wounds: 60: +5; 120 +10; 180: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Hunting 5, Intimidation 5

Special Abilities:

Fear 5

Huge

Invulnerability

Magic Resistance: Spawn of the First Oni have two levels of the Magic Resistance Advantage.

Poison Claws: Anyone struck by a First Oni spawn's claws must roll Stamina at TN 25 to resist the poison. Those who successfully resist lose only a single Rank of Stamina. Those who fail to resist begin losing Stamina at the rate of 1 Rank per minute until they reach zero Stamina and die. No normal treatment can stop the poison, but magical spells and other supernatural effects that purge poison or disease will stop the effects. Lost Stamina will heal at the rate of 1 Rank per month.

Shapeshifting: The First Oni's spawn share their sire's ability to freely change and warp their form as a Free Action. Much like the original First Oni, they cannot increase or decrease their massive size and bulk.

Hatsu Suru no Oni, the Demon of Agony

Air: 3	Earth: 6	Fire: 5	Water: 4
Reflexes 7	–	Agility 7	Strength: 9

Initiative: 10k5 — *Armor TN: 40*

Damage: *8k4 (claws) or 9k3 (Sword)* — *Attack: 9k6 claws (Simple) or 10k6 sword (Simple)*

Reduction: 25 (15 against magic, jade, crystal or obsidian) — *Wounds: 36: +5; 72 +10; 108: +15; 140: Dead*

Taint Rank: 7

Shadowlands Power: Feeding on Flesh

Special Abilities:

Fear 5

Huge

Invulnerability

Magic Resistance: Hatsu Suru no Oni has two levels of the Magic Resistance Advantage.

Touch of Pain: Anyone who takes at least 15 Wounds from Hatsu Suru no Oni's claw attack must roll Earth at TN 30. Failure means the victim suffers continuous agonizing pain, even after the injury is healed. In game terms this is expressed as a perpetual -3k0 penalty to all Skill Rolls and Spell Casting Rolls. The victim may take a Free Action each Round to roll Honor/Willpower at TN 35; success allows the victim to ignore the pain for that Round. The pain can only be stopped by magical effects that cure poison/disease; otherwise the victim must endure the agony for the rest of his life.

Hatsu Suru no Oni

The demon known as Hatsu Suru no Oni was another of Fu Leng's chief lieutenants during the First War, although not quite so powerful as the First Oni. It led many Shadowlands armies against Rokugan and the forces of the Empire learned to fear its appearance on the battlefield. After Fu Leng was defeated at the Day of Thunder, his spirit ordered Hatsu Suru no Oni to remain in the mortal realm and lead the Shadowlands against Rokugan. However, some months after the war the mighty oni was tracked down and slain by three Crab heroes: Kaiu, Kuni, and Hiruma. It has never been able to return to the mortal world, though the Crab have reported encountering its spawn on rare occasions.

Physically, the Hatsu Suru no Oni appeared to be a gigantic humanoid demon, fifteen feet tall or more, with green leathery scales and a vaguely man-like face. It wears armor, though this appears to be an affectation rather than a need, and carries a massive sword—though given the choice, it much prefers to rip its opponents apart with its massive clawed hands. The demon's blows cause unending pain to its victims, a torment which only adds to the monster's foul enjoyment of death and suffering.

The Reign of the Gozoku

To My Lord Seppun Ryusuke,

Greetings from Ryoko Owari. I hope this letter finds you in good health. How are your wife and children? Has little Nichiko begun her studies, or is that next year?

I am writing to request again that I be given a free hand with regard to the local representatives of the Daidoji Trading Council. Since I last wrote they have purchased a large warehouse and are using it to store contraband. A single raid would shut down the entire operation.

Yours in service,

Seppun Gohoru

12th day, second month of the year 407

Seppun Gohoru folded his letter carefully, stamped the wax with his seal of office, and handed it to a messenger for delivery. It was almost insultingly brief, but no one would read it anyway. The letter was only meant to create a paper trail. He was about to go beyond his orders, and he wanted to first paint himself as an obedient functionary.

A rustling beyond the shoji screen of his office announced new arrivals. He put down his writing brush and tapped his fingernail against the table, summoning them in. When they did not take the hint, he grunted. Finally he sighed and said, "Enter."

His latest crop of yoriki presented themselves. These five were clearly fresh from their gempukku, inadequate replacements for the valuable men and women he had lost in recent months. Every eye shone with eagerness, however, and that made them uniquely qualified for this assignment.

"Whom do you serve?" he asked.

"The Emperor, the Empire, and its divine law!" a woman in Matsu colors proclaimed. Her voice was ridiculously loud for the small room, and one of the others winced visibly. All five, however, seemed to agree with the sentiment, if not its dramatic expression.

"Good," Gohoru said mildly. "I have a task for capable yoriki, men and women who are skilled investigators and proof against any temptation. Is that you?"

"Yes," a young man with the Mirumoto family mon answered immediately. He had probably hoped to head off a further outburst from his overeager compatriot, but she still called out proudly, "Absolutely!"

"Excellent," Gohoru responded. "Within three blocks south of this office, a group of merchants has established a staging area for illegal wares. This is bad enough as it is, but setting it up so close to our post is an intolerable insult. You must go, find witnesses to their crimes, stop the flow of contraband, and bring all involved to justice."

The Mirumoto cocked his head slightly, conveying a question without speaking. "Speak," Gohoru instructed.

"Sir," the young man said hesitantly, "they must be very confident to operate so close to us."

"They have powerful friends," Gohoru responded. "Friends in their clan, friends in other clans, even in my family. I am not saying this to shock you, but to warn you. This assignment will not make you popular. But then," he added with a smile, "each of you serves the Emperor, the Empire, and its divine law, do you not?"

"Of course!" the woman shouted. The Mirumoto looked more thoughtful. All, however, bowed respectfully to Gohoru and left the room with a suitable air of purpose.

Listening to the young woman's voice, still audible as she led the others down the hall, Gohoru wondered if he would see them again. He also wondered whether, if he did, he would meet them as trusted yoriki or as five more of the Trading Council's "friends."

The History of the Gozoku Era

This chapter presents the era of the first reign of the Gozoku as a setting for running an L5R campaign. In contrast to other eras of play, which tend to feature either stability and peace (the pre-Scorpion Clan Coup era) or chaos and war (the Clan War, White Stag, the Great Famine, and so forth), the Gozoku Era presents a time of relative peace but severe political and social corruption. Thus, while a martially-oriented campaign may not be suitable for this era, a game focusing on magistrates and other law-enforcement types will fit in quite nicely. Honorable magistrates will find themselves battling against seemingly overwhelming forces of corruption and criminality, often in an environment of paranoia in which they do not know who to trust.

GMs who wish to run campaigns oriented toward political intrigue or the drama of conflicting loyalties will also find the Gozoku Era very appropriate. Political battles between the Gozoku and those who oppose them rage throughout this era, with heavy use of the most ruthless tactics such as blackmail, seduction, and assassination. Furthermore, even among honorable samurai there are deep divisions with regard to the Gozoku Alliance's reign—many samurai (including two of the three founders of the Gozoku itself) genuinely believe they are doing the right thing and ensuring stability and prosperity for the Empire. Incidents such as the Gozoku crackdown on the Brotherhood of Shinsei can force such misguided idealists to reexamine their beliefs, leading to powerful character development. Perhaps they will see the error of their ways and turn against the Gozoku, or perhaps they will continue to embrace the conspiracy in its long slide into corruption.

The Gozoku was the brainchild of three highly-placed samurai: Crane Clan Champion Doji Raigu, Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Atsuki, and Imperial Scribe Shiba Gaijushiko. Each of them believed the Empire could not be left in the hands of a single ruler, though their personal motivations varied—Gaijushiko, for example, wanted to ensure peace throughout the Empire, Raigu believed he was saving the Empire from an incompetent ruler, and Atsuki sought power for its own sake. Regardless, they joined together to decentralize the Emperor's power and push it "downward" to themselves and the vast new bureaucracy they built and controlled. Their goal was to reduce the Emperor to a figurehead, a moral and spiritual leader without his traditional absolute political powers. Obviously, this would have also increased the power of the individual Great Clans, and it is possible that long-term maintenance of Gozoku policy would have reduced the Empire to a set of semi-independent kingdoms bound together only by trade and shared culture.

Almost from its founding, the Gozoku was forced to make a series of increasingly ugly choices to secure and maintain its power and position. In the process the conspirators violated Rokugani religious principles, divided

Gozoku Philosophy

Although the three leaders of the Gozoku Alliance had differing motives, their campaign to take and hold power required them to develop some sort of coherent philosophy which they could use to recruit followers. The Gozoku vision, as it eventually solidified, argued that while the original Kami Hantei might have been able to rule single-handedly, his descendents were mortals and could not be trusted to wield such power unconstrained. Instead, rule of the Empire should be handed over to a group of wise and capable assistants—namely, the Gozoku themselves.

Of course, the motivations behind this philosophy were selfish—it was essentially little more than an elaborate rationalization for the Gozoku to seize power. However, it cannot be denied that many samurai sincerely believed the Gozoku viewpoint was well-intentioned, correct, and perhaps even noble. Although the conspiracy attracted plenty of dishonorable and ambitious samurai, it also drew idealistic and honorable followers who embraced its values without thought of their own advancement.

Seven centuries later, Atsuki would return to life through Oblivion's Gate and revive the Gozoku during the reign of Toturi III. Much as before, the conspiracy would draw a mixture of the opportunistic and those of genuine conviction—including the Emperor's own brother, the Shogun Kaneka.

their own supporters, and created more and more opposition within the Empire. Ultimately, Gozoku rule ended when those opponents rallied behind the Imperial Princess Hantei Yugozohime, who defeated the Gozoku's intended pawn in honorable combat and purged the Alliance from power.

The Gozoku's reign can usefully be divided into four periods: rise, consolidation, dominance, and fall.

The Rise of the Gozoku: Year 375 to Year 391

Year 375

- Emperor Hantei Fujiwa personally leads an Imperial army against the Shadowlands in support of the Crab Clan. After winning a stirring victory, Fujiwa condemns the Lion Clan and especially the Crane Clan for failing to support the Crab. Fujiwa already has a history of belittling the Emperor's Left Hand, but this incident takes it to a new level. Crane Clan Champion Doji Mizobu, known for his temper, shames himself with his open fury over the Emperor's policies at the Imperial Winter Court.
- Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Atsuki develops the first version of what becomes the Gozoku ideology. Atsuki's motivation for this is unclear; he claims to be concerned that the Emperor's displeasure with the Crane will extend to his own clan, but his later actions suggest his motives were less pure. He uses the Imperial Winter Court to search for allies, and finds one in Shiba Gaijushiko. Gaijushiko is an idealist who longs for peace across Rokugan, and Atsuki's suggestion of an Empire governed by a council of wise leaders wins him over. Atsuki also considers enlisting Doji Mizobu, but rejects him as too hot-headed.

Year 376

- Doji Raigu, Mizobu's son and heir, writes a brief tract entitled Relations Between Ruler and Subject. He proposes rulers should be above "taunting and prodding honorable samurai" and concludes superiors should "represent what is best about their subjects, and not be in a position to give in to their own worst impulses." The work is obviously criticizing the Emperor's treatment of his father, and its publication creates a minor scandal. Atsuki recruits Raigu into the Gozoku, promising the conspiracy will be able to restore the proper relationship between Imperial rule and the Empire's citizens. Over the next nine years the group slowly brings the combined strength of the Scorpion, the Crane, and the growing Imperial bureaucracy to bear against the Emperor's power, although their initial steps are cautious.

Year 385

- A rift develops between Doji Mizobu and the Yasuki family, whose dishonorable methods outrage the Clan Champion's traditionalist sensibilities.

Year 386

- War erupts between the Crab and Crane Clans over the Kenkai Hanto Peninsula. The conflict is initially somewhat limited in scope, although it is

Bayushi Atsuki in Later Times

Many centuries after the reign of the original Gozoku, Bayushi Atsuki returned through Oblivion's Gate and attempted to seize control of the Scorpion Clan, creating a dire conspiracy called the Shadowed Tower. Later he tried to recreate the Gozoku itself, but both the Shadowed Tower and the so-called Second Gozoku freely used *maho*, mind-control techniques from the Burning Sands, and other horrifying perversions. Obviously Atsuki never went so far in his original mortal life, but there is some debate as to whether this was due to a real difference between the original and the returned Atsuki, or simply due to the need for the earlier Atsuki to work in tandem with more honorable men (Gaijushiko and Raigu), restraining his preference for the most ruthless possible methods.

Some scholars believe Atsuki was actually condemned to Toshigoku after his first life and this resulted in his former personality being warped and twisted when he returned. These defenders argue that the original Atsuki, while a Scorpion to the core, was genuinely unwilling to employ such dangerous and evil tools as the returned one. Others counter that it was Atsuki who was the driving force behind the Gozoku's most impious and morally questionable actions, such as the crackdown on the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and point out that a soul condemned to Toshigoku would most likely be completely insane upon returning to the mortal world—like Hantei XVI. Moreover, only those who die in the grip of extreme violence and bloodlust are condemned to the Realm of Slaughter, and that hardly describes Atsuki's last moments.

Ultimately, it is up to individual GMs whether Atsuki's actions in his "second life" reflect his previous character or are the result of his experiences in the afterlife.

still larger than any previous inter-clan war. The Gozoku use the war to continue undermining the authority and power of the Emperor.

Year 387

- The Yasuki abandon the Crane for the Crab, dramatically intensifying the war already underway. Crab Champion Hida Ichido welcomes them into his clan's ranks. It is the first time in the Empire's history that a major family has defected from one clan to another. The aging Emperor looks on in horror as the two clans bring their full might to bear against each other with unprecedented ferocity, but the machinations of the Gozoku make it difficult for him to intervene directly.

Year 389

- Doji Raigu wins the Tournament of the Emerald Champion. His ascension to the position of the Emperor's personal champion greatly increases the power and influence of the Gozoku conspiracy. Emperor Fujiwa is unhappy at seeing Raigu win the position, but has no socially acceptable reason to deny him the post.

Year 391

- Bayushi Atsuki believes the ongoing Yasuki War and the ascension of Raigu as Emerald Champion has critically weakened the Emperor's position. He hatches a plan to bring Fujiwa to heel by kidnapping his only child. His two fellow conspirators are both hesitant to take such an extreme step, but finally allow their hopes for the future (and in Raigu's case, enmity for Emperor Fujiwa) to overcome their doubts.
- The Scorpion invite the Imperial heir to visit the home of one of his favorite painting tutors in the Bayushi lands. The heir departs on the third day of the sixth month, in the company of a large Scorpion force provided for "protection." In the seventh month Scorpion messengers bring word to Fujiwa: the heir has "decided" to stay with the Scorpion "so as not to interrupt his studies with travel."

Consolidation of Gozoku Power: Year 391, Seventh Month to Year 397

Year 391

- Doji Mizobu dies. Doji Raigu takes over as Crane Clan Champion. By now Emperor Fujiwa well recognizes the threat Raigu poses, but with his son a hostage he is powerless to respond.
- Using the captured heir as leverage, the Gozoku force the Emperor to declare hundreds of their opponents ronin. Among those disgraced is the Matsu family daimyo, Matsu Mochihime, an outspoken opponent of Doji Raigu. Freed of the obligations of her clan loyalty, she publicly declares her disgust with the fledgling Gozoku. Few believe Mochihime and all the other samurai are truly guilty of "gross contravention of the tenets of Bushido," but even fewer are willing to speak openly against the triumvirate now that their power over the Emperor is so obvious.
- His spirit broken, Hantei V dies on the 20th day of the eleventh month. He leaves the ongoing Yasuki War and a captured son as his legacy. Raigu and Atsuki immediately arrange for Fujiwa's uncle Otomo Tohojatsu to be named as regent. Tohojatsu is a corrupt and selfish man; he willingly accepts his role as the Gozoku's puppet in order to gain wealth and comfort and see his name in the Imperial histories.

Year 392

- Gaijushiko and Raigu begin aggressive efforts to modernize and streamline the Empire's trade and commercial arrangements in the name of greater efficiency and prosperity. The centerpiece of the program is the construction of many new roads linking major cities, ports, manufacturing centers,

and mines. Unfortunately, rampant corruption and local power struggles accompany the new projects, leading to diverted funds and other abuses.

- The Alliance begins expanding its organization. Where once only a small and select group had called themselves "the Gozoku," now a much larger number of useful allies are brought into the fold. Most of these are courtiers of repute or bureaucrats holding important Imperial positions, but some are relatively minor samurai who can do the day-to-day work of advancing the triumvirate's plans and removing its enemies.
- Raigu seeks the Gozoku's help in ending the Yasuki War. Atsuki and Gaijushiko refuse on the ground that a united Gozoku front might push the Crab to extreme measures for which the conspiracy is not prepared.

Year 393

- Shiba Gaijushiko requires Otomo Tohojatsu to create a new Imperial family, the Nasu, to help administer the swelling Imperial bureaucracy. Although the Empire at large is told this will ensure "parity and fair treatment in government," the Nasu are in fact direct agents of the Gozoku Alliance and entirely under the rule of the conspiracy. The puppet regent declares the Nasu to be of higher station than any other Imperial family, and the Gozoku use appointments to the new family as rewards for their loyal followers.
- Crime rates begin to rise throughout the Empire as the Gozoku Alliance's rule spawns massive political corruption and influence-peddling. The conspirators either ignore the problem or rationalize it as a temporary phenomenon with other causes (e.g. bad harvests, local ineptitude, etc).

Year 397

Fujiwa's heir, Hantei Kusada, takes the Emerald Throne as Hantei VI on the first day of the fourth month. Kusada is a strange mix of Gozoku upbringing and his father's influence and pride. The triumvirate is unconcerned, however, as Tohojatsu's regency has already put essentially every important decision in its hands. Tohojatsu resigns as regent and lives out his remaining life in luxury.

Gozoku Domination: Year 398 to Year 427

Year 400

- The Yasuki War grinds to a halt as Crane economic power (and Raigu's ability to control Imperial power through the Gozoku) effectively counterbalances Crab military supremacy. During the negotiations over the war's conclusion, a young courtier named Doji Suzume, son of a minor Crane daimyo, offhandedly remarks that it might be better if samurai gave their wealth to the peasants and allowed them to rule. The errant comment causes an uproar, with half the Empire thinking it heretical and the other half believing Suzume enlightened. Followers, mostly commoners, flock to his side, while his father Doji Onegano shaves his head in disgust and retires to a monastery. Doji Raigu arranges for Emperor Kusada to grant Suzume his own Minor Clan (the Sparrow) and gifts the clan the small amount of poor-quality land still under dispute in the peace negotiations; this allows a final conclusion to the war and removes a source of distraction and embarrassment for the Crane.

Who Knows About the Gozoku?

Every good courtier makes it his or her business to know who has power. As the Gozoku period progresses it soon becomes clear that Raigu, Atsuki, and Gaijushio along with their respective clans are in ascendance and the Emperor is rubber-stamping most decisions. The name "Gozoku Alliance" is a public one, referring to the political alliance between the Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix Clans, and any well-informed samurai will know about it.

However, the true depth of the Gozoku Alliance's power is not immediately apparent, and most of the Gozoku's enemies initially think of them as nothing more than an unusually successful political alliance. Only after many years does it become clear that the Gozoku have actually completely subverted the Emperor's supremacy, but since other clans (especially the Lion) still respect the Emperor's commands they cannot honorably rebel directly against Gozoku control. Further, for most of this era even the Lion do not realize how extensive is the conspiracy's reach or that the Nasu family is entirely a creation of the Gozoku. Only at the end, when the Dragon Champion emerges from hiding to enlist the Lion for a direct counterattack on Gozoku power, does the conspiracy's true nature become apparent.

- Ultimately, the final peace treaty allows the Crab to keep the Yasuki family, although the clan is politically ostracized by the Gozoku. The Yasuki go to work reviving Crab fortunes, but it will be many generations before their work bears fruit. The Crane begin rebuilding their own mercantile strength with the help of Daidoji merchants of questionable repute. Commercial clashes between the Yasuki and Daidoji only worsen the ongoing problems of widespread crime and corruption.

Year 406

- Bayushi Atsuki, concerned about the rise in criminal activity, attempts to control the problem by co-opting it. He begins recruiting criminal elements into the Gozoku. Raigu and Gaijushio complain that this sullies the Gozoku, but their objections fall on deaf ears.
- The Gozoku leaders arrange for Emperor Kusada's oldest son to be fostered by the Phoenix. Kusada knows he is being put into the same position as his father, but is powerless to resist.

Year 415

- A relatively minor courtier does the previously unthinkable by publicly discussing the Gozoku's activities at the Imperial Winter Court, held at Kyuden Asako. The courtier's words are immediately disavowed by all concerned, but create a stir nevertheless. Atsuki blames Raigu, claiming he orchestrated the incident in a misguided attempt to maintain the principles of Imperial rule. Raigu denies any involvement, but it is clear he and his followers still believe in the Emperor's ultimate supremacy in a way that Atsuki and Gaijushiko do not share. A split forms within the conspiracy, leading to occasional assassinations and other dirty tactics.

Year 418

- Emperor Kusada's second son goes to the Crane. Upon his gempukku he is expected to take the name Harada and join the Otomo family.

Year 421

- The Scorpion foster the Emperor's third son. The young heir is sent to live at Shiro no Shosuro, where he learns the ways of politics.

Year 426

- Bayushi Atsuki officially "retires" as ruler of the Scorpion Clan, passing power to his loyal daughter Minoko. He himself continues to serve as one of the three leaders of the Gozoku, of course.

Some issues and patterns during this period were not tied to any one year but rather extended throughout. The Gozoku sought to promote economic prosperity, to expand the power and reach of the Imperial bureaucracy (which it controlled through the Nasu family), and to promote the arts. Shiba Gaijushiko and Doji Raigu in particular were both major sponsors of the arts and saw their growth as proof of the Gozoku's superiority to the culturally unmemorable reign of Emperor Fujiwa. The Kakita Artisan School enjoyed huge new prestige in this era and the Shiba Artisan School first attained Empire-wide recognition as well.

Unfortunately, the aggressive promotion of economic development and the huge expansion of the Imperial bureaucracy brought with them unprecedented growth of crime, as graft and corruption proliferated all across Rokugan. Gaijushiko and Raigu largely turned a blind eye to this problem, seeing it as little more than a temporary side effect of their various "reforms," while Atsuki sought to control the problem by enlisting the multiplying criminal gangs into the Gozoku itself. For that matter, the Gozoku's own ranks were home to some of the worst corruption, as many of its followers saw the conspiracy as little more than a means to their own advancement. Even true believers in the Gozoku's ideal of a peaceful Empire ruled by enlightened bureaucrats were not immune to the lure of power, wealth, and comfort.

From a religious viewpoint, it can be argued the Gozoku weakened the connection between the divinely sanctioned Emperor and the governance of his subjects. The Empire's spiritual harmony was disrupted and this made it

Alternate Paths: Kusada's Third Son and the Nothing

By the fifth century, the Shosuro already had a covert alliance with the Lying Darkness, sacrificing a small number of their students each year to join the ranks of the Darkness' "Goju" ninja. (More information on this can be found in Chapter Seven of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*.) GMs who wish to add some additional spice to the Gozoku era may wish to explore the idea of Hantei Kusada's third son falling victim to this sinister arrangement. Perhaps the Nothing agrees to forsake its usual "tithe" of Scorpion recruits in exchange for the chance to corrupt a child of the divine Hantei line, or perhaps it takes action without the Scorpion even being aware of it. Kusada's son might return to the Empire as a deadly (or tragic) villain, creating a dramatic shift in the subsequent struggle of Princess Yugozohime to restore Imperial power.

easier for corruption and crime to flourish. Certainly the Brotherhood of Shinsei saw the era as one of spiritual decline, a view which doubtless contributed to their later support of Emperor Kusada.

From the year 415 on, the Gozoku began to divide into three factions, one for each member of the ruling triumvirate. Raigu's group wanted to maintain the basic principles of Imperial rule in hopes of eventually returning at least some power to a future Emperor more worthy than Fujiwa, allowing the Gozoku to stand in the sunlight as a loyal supporter of the Son of Heaven. Raigu disliked having his clan involved in covert activities and was uncomfortable with his close alliance to the shadowy and ruthless Scorpion. "I and my clan," Raigu wrote in his personal journal, "were not made for the shadows." He was also increasingly concerned by the amount of corruption the Gozoku had spawned, believing it undermined his clan's principles of honor and perfection.

Atsuki was frustrated by what he termed "Raigu's childish innocence." In his view the Gozoku could never be openly accepted by the rest of the Empire and, in any case, the Emperor could never be trusted to regain power. (Of course, whether the Gozoku should be called a conspiracy or just a group of samurai with similar reforms in mind was another point of disagreement between Atsuki and Raigu.) Tension within the Gozoku mounted as Raigu's faction tried to govern more openly, reform the worst corruption, and make peace with Emperor Kusada while Atsuki and those who agreed with him resisted and undermined such efforts, often with covert violence.

Gaijushiko was not immune to factionalism, though he deplored it as wasteful, but his focus remained on maintaining peace in the Empire at all costs. He disliked Raigu's attempts to make the Gozoku a more public organization but reserved a special contempt for Atsuki's use of violence and his recruitment of criminals, considering such methods both improper and also short-sighted. "You are eliminating competent people every time they annoy you," he complained during one of their debates, "and replacing them with loyal fools."

Although the Gozoku maintained its hold over the Empire, by the year 427 its internal division was making it increasingly vulnerable to a counterattack from its enemies. The attack came, however, from two unexpected quarters.

The Fall of the Gozoku: Year 428 to Year 435

"With a single strike a regime ended, a puppet fell, and an Empress was born. This is the power of Bushido."

—Ikoma Sutake, Imperial Historian

Year 428

- Hantei Kusada summons many monks from the Brotherhood of Shinsei to a philosophical conference. When they arrive, he stuns them by asking them to become his personal spies, working against the Gozoku. The monks, unable to refuse an Imperial command, attempt to carry out their new role but Scorpion agents soon detect their efforts.
- The divide between the Gozoku leaders deepens as they debate how to confront the Brotherhood. Raigu's faction argues a lighter touch is needed to salve the Emperor's pride and convince him to play his intended role. Atsuki sees a direct threat and wants every monk involved publicly executed. Gaijushiko's faction is divided, and while he personally recognizes the Gozoku cannot afford to ignore a direct challenge to its power he is unwilling to support violence.
- While the fate of the monks is still under debate, Gozoku agents burn down three monasteries. The battles between the Gozoku and the resident monks quickly become the subject of popular songs and stories.

Year 429

- Kusada's spies are publicly executed on the 16th day of the first month. The killing of holy men as base criminals shocks the Empire as a whole and drives a deeper wedge between the different factions in the Gozoku. Gaijushiko in particular is horrified and some of his followers begin to turn against the organization, although Gaijushiko himself is unwilling to forsake its goals.

Year 432

- Raigu, subtly influenced by Dragon diplomats, arranges to have Emperor Kusada's eldest daughter Yugozohime formally fostered to the Lion Clan for instruction. The Lion have been increasingly restive and Raigu hopes this gesture will pacify them. His expectation is that Yugozohime will receive a suitable education for a court lady, after which she will be married off advantageously. However, the Lion instead train and educate Yugozohime in the traditions of Bushido and the principles of Hantei supremacy, sowing the seeds of the Gozoku's doom.

Year 433

- Dragon Clan Champion Togashi Hikaru meets secretly with Yugozohime and her Lion hosts, promising Dragon support if she moves against the Gozoku. Although the princess does not realize it, Togashi Hikaru is actually Togashi himself, and he has foreseen the impending doom of the Gozoku Alliance. The promise of Dragon support galvanizes the Lion (who had previously been isolated in their opposition to the Gozoku) and they pledge their complete loyalty to Yugozohime.

Alternate Paths: Yugozohime Thwarted

There was of course nothing inevitable about Yugozohime's triumph over the Gozoku. If the conspiracy had recognized the threat she posed, she might have been intercepted before she could reach the coronation or even assassinated outright (while Gaijushiko or Raigu might have balked at the idea of assassinating a Hantei heir, Atsuki would not have hesitated). GMs running a campaign in which the PCs are opponents of the Gozoku can task them with trying to make sure Yugozohime reaches the coronation alive (and in time to issue her challenge), while PCs who support the Gozoku could face the equally challenging task of trying to delay or even kill her.

A timeline in which Yugozohime is killed is not automatically one in which the Gozoku triumph. The Lion and Dragon Clans have already decided to stand against the Gozoku and are unlikely to back down; in fact, the outright murder of an Imperial princess may be enough to turn them against the conspiracy once and for all. Likewise, if Yugozohime is unable to reach the coronation in time, she might well raise the banners of rebellion against her puppet older brother Soujiro, leading to a full-scale civil war between pro- and anti-Gozoku factions.

Year 435

- Emperor Hantei Kusada dies. His eldest son, Hantei Soujiro, returns from the Phoenix lands to assume the Emerald Throne. Hantei Yugozohime confronts him at his coronation, backed by a contingent of loyal retainers. She challenges Soujiro to a duel on the spot, accusing him of acting against the will of Heaven and the laws of Rokugan. Coming from a member of the Imperial line such allegations cannot be ignored, and since Soujiro is not yet the Emperor he cannot rely on Raigu to champion him. Soujiro faces Yugozohime and she kills him with a perfect strike. Her followers immediately take control of the throne room, seizing the Gozoku loyalists present and arresting Doji Raigu. Some accounts claim Raigu is executed as a traitor, although Crane tradition insists the Empress permitted him to commit seppuku.
- Shiba Gaijushiko, confronted by the abject failure of the conspiracy, surrenders and reveals the full scope of the Gozoku organization and bureaucracy to Yugozohime. He assists her in dismantling it; in return his life is spared. He arranges to save some of the Nasu family by enrolling them in the Shiba family as vassals.
- When orders arrive from the capital calling for the arrest of Bayushi Atsuki, his daughter Minoko refuses, leading to an internal split within the clan. Some support Minoko (who wishes to place Kusada's third son, Kentaro, on the throne) while others realize the Scorpion cannot prevail against the combined might of the Lion and Dragon and rally behind an old family rival of Atsuki, Bayushi Junzen. A shadowy struggle engulfs the clan as each faction tries to poison, knife, and garrote the other. The conflict ends when Minoko is killed in her private chambers. A few weeks later an elderly and ill Bayushi Atsuki is dragged to Yugozohime for judgment. He is quietly executed and Junzen becomes the new Clan Champion.
- Yugozohime ascends the throne as Hantei VII. She holds a new Emerald Tournament which is won by an anti-Gozoku Crane nobleman named Doji Usan. She also rescinds Hantei Fujiwa's proclamation that created ronin of the Gozoku's enemies. Among those restored is a middle-aged wave-woman named Mochiko who is actually the former Matsu Mochihime.

The Winter Court of 436

The Winter Court of Empress Yugozohime in the year 436, one year into her reign, is regarded by Imperial historians as one of the grandest Winter Courts ever held, as well as one of the longest (the winter that year was especially severe). The Court was held at Kyuden Ikoma and the Otomo proclaimed it a celebration of the Empress's rise to power; her Lion hosts spared no expense in showing her their loyalty and devotion. The new Crane Champion, Doji Kakumei, nearly bankrupted the Crane in preparation for the winter, outfitting his courtiers with magnificent garments and assembling the finest stockpile of gifts possible; the Crane swept into the Court determined to regain their political influence and reputation. By contrast, the Phoenix in attendance were a somber group, with over thirty using the opportunity to personally request permission from the Empress for seppuku. Most of these requests were granted.

By Imperial decree, every family daimyo and Clan Champion in the Empire was required to attend, with an exception granted solely for the Crab in respect for their duties. The intention here was obvious: the Empress used the Winter Court as a show of strength, impressing the power and restored vigor of the Hantei line on all in attendance. For the most part this campaign was quite successful and even those daimyo who had felt some sympathy for the Gozoku were swiftly cowed.

In addition, the Empress declared on the first day of the Court that she sought a samurai worthy of being her husband and Imperial Consort. Naturally her attention and affection was sought intensely throughout the winter, both in and out of court. Matchmakers from every clan offered their finest prospects, while poets, swordsmen, courtiers, and artists tried to impress Yugozohime in every imaginable fashion. Over one hundred competitions were held during the winter months, from poetry to sumai, with nearly every winner dedicating his victory to the Empress.

Ultimately, however, it was another incident which drove the Empress' decision. Midway through the winter, Emerald Champion Doji Usan challenged his former sensei Kakita Umaro, accusing him of being a Gozoku agent. The duel was held in the last week of court, and Usan prevailed, taking Umaro's head. Two days later the Empress announced that Usan would be her consort, and the noble Crane immediately resigned from his position as Emerald Champion, declaring he could not honorably fulfill both duties.

Other Notable Events During the Era

Although the Yasuki War and rise and fall of the Gozoku Alliance are by far the most important events during this time period, they are by no means the only ones. The following section lists other notable incidents which took place during the time of the Gozoku. Many of these incidents have been described in more detail in previous L5R 4th Edition supplements such as *Emerald Empire* and *The Great Clans*, but are briefly repeated here so GMs and players may see where they fall in the chronology of Rokugan's history.

Alternate Paths: The Gozoku as Secret Society

In the canonical timeline, when the Gozoku Alliance is overthrown all of the most powerful conspirators are quickly executed or forced to retire. The conspiracy is, for all intents and purposes, dead. However, it is possible that Bayushi Atsuki might have taken steps to ensure the Gozoku could persist even if it was publicly overthrown. Atsuki was a cunning man and a master conspirator, and could easily have created a secret infrastructure that would allow the Gozoku to persist in hiding and continue to influence Rokugani politics and society. Under this alternative, the Gozoku could have endured in small cells and covert groups for centuries, working to subtly influence politics and trade in the Empire to serve its own goals. Aside from hoping to eventually regain direct power, the conspiracy's main goal would be to reduce the power of the Emperor and distribute it more widely among other lords and officials.

In the twelfth century, Bayushi Atsuki returned to the Empire through Oblivion's Gate and set about trying to recreate the Gozoku. Such a plot could have been far more successful if a hidden Gozoku order had endured through the centuries, awaiting a suitable leader.

Year 401

- The Minor Clan of the Snake falls under the sway of a terrible malignant spirit known as a Shuten Doji. Soon after, the Phoenix Clan exterminates the entire Snake Clan in an incident known as the Five Nights of Shame. The Elemental Council offers no explanation for this seemingly unprovoked aggression other than the cryptic words, "Never again."
- Lion Clan Champion Akodo Mitsuyuki dies. He leaves no direct heir available, and after some debate the Lion pass the Clan Championship into the hands of Matsu Itagi, younger brother of Matsu Mochihime. Itagi is a bold and powerful warrior who already has a history of military success, but he is largely oblivious to political events in the Empire. The Gozoku finds his aggression quite frustrating but is unable to completely contain it.

Year 408

- In Matsu Itagi's most ambitious operation to date, a large Lion force moves to invade the Phoenix lands. A small Phoenix unit led by Shiba Kaigen sacrifices itself to stop the Lion army at Kiken Roka, the Treacherous Pass. In response, Shiba Gaijushiko brings the full power of the Gozoku to bear on Itagi, forcing him to largely halt further aggression within the Empire.

Year 412

- Matsu Itagi's boldness and ferocity lead him to a fatal mistake: he requests permission to enter the Shadowlands to personally close the Festering Pit of Fu Leng. The Emperor cannot refuse such a courageous request and the Gozoku, long since tired of this dangerous wild card, are happy to see him go. Itagi and his men are lost in the Shadowlands, and when the Lion threaten war the Crab Clan Champion, Hida Tadaka, personally rescues Itagi. Both Clan Champions die of their wounds, but the Crab and Lion Clans gain a newfound respect for each other and conflict between them ceases.

Year 429

- The self-titled lord of the Mantis Clan, Gusai, meets with Hantei Kusada to seek recognition of his clan. To prove his claim that steel is stronger than words, Gusai draws a hidden knife and holds it to the Emperor's throat. Kusada is enormously entertained by this rare moment of unscripted surprise, and rewards Gusai by officially naming him the Clan Champion of the Mantis and granting him the right to a family name. However, the Emperor then shows the power of words over steel by ordering Gusai executed. The Gozoku have little choice but to affirm Kusada's public actions, a rare instance in which he manages to wriggle free of their tight control.

The Clans and Factions in the Gozoku Era

The Gozoku's reign was a time of trial for many of the clans, even those not directly involved in the Alliance. Those on the outside struggled against the weight of Gozoku power, searching for ways to assert themselves, while those whose leaders belonged to the conspiracy had to deal with conflicted internal loyalties.

The Crab Clan

The Crab were largely distracted from the Gozoku's rise and fall by the First Yasuki War and its aftermath. Initially, Crab strategists and soldiers welcomed this first large-scale clash of clan armies, believing a clear victory would earn them the respect they deserved and so rarely received. In the nearly four centuries since the dawn of the Empire they had already developed a strong dislike of the Crane, and the war seemed a chance to prove themselves once and for all.

After years of bitter fighting, the clan's samurai watched their dream of military dominance collapse as the Yasuki War stumbled to its indecisive starved-out end. The Crab were dominant on the battlefield, where they frequently inflicted much heavier losses than they suffered, but the economic pressure of maintaining two fronts simultaneously (against the Shadowlands and the Crane) became unsustainable once the Crane were able to shut down their food supplies. Although they were furious at the war's disappointing conclusion, the Crab could do little but start rebuilding, giving thanks that at least they had gained the Yasuki family and most of its lands.

Much of the responsibility for restoring the Crab would fall on their new Yasuki family. The Yasuki went to work re-establishing and expanding their mercantile interests while conducting a covert economic war against the Crane, fighting to reclaim the extensive network of markets they had previously built together with the Daidoji. Not all Yasuki fully embraced their new Crab identity, of course, and some in their ranks still clung to old loyalties or tried to play both sides of the Crab-Crane mercantile conflict. Others joined the Gozoku, motivated by either their former ties to the Crane or by the Alliance's trade-friendly policies. The Crab and the Yasuki leadership spent decades rooting out these rogue elements and firmly establishing the family's new home and loyalty with the Crab Clan.

It was not until the negotiations and economic maneuvers at the conclusion of the Yasuki War that the Crab realized the Gozoku were now in control of the Imperial bureaucracy and indirectly of the Emperor's personal decisions. By then they were too politically and economically

weakened to take direct action. The only response they could make was to try whenever possible to make direct appeals to Emperor Hantei Kusada. The puppet Emperor remembered his father's favored clan and wished he could do more for them. Kusada was known to say in private that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps by marching to war on the Crab Clan's behalf, but in public the power of the Gozoku forced him to remain largely aloof.

As the era went on many in the Crab became increasingly angry that the "weakling" Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix Clans had so much power. Some in their ranks suggested the clan declare itself Emperor Kusada's loyal army and destroy the Emperor's "oppressors." However, they knew their duty to defend against the Shadowlands came first, and during the Yasuki War the Crab had been hard-pressed to fight the Crane and the Horde simultaneously. Constant debate raged in the upper echelons of Crab leadership as to whether the clan could risk another war in the Empire while still upholding its primary task. Particularly aggressive Crab leaders sometimes tried to force the situation by staging border raids against the Crane and Scorpion and occasionally even the Lion (although that ended after the famous incident involving Hida Tadaka and Matsu Itagi).

Ultimately the Crab never had the chance to march on behalf of the Emperor. Princess Yugozohime was sent to the Lion and Togashi Hikaru allied with them to bring down the Gozoku. The Dragon Champion left the Crab out of his plans, perhaps unwilling to include too many people in his secrets, or perhaps simply recognizing their war against Fu Leng's forces had to come first. Although some Crab were frustrated by the lost opportunity to wage war against the Gozoku, all of them were delighted with the conspiracy's fall and eagerly pledged their loyalty to the new Empress Yugozohime.

The Crane Clan

The Crane entered the Gozoku period in a position of weakness. Emperor Hantei Fujiwa had baited and maneuvered Doji Mizobu effortlessly, and the Crane's political power had faltered. For most Crane the disastrous Yasuki War was the final capstone on years of poor leadership and public embarrassment. In retrospect, the collapse of negotiations into open fighting and the subsequent Yasuki defection were inevitable when the temperamental Mizobu was in charge. Although the war did not end in complete defeat, the loss of the Yasuki family inflicted serious long-term damage on the Crane Clan's economic situation, and its effects rippled outward for years afterward. Where once the Crane had been the almost-unquestioned leaders of Rokugan's economy, they now faced skilled competition in every sector.

Alternate Path: The Crab Triumphant

Although the historical Crab Clan debated too long and ultimately failed to act against the Gozoku, there is no reason why a creative GM cannot explore what could have happened if things went differently. Despite the heavy losses and economic privation of the Yasuki War, the Crab in the late Gozoku era were still one of the Empire's strongest military forces, exceeded only by the Lion Clan. If the Crab had marched against the Gozoku they could well have persuaded the Lion to ally with them or at least to stand aside, so long as they made it clear they were acting in defense of the Emperor. If Togashi Hikaru also joined in support of the Crab, such a scenario might well end with the Crab Clan crushing the Gozoku-allied clans and emerging as the dominant power of Rokugan, backed by a grateful Emperor Kusada.

On the other hand, the Lion Clan remained loyal to the Emperor even when he was reduced to a puppet. What if the Gozoku forced the Emperor to declare the Crab as traitors and order the Lion to fight against them? This scenario might lead to an earlier version of the Clan War, with the Crab and Lion engaging in an all-out war that would have made the earlier Yasuki War look tame by comparison. Given the stakes involved, all of the other clans would quickly have been drawn in and the entirety of Rokugan would have become a battlefield. Any skilled GM should be able to construct a suitably epic and apocalyptic campaign from such an alternate timeline.

The Crane military also suffered heavily. Their armies were built around small units of scouts, skirmishers, and duelists, designed to wage limited border wars and win small battles while courtiers resolved the conflict politically. They had never prepared for an all-out war lasting over a decade, and in order to match the Crab strength and numbers year after year the Crane had to send many promising young samurai to their deaths long before they were ready. Many of these were young men (and occasionally women) who might otherwise have made great contributions to the arts, politics, or other endeavors. The Crane Clan felt the impact of these losses for over a generation, and many survivors of the war referred to it as "the thresher." The bitter experience of this conflict doubtless contributed to the clan's later policy of waging pragmatic defensive warfare and relying even more heavily on political and (especially) economic pressures to defeat its enemies.

Doji Raigu's ascendency to the post of Clan Champion seemed to many samurai to herald the clan's recovery. The Crane nobility desperately wanted an honorable way to put an end to Emperor Fujiwa's insults, and they readily accepted Raigu's promise that the Gozoku could give them what they sought. The new Champion believed the Gozoku could limit the Emperor's power without insulting him or offending against the Celestial Order; ultimately, Raigu thought, the Hantei would see the advantages of the new arrangement for his people and himself. Raigu's journal contained the notation, "Nothing we are doing is against the Emperor. It is for good government, and he will recognize that in time."

The Crane soon found reason to have faith in Raigu's vision. Once Hantei Fujiwa bowed to the Gozoku, the Crane Clan was able to use Imperial power and swiftly rebuild its wealth and commercial power, while raising its political power to previously unseen heights. The clan even made an abortive effort to win back the Yasuki by political means.

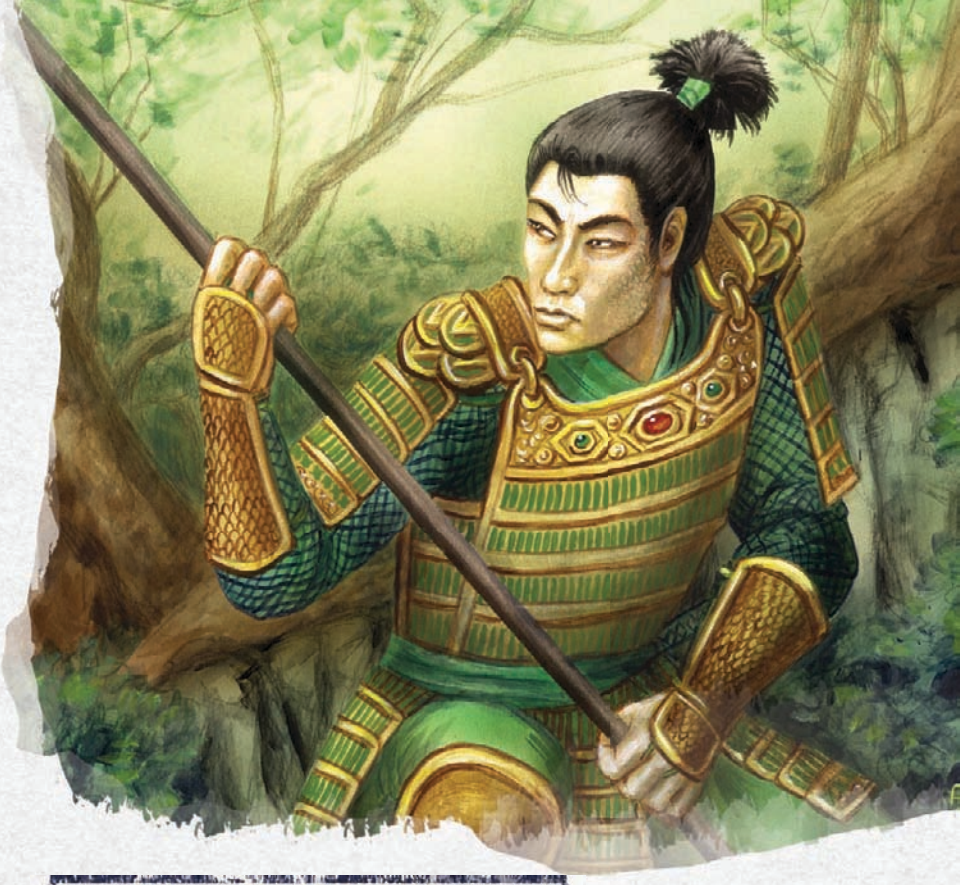
Maintaining political momentum later in the Gozoku's reign proved more difficult. Hantei Kusada struggled against the limits the Gozoku placed on him almost from the day he took the throne. It fell to the Crane to placate the Emperor and convince him of the benefits of his new, reduced role. The other leaders of the Gozoku would have preferred to simply isolate Kusada and run the Empire without him, but Raigu was determined to attain an honorable compromise between the Gozoku and the Throne, and Crane courtiers spent decades trying to uphold his dream. Over time, the increasing harshness of Gozoku rule (and especially the mass execution of monks in the year 429) weakened the commitment of the clan to Raigu's path. Many Crane concluded it was impossible to put a good face on the Gozoku's rule and these disaffected samurai often used their skills against the Gozoku, intensifying the political clashes in the Empire's courts. Of course, plenty of Crane remained true believers in the conspiracy, Raigu himself foremost among them.

The final destruction of the Gozoku could very easily have devastated the Crane as well. Raigu was captured by Yugozohime's loyalists, but some accounts claim he managed to smuggle messages to his clan calling for their army to take the field and seat Hantei Harada on the Emerald Throne. Allegedly his son and heir Doji Kakumei refused the order and re-affirmed Crane loyalty to the Throne—a vital step to preserving the clan's position, since a great many Crane were connected with the conspiracy to a greater or lesser extent. Many of these nobles later committed seppuku or retired to monasteries in order to appease the new Empress Yugozohime and spare the clan from her wrath. Fortunately for the Crane, the Empress ended up marrying one of their own—Doji Usan, an honorable swordsman who won the new Empress' first Tournament of the Emerald Champion.

The Dragon Clan

For most of the Gozoku era, the Dragon Clan seemed to follow its traditional policy of holding itself aloof from the rest of the Empire. This was a deceptive appearance, however. In truth, Lord Togashi did not in any way approve of the Gozoku's plans for his brother's descendants and for the Empire he and his siblings had built. The Dragon Kami was not one to act precipitately, and he foresaw the conspiracy would eventually sow the seeds of its own demise. He was content to wait until the proper moment to strike against the Gozoku.

While Togashi waited, his tattooed monks visited the rest of the Empire, speaking of the proper order of the Celestial Heavens and the glory of the Emperor. The Ise Zumi had been seldom seen in the Empire before this time and they drew attention wherever they went; they often took direct action to suppress criminals or punish corrupt officials, earning the respect and admiration of the heimin. The Gozoku saw them as a serious threat but found it difficult to oppose them directly.



Nor was the rest of the clan wholly idle. Individual Mirumoto duelists sometimes took action, seeking out challenges with important figures in the Gozoku, occasionally even guided by cryptic messages from Togashi himself. The Dragon Clan's limited number of diplomats also stood against the Gozoku's manipulations in the courts.

The Gozoku did not ignore this subtle opposition from the Dragon, and they were deeply suspicious of anything they could not control. The conspiracy made repeated attempts to recruit Dragon samurai and to infiltrate the clan's mountain fortresses. Togashi and his agents almost invariably rooted out such disloyal elements, further inflaming the Gozoku's concerns and leading them to try even harder. In the year 419 a group of Gozoku agents were tasked specifically to learn how the Dragon so consistently detected the conspiracy's infiltrators. None of them learned of Togashi's true nature, although through elaborate disguises and subtle magic several of them did get close to the secret. Bayushi Atsuki believed his spies even spoke with the Dragon Clan Champion himself, but they seemed different upon their return and he did not trust their reports.

Togashi foresaw that Yugozohime would be the lever by which the Gozoku could be toppled, and his diplomats played a major (if subtle) role in arranging for her to be fostered to the Lion. Although some in the clan thought Yugozohime should be trained by the Dragon, Togashi saw the Lion were the key to breaking the Gozoku's power; fostering her to them would immediately win her their support, and between them and the Dragon she would be able to face the Gozoku on any battlefield. In addition, he had no wish to get the Dragon Clan deeply involved in the Empire's political affairs, which would inevitably happen if the new Empress was closely associated with his clan.

The Lion Clan

Hantei Fujiwa was almost as much of a problem for the Lion Clan as he was for the Crane. Fujiwa viewed the Crab as serving a vital purpose, but sneered at the Lion as a clan "good only for posturing." Lion Clan Champion Akodo Mitsuyuki, a man of honor and serenity, accepted the Emperor's insults without complaint and directed his clan to do likewise. His samurai seethed but obeyed, as Lion always did.

Doubtless this poisoned relationship contributed to Fujiwa's later submission to the Gozoku kidnapping of his heir in the year 391. Had the Lion known of the kidnapping they would have been appalled and taken military action, but Fujiwa believed past relations meant he could not trust the Lion any more than the Crane or Scorpion, and he refused to seek their aid.

Of course, after Fujiwa proclaimed hundreds of samurai ronin, including the Matsu daimyo, it was clear even to the Lion that the Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix had gained inordinate political influence over the Son of Heaven. Many Lion nobles wanted to take the field of battle and assert their clan's influence in the traditional manner. Mitsuyuki,

Alternate Path: The Dragon Empress

Had Hantei Yugozohime gone to the Dragon she could have turned out a very different ruler. A mysterious, mystical Empress who spoke in cryptic riddles would not have easily won the loyalty of the Lion or the Crab. Although they would likely still have supported her long enough to defeat the hated Crane and Scorpion, it is likely they would have quickly soured on her thereafter. The canonical Yugozohime quickly rebuilt the Imperial line's dignity and authority, something especially important in light of the gaijin contact which took place a few years later (see the next chapter, The Era of White Stag, for more details of her later reign). A Dragon-trained Yugozohime would have a much more difficult time of it, both in the short term and also later when the gaijin appeared.

In the year 435, the Dragon Clan brought its full strength to bear for the first time since the dawn of the Empire. The Mirumoto army emerged from the mountains, backed by hundreds of Agasha shugenja and tattooed men, showing its willingness to fight alongside the Lion armies against the clans who backed the Gozoku. This formidable display (supplemented in many cases by heimin who had been won over by the Ise Zumi in the preceding years) played a key role in convincing the Crane and Scorpion leadership to forsake their Gozoku lords and support the new Empress. Had they refused, the Dragon would have waged war without hesitation.

however, was wary of the political conflict that would inevitably follow any war, and over his vassals' objections he commanded a policy of caution and restraint. When the Gozoku conspiracy consolidated its power at the end of the fourth century one of its highest priorities was to keep the Lion in hand. To that end they made sure the new Emperor Kusada constantly praised the Lion and appealed to their pride, while the Gozoku made sure their new roads did not link to the Lion strongholds.

Mitsuyuki's death in 401 changed the Lion Clan's posture almost immediately. He had no direct heir and the Clan Championship passed to Matsu Itagi, lord of the Matsu family, a formidable and aggressive warrior. Major and minor daimyo began mobilizing even before Itagi formally assumed the Championship, and several saluted their new leader by announcing skirmishes underway at that very moment. Itagi responded by putting an end to his induction ceremony and riding out to join the fighting. His reputation only grew thereafter. Campfire stories claimed he fought in every battle, charging the enemy personally and fearlessly, and he became the best-loved Lion Champion since Akodo himself.

For the next 15 years the Lion went on a rampage, attacking their neighbors ever summer. However, for all their battlefield glory the clan made no meaningful political gains. Itagi was more interested in proving the clan's superiority in battle than in making coherent plans for politically capitalizing on his victories, and the combined efforts of the Gozoku effectively stymied any long-term Lion ambitions. Bayushi Atsuki made it a point to encourage the growth of crime within Lion lands, hoping to distract them and drain their resources; he succeeded primarily in making the Lion take what they needed from their neighbors. Neighboring clans shuddered when the snow melted each year, knowing the Lion would soon be coming for blood and fame. The main consolation for the Gozoku was that the Lion cheerfully attacked the Crab and Dragon just as often as the Crane, Scorpion, or Phoenix. Eventually Shiba Gaijushiko took political action to protect his own Phoenix Clan from Itagi's rampages, but the other clans had no such recourse.

Itagi's career of warfare came to an end when he embarked on a foolish quest into the Shadowlands in the year 412. Thankfully, Hida Tadaka's heroic sacrifice stopped the Lion from blaming Itagi's death on the Crab and in fact led to greatly improved relations between the two clans. After Itagi's death the Akodo reclaimed the rule of the clan and followed a somewhat less aggressive policy, retasking some of the clan's soldiers to suppress crime and banditry within the Lion borders.

By this time the Lion leadership fully recognized what the Gozoku were, but the puppet Emperor Kusada's refusal to publicly condemn the conspiracy tied their hands. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last, that the Lion would feel themselves trapped by their unflinching loyalty to Imperial authority. Hope finally arrived in the year 432 when the aging Emperor Kusada's daughter Yugozohime was fostered to the Lion Clan. Even before Togashi Hikaru approached them, the Lion were already eagerly teaching Yugozohime about the traditions, honor, and glory of the Hantei Dynasty. When she finally stepped forward to lay claim to the Emerald Throne, an eager and loyal Lion Clan stood beside her. Her victory left every Lion samurai expecting further glories with "our Empress" in command.

The Phoenix Clan

While the Scorpion and Crane dominated the Gozoku Alliance at the highest levels, Phoenix samurai were the most likely to serve as its often unwitting public face. Shiba Gaijushiko needed skilled and reliable people to carry out his vision of peace and unity. He often turned to his own clan to find them, putting loyal Shiba yojimbo and highly-trained Asako scholars at the forefront of Imperial life. By the year 397 it was routine to see a Shiba in charge of a group of Emerald Magistrates or an Asako at the head of a bureaucratic department.

The Asako rose in stature with particular speed. During the period of Gozoku dominance even those Asako with no knowledge of or leaning toward the Gozoku were often called on to fill important positions. Gaijushiko firmly believed decisions were best made by compiling information, reviewing past experience, and then choosing the best course. Asako scholarship was invaluable to him, and he rewarded the family liberally. Its members were accustomed to being eclipsed by the Isawa, but now routinely received invitations to the greatest courts in the Empire.

The Asako's rise accompanied a surprising decline in the Isawa family's political fortunes. Many Isawa were displeased with Gaijushiko's overly pragmatic attitude toward

the ways of the spirits—he was known to refer to adepts of air as "useful messengers" and to regard earth shugenja as "effective construction workers." The Master of Earth Isawa Ryote commented wryly that Gaijushiko's attitude would not be so troubling "were he not so very respectful when he says it." Since the Isawa generally held themselves aloof from politics most of the time, it is not surprising that their overall influence declined, although their rule of the Phoenix Clan itself remained undisputed. They were also reluctant to undermine the political successes of the Shiba and Asako, which greatly improved the fortunes of the Phoenix Clan as a whole.

As the era went on the Shiba family grew deeply torn. Imperial posts were there for the taking, and those who accepted vaulted into prominence. Young Shiba bushi received officer positions in the Imperial Legions, appointments as magistrates in major towns and cities, and special assignments directing the Imperial Cartographers or the Gozoku's many work crews. But even as some were finding their destiny beyond the Phoenix lands, other Shiba felt the call of home and traditional duties. The Lion Clan frequently attacked their borders, especially during the reign of Matsu Itagi. For the first time since Shiba knelt to Isawa there were serious concerns about whether the family could properly fulfill its duty to protect the Isawa shugenja. In the year 408 one of their number, Shiba Kaigen, sacrificed himself and his men to hold off a Lion attack through the Treacherous Pass; his heroism was a source of pride for the Shiba, but also of guilt. Those who had gone forth to seek glory elsewhere in Rokugan began to wonder if they had betrayed their responsibilities for the sake of ambition. Gaijushiko tried to lessen their concerns by using the Gozoku's political power to restrain the Lion, but the damage to family unity had already been done.

The fine balance the Shiba rested on tipped in the year 429 when the Gozoku turned against the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Gaijushiko himself was deeply shaken by the incident and many of his Shiba followers decided the time had come to return home. By the time the Gozoku fell in the year 435 there was almost no significant Shiba presence within its ranks.

The Asako remained more strongly committed to the Gozoku government, and when Yugozohime took power the family found itself exposed and facing an inevitable fall into disgrace and obscurity. Although Gaijushiko's own recantation did much to allay the worst effects, many Asako still committed seppuku to cleanse the shame of their actions from the clan. It would be many generations before their family attained any renewed prominence within the Empire.

The Scorpion Clan

Gozoku rule divided the clan of Loyalty like almost no other event in its history. The insular Scorpion were accustomed to following their Champion wherever he or she led, and when Atsuki developed the idea for the Gozoku Alliance his vassals followed in his wake without questioning what he was doing or why. His samurai were well accustomed to carrying out strange orders and to knowing only their own small part in a larger plan. Even very troubling instructions, like kidnapping the Emperor's son, were obeyed without question.

Of course, Scorpion pride themselves on learning the secrets of others, and Atsuki knew he could not rely on blind obedience to maintain his clan's support forever. Starting in the year 391 he began inducting his most trusted samurai into the full nature of the Gozoku Alliance. Those he considered untrustworthy, whether for personal or political reasons, were shunted off to unimportant positions or remote posts on the outskirts of Scorpion lands. Some of these samurai, referred to in Scorpion circles as "the exiled," spent decades in obscurity. Others managed to restore their prestige, usually by demonstrating loyalty to the Gozoku.

Most notable among the exiled was Atsuki's closest cousin, Bayushi Junzen. Atsuki and Junzen clashed for years over many aspects of Scorpion policy. When Junzen's information network brought him close to the truth about the Gozoku's long-term plans, Atsuki created false records showing Junzen was of Yogo descent and carried their curse. Junzen's fortunes fell overnight, and he spent years at a minor outpost on the Scorpion-Crab border.

For most of the Gozoku Alliance's history, a majority of the Scorpion willingly did the conspiracy's work. Even those who did not fully embrace the Gozoku's ideas rec-

Where Are the Unicorn?

At the time of the Gozoku Alliance, the Unicorn Clan was still traveling through the gaijin lands far outside of Rokugan. Their return lay almost four centuries hence. Anyone with news of their travels and adventures would have been welcome in every court of the Empire, of course, provided they could prove their authenticity.

ognized it as a source of power for the Scorpion and were eager to maximize their clan's share of the conspiracy's gains. Scorpion magistrates were also important to the Gozoku, especially after the year 406 when criminals were first inducted into the group's ranks. The Scorpion already had many contacts with questionable elements of society and were far more comfortable with the seedy side of Rokugan than the Crane or Phoenix, so it was typically Scorpion magistrates who managed Gozoku-affiliated crime organizations (and rooted out rival unsanctioned criminals). One of these magistrates later characterized the work as "dangerous to a samurai's health, and far more to his morals." In fact, corruption among the Scorpion magistrates became so endemic that new magistrates had to be created to monitor and supervise the existing ones.

Unfortunately for the Scorpion as a whole, Atsuki and his daughter Minoko worked poorly with Doji Raigu, whose idealistic vision of the Gozoku's goals diverged considerably from Atsuki's pragmatic pursuit of power. By the year 429 their respective factions within the Gozoku were doing more harm to each other than to the conspiracy's enemies. Raigu sometimes tried to rehabilitate the Gozoku's image (and salve Crane pride) by publicly revealing corrupt Scorpion within the organization. In doing so he often upset delicate plans and exposed those Scorpion to deadly danger. The Scorpion Clan responded by politically undermining the Crane at every opportunity.

When Princess Yugozohime defeated her brother for the Throne, many Scorpion immediately recognized it as the death-knell of the Gozoku and wondered if Atsuki and his daughter had led the entire clan to doom. Exiles quickly found their way back into the halls of power, and resistance crystallized behind Bayushi Junzen. A brief but ugly civil war followed, entirely out of sight of the rest of the Empire. Most Rokugani historians agree Yugozohime was able to crush the Gozoku so thoroughly in part because the Scorpion seemed oddly preoccupied and inactive in the months after her ascension to the Throne; in truth, Bayushi Minoko was fighting desperately to bring her clan back into line. Ultimately she failed, and died. Bayushi Junzen took over the Championship with the support of the bulk of the clan. Although he was not popular with the remaining Gozoku sympathizers, they considered it wise to support him publicly and thereby avoid the mass executions they might otherwise face.

The Minor Clans

Relatively few Minor Clans had come into existence at the beginning of the Gozoku period. The Bat, Boar, Dragonfly, Falcon, Hare, Monkey, Oriole, Ox, and Tortoise Clans all lay in the future, in some cases centuries hence.

The Snake Clan did exist, but was annihilated in the Five Nights of Shame in the year 402. The Badger Clan guarded the Empire's northern border as it had already done for many generations, while the Centipede worshipped the sun in their small valley within the Seikitsu Mountains. The Fox Clan, cousins of the absent Ki-Rin, dwelled quietly in the Kitsune Mori while the Mantis grew slowly wealthier and more powerful in their distant home on the Islands of Spice and Silk.

Gozoku rule proved a difficult time for most of the Minor Clans. The conspiracy represented the greatest collection of political power Rokugan had seen since the rule of the first Hantei, and the Minor Clans had no real hope of competing or even gaining much notice. Lacking influence, they could only sit by and endure when the Gozoku built roads through their lands or criminal gangs took root on their borders.

Nevertheless, one new Minor Clan did come into existence during this era. The Sparrow Clan was created in 400, an accomplishment born unexpectedly from Doji Suzume's loose tongue. As a clan ostensibly founded to pursue an enlightened ideal, the Sparrow were held up as an example by both sides in the struggle surrounding the Emperor: the Gozoku took credit for helping create them, while the Lion and Crab argued the Sparrow were what any samurai could become if he or she gave up the lure of ambition and politics. The Sparrow themselves were too busy figuring out how to grow food in the sparse and poor-quality lands they had been given to discuss the higher implications of their existence. However, they did appreciate the gifts they sometimes received from admirers. Those who looked beyond the usual routines of etiquette and sent items of genuine practical value earned the Sparrow Clan's friendship for life.

This was also an important era for the Mantis, a time in which they achieved more than in almost any other era prior to the Clan War 700 years later. The Mantis lord called Gusai won the clan official recognition and a family name, albeit at the cost of his life. This accomplishment brought the oft-ignored Mantis new legitimacy and they began sending diplomats throughout the Empire, building political networks and personal connections. Mantis merchants always followed close behind, building even stronger trade routes.

The Imperial Families

The Imperial Families dealt with the Emperor daily during the reign of the Gozoku. It is no surprise that their opinions of him and his proper status reflected the divisions in the Empire as a whole.

In this era the Otomo family had not yet adopted its later role as the Emperor's personal agents of division and manipulation, protecting the Hantei line's dominance. (In fact, it was Yugozohime who appointed them that task after she became Empress, as well as placing them in control of the large Imperial bureaucracy which had developed during the Gozoku era.) Rather, during this time the Otomo were essentially just the scions of later-born Hantei children removed from the direct line of descent so as to avoid succession conflicts. As a rule they received honorable sinecures but had no real political influence. Among themselves the Otomo joked they could expect "a bowl of rice and a bow" each day. This was an exaggeration, but it expressed their dissatisfaction with their weak and largely meaningless position.

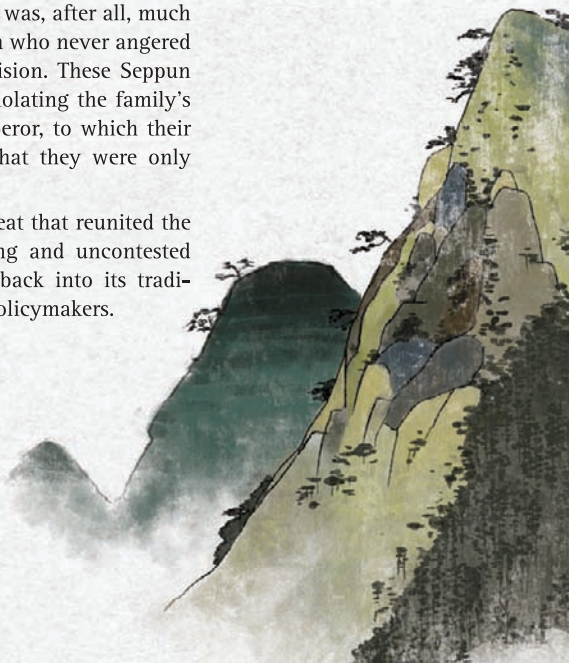
It was easy for the Gozoku to win over many of the Otomo through simple flattery. Renovating Kyuden Otomo, improving daily living arrangements for family members, and elevating Otomo Tohojatsu to the regency all served to convince much of the family that the Gozoku had their best interests at heart. Only a few were suspicious, recognizing the Gozoku had no more need for them than the Hantei Emperors did. Foremost among these were Otomo Muhaki, the younger brother of Emperor Kusada, and Otomo Hokusai, the family daimyo's son. (Hokusai would go on to take control of the family after Yugozohime was named Empress, while Muhaki would serve as Imperial Regent when Yugozuhime died at the hands of gaijin a decade later.) This small group of dissidents spent the last decade of Gozoku rule trying to split the conspiracy, although they sometimes disagreed on whether their goal was to restore Hantei power or to make room in the power structure for themselves.

The Miya, by contrast, were generally opposed to the Gozoku, and while they were not a politically powerful family they willingly threw their support behind anyone opposing the conspiracy. Due to their closer connections with the common people of Rokugan, the Miya saw firsthand how the Gozoku Alliance's rule brought crime and religious dissatisfaction with it. They often expressed appreciation for the Gozoku's efforts to promote prosperity and raise the standard of living, but rejected the corruption and political maneuvering that accompanied those projects, arguing compassion did not involve personal benefit. Of course, arguably the higher-ranking members of the Miya were protecting their own family's position when they attacked the Gozoku. A better road network would mean easier communication, threatening the traditional Miya role as the only reliable couriers for Imperial missives.

The Seppun were deeply divided. Those close to Emperor Fujiwa and later Emperor Kusada often shared their monarch's personal frustrations. A large number of Seppun Guardsmen had ridden with Fujiwa when he went to fight the monsters of the Shadowlands, and they were infuriated by the bonds which later constrained this most courageous Emperor. Their anger grew when it became clear that Kusada would not be permitted to attain the same glory as his father, and they passed their hatred on to the next generation. Guardsmen assigned to Kusada regularly volunteered their services to carry out his often rather amateurish efforts to subvert the Gozoku's control, and Princess Yugozohime's personal yojimbo gladly assisted in her efforts to reclaim Imperial power.

Others in the family, however, saw the diminution of the Emperor's role as a positive change. It was, after all, much easier to protect a figurehead monarch who never angered anyone by making an important decision. These Seppun saw their more activist brethren as violating the family's sworn purpose of protecting the Emperor, to which their opponents returned the accusation that they were only trying to make their own lives easier.

Ultimately, it was the Gozoku's defeat that reunited the Seppun. Empress Yugozohime's strong and uncontested leadership pushed the entire family back into its traditional role as protectors rather than policymakers.



The Shadowlands

In the year 375, the Shadowlands launched a major attack on the Crab lands which came close to breaching their defenses. The intervention of Emperor Hantei Fujiwa and the Imperial Legions turned the tide and inflicted a shattering defeat on the forces of Fu Leng. Thereafter the Shadowlands were relatively quiescent—it would be many generations before they unleashed another major assault against the Empire. The usual constant border raids and limited attacks continued to take place, of course, and containing these required significant ongoing effort by the Crab Clan. Nevertheless, the weaker state of the Shadowlands allowed the Crab to send a substantial portion of their forces to fight the Crane during the Yasuki War. Despite the Crab losses in that war they were still strong enough in the later Gozoku years to threaten war against both the Crane and the Scorpion, and in Empress Yugozohime's reign they would even send an expeditionary force north to wage war on the Dragon.

Alternate Paths: Tsukuro and Shadowlands Aggression

Although the Shadowlands was largely quiet after its defeat by Hantei Fujiwa at the end of the fourth century, this need not have remained the case. At some point during the fifth century, the Crane general Daidoji Tsukuro fell to the Taint and became one of the Lost, emerging as a significant leader in the Shadowlands. Exactly when this happened is uncertain, since the Crane went out of their way to delete Tsukuro from their records, and in any case he never emerged as a major Shadowlands leader in the manner of later villains such as Moto Tsume and Daigotsu.

What if that had gone differently? What if Tsukuro had managed to forge a large Shadowlands army? Worse yet, what if a new Oni Lord or similar being had emerged to command the loyalty of the Horde? The Empire during the Gozoku era largely ignored the Shadowlands, so the burden of defense would have fallen entirely on the Crab. This might have led to an earlier version of the Battle of the Cresting Wave, or it could have resulted in a full-scale Shadowlands invasion of Rokugan, one which the Gozoku government would have been ill-prepared to resist.

Roleplaying the First Reign of the Gozoku: Themes In Play

The original Gozoku era was a very unusual time in Rokugan's history, and games set during it can have a unique feel. It is a lengthy period—over half a century in total—and there are plenty of other events happening which have no direct connection to the conspiracy. However, by working certain themes into a campaign the GM can provide a sense of the time without ever mentioning Doji Raigu, Bayushi Atsuki, or the execution of Brotherhood monks.

The foremost theme of the era is corruption and redemption. During the Gozoku Alliance's reign Rokugan drifts away from its proper course, slowly at first and then with increasing speed as time goes on. In 375, the Empire is united and strong, exemplified by its powerful warrior-Emperor. Fifteen years later that same emperor is a shadow of his former self and two Great Clans are waging all-out war. Fifteen years after that there is an Emperor in name only, the Lion Clan is relentlessly attacking its neighbors, the Crab and Crane have beaten each other into exhaustion, and Rokugan is directly ruled by the Gozoku conspirators and their Nasu puppet family.

Corruption at the top of the Empire gives rise to corruption on the local level as well. Crime becomes a normal part of life. Corrupt officials take bribes and abuse their power. And in a more spiritual example, the Snake Clan succumbs to the very maho powers it was formed to destroy.

In the end, however, the era also sees these moral failings redeemed. The Empire reunites under Hantei Yugozohime and even Shiba Gaijushiko repents, dismantling

the very structure he created. The Scorpion Clan purges Atsuki's followers and reclaims its proper place as a defender of the Hantei dynasty. Crime and corruption are stamped back down. The Snake are destroyed by the Phoenix.

When planning a Gozoku-era game, the GM should give some thought to how this larger cycle of corruption and redemption impacts it. Rokugani in this time are no more evil or venal than those in any other period, but they are trying to find the right path in an era when the established Celestial Order is under attack. Moral failures and recoveries, great and small, help convey the sense of such times.

The other major theme permeating this era is the importance of moral fortitude and its ability to trump elaborate plans and schemes. Major issues in this era are often solved not with brilliant strategies but with heroic action, sometimes even heroic execution of genuinely bad ideas. For example, Hida Tadaka's lone search for Matsu Itagi in the Shadowlands was enormously risky, putting the leader of an entire clan into danger. It was entirely possible he would die before he found Itagi, leaving the Crab leaderless with the angry Lion Clan on their doorstep. However, Tadaka's courage and boldness carried the day. The stirring image of the Crab and Lion Champions helping each other to safety brought peace between their clans.

One might similarly argue the very plan to unseat the Gozoku was unwise at best. The anti-Gozoku forces gambled everything on Hantei Yugozohime and a single sword stroke. If she had lost the duel to her brother, the Gozoku would have had their puppet Emperor and would have known exactly who their enemies were. The Dragon, in particular, would have shown their hand for nothing, opening themselves to punitive responses. But at the same time, the very audacity of putting everything on Yugozohime's shoulders made the gambit all the more effective. Her victory was as dramatic as could be imagined, a stunning and glorious moment that told the entire Empire the Gozoku were finished. Word of the duel shattered Gozoku loyalty as fast as it could spread. A more cautious plan might have succeeded in the end, but never so quickly and thoroughly.

This theme of victory through moral strength can be very effective in a heroic samurai campaign, especially one employing the Cinematic style described on page 317 of the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook. It encourages bravery, over-the-top heroics, and big risks for big wins. Needless to say, not all of these risks should pay off (and sheer foolhardiness should still get PCs killed); Hida Tadaka had a lifetime's experience behind him when he walked into the Shadowlands, and the Lion made sure to train Hantei Yugozohime thoroughly before sending her to her fateful duel. However, if the players are willing to run those sorts of informed but courageous risks, the GM should be willing to potentially reward them just as Yugozohime was rewarded.

At its broadest the Gozoku era is a story about right and wrong. Those who keep to high moral standards ultimate-

Adventure Seed: A Twist on the Loaf of Bread

Challenge: The PCs learn a city guard, previously known to be an honorable samurai, has gone rogue and is extorting wealth from local merchants.

Focus: The guard is stealing to eat. He overheard a conversation revealing his daimyo has illegally opened diplomatic relations with barbarians beyond the Empire's northern border. The daimyo has cut him off from all support, but has refused to name him ronin in order to avoid drawing attention to himself.

Strike: The guard is in fact guilty of theft, but passing judgment on him will not solve the larger problem of the daimyo's illegal actions. Unfortunately, the only person who knows the full truth is the guard, and his testimony by itself will not be nearly sufficient to convict a provincial lord. He did, however, have a good reputation before his recent missteps. If the PCs restore his honor and repute, his name will open doors to more influential samurai who may be able to help bring down the corrupt daimyo.

ly prevail, though perhaps only posthumously. Evil is punished, often in dramatic fashion. Redemption is possible for those willing to walk a long road and make sacrifices.

A Gozoku-Centered Campaign

The Gozoku are the central focus of this era, of course, and most campaigns set in this part of the Empire's history will focus on them to at least some degree. Conspiracies always make good antagonists and can present interesting choices for the players. However, the GM should give some thought to what role the Gozoku will play in the campaign.

Fighting Against the Gozoku

One key to making the Gozoku into interesting antagonists is to remember they are not just "Kolat-lite." They work in a completely different way from Rokugan's other great conspiracy. The Gozoku have a public face as a political alliance. Top members are widely known to be the Alliance's leaders. The Gozoku do not have to hide themselves—indeed they are happy to be seen. (They do, of course, try to hide the full extant of their power and some of their more ruthless tactics and methods.)

Part of the reason why the Gozoku work so openly is that many of the Alliance's members have no skeletons in their closet. Being a member of the Gozoku generally means nothing more than having a particular political allegiance. The average Gozoku sympathizer thinks of himself or herself as honorable. Even those who know and support the long-term goal of reducing the Emperor to a permanent figurehead view themselves as proper samurai with some unusual but wise ideas. Scorpion Gozoku, accustomed to putting clan loyalties first, do not need to bend even that far.

In a related point, most Gozoku are not fanatics. Members who believe in the conspiracy's aims do so because someone convinced them of that position, not because of indoctrination or brainwashing. The Gozoku has no Kolat-style "sleepers," no secret legions of spies and assassins. To the contrary, the conspiracy is a hotbed of ideological debate and its members disagree about the group's purpose and meaning. Effective arguments or traumatic moments can sway them against the conspiracy as a whole, as evinced by the eventual disaffection of Gaijushiko and of many Crane and Scorpion.

None of this is to say the Gozoku are not dangerous. To the contrary, they are fearsome enemies, controlling the Imperial bureaucracy and the resources of three Great Clans. However, they are accustomed to dealing with their opponents with the conventional methods of Rokugani politics. Shuffling someone off to the Empire's hinterlands? Shaming a samurai and destroying his or her career? Maneuvering an enemy into a duel with a Kenshinzen? All perfectly acceptable. Poison and knives in the dark? These are much less likely. Even the Scorpion Clan's internal clashes do not turn lethal until the final days of the conspiracy.

The Gozoku's relatively open membership and its adherence to Rokugani public mores and traditions allows the GM to work the conspiracy into a campaign for samurai of any Rank and capability. Low-Ranking characters can encounter one of the conspiracy's honorable tertiary members, someone who can introduce the PCs to the existence of the Gozoku and perhaps to some of its ideas without immediately confronting the PCs with an overwhelming threat. This keeps the challenge manageable while hinting at future conflicts at higher levels.

The widespread and flexible nature of the Gozoku means it can be used in a wide range of plots. Almost any of the "36 Plot Types" discussed in the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook's *Book of Void* can employ a Gozoku conspirator in one or more of the vital roles. A loved one who must be sacrificed for a cause may turn out to be a Gozoku member, or the conspirator may be the favorite son in a tale of family rivalry. Showing the PCs a sympathetic Gozoku character lays the groundwork for later stories which bring out more of the conspiracy's complexity.

More experienced characters can confront the conspiracy more directly. Such PCs are still nowhere near the equal of the Gozoku leaders and the resources they command, but fighting the Gozoku does not have to mean storming Kyuden Bayushi. Like any organization the conspiracy has many lesser figures who command some power in their own right. Moderately experienced characters are well-suited to confront these sorts of opponents.

One challenge the GM will face in planning these stories is how to give a sense of the larger Gozoku Alliance's presence without simply overwhelming the characters. There are many ways to deal with this problem, but a reliable solution is to give the conspiracy only a limited presence within the specific story—a few reinforcements, perhaps, or a rationed amount of political help. The Gozoku will only go so far for its lesser agents, and if the PCs can find their way past such obstacles and defeat their opponent, the conspiracy will cut him or her loose.

Characters at high Insight Ranks are likely becoming important in their fields and may be targets for Gozoku recruitment. GMs who want to go down that road should think carefully about how to address it. If some characters want to join the conspiracy while others do not, the conflict can potentially extend beyond the PCs to the players. The easiest way to deal with this problem is to make the offer all-or-nothing: the group is most valuable to the conspiracy as a whole, so either everyone accepts or no one does. Barring that, make sure the players discuss things out-of-character and decide what would be most fun for everyone.

High-ranking characters may have the influence and power to be a genuine threat to the conspiracy as a whole. They might be able to interact with the Gozoku's top leaders, and can reasonably damage—or even, with enough effort and after a long campaign, destroy—the conspiracy. While mid-ranking PCs are trying to survive the Gozoku's

attention and perhaps chip at its edges, high-ranking characters are strong enough to strike at its heart.

The biggest question a GM has to answer at this stage is just how much damage the PCs are going to be permitted to do. Does the GM want to maintain the canon storyline, or is he willing to let the players create a new canon? If the players are dedicated to bringing down the triumvirate themselves, or to becoming the new Imperial family in the Nasu's place, or otherwise departing from the established history they may very well be able to succeed. In general, it is usually preferable to let the players follow their story to wherever it may lead, but not every GM will be comfortable with that level of story freedom. On the other hand, deliberately frustrating PC efforts that should be able to succeed may result in forced events, improbable escapes for villains, and other such abuses of GM power that leave the players frustrated and disgusted.

Here again, one good solution is a conversation between the GM and the players. If the GM has a great story planned and needs the canonical timeline to run correctly for it to happen, letting the players know there is a reason to go along with history makes them much more likely to do so. Conversely, if the players have strong ideas of

Adventure Seed: Rochefort Revisited

Challenge: A Gozoku-connected Bayushi courtier is the talk of Winter Court. She is beautiful, witty, and temperamental, and has turned her undoubtedly dangerous attention toward the PCs.

Focus: The courtier, Bayushi Noko, has orders to destroy the PCs as part of a Gozoku scheme. However, she is herself so unpredictable that she has become a liability to the organization. Her Gozoku-provided yojimbo is expected to keep an eye on her while also protecting her.

Strike: The PCs have to defend themselves from Noko's schemes without drawing the yojimbo's wrath. They can potentially gain favor with the Gozoku if they defeat Noko without harming the larger conspiracy.

The Kolat in the Gozoku Era

During the rise and fall of the Gozoku, the Kolat conspiracy—the true gold standard for secret conspiracies in Rokugan—is in the process of growing and spreading its tentacles of power around the Empire. In fact, the Yasuki War represents the first major instance in which the Kolat is able to influence Rokugan's history. The Kolat considers trade and commerce (whether normal or illicit) to be very effective ways of building its power without drawing too much attention from the samurai caste, and thus works hard at infiltrating mercantile families like the Yasuki. Nudging the Yasuki into leaving the rigidly honorable Crane for the more pragmatic Crab is a very good idea from the Kolat's perspective, although the length and ferocity of the subsequent war is less to their liking.

The Kolat do not oppose the Gozoku Alliance, and indeed see it as a positive development since it represents a shift in power away from the divine mandate of the Hantei and in favor of mortal rule. However, the Kolat Masters also recognize that the Gozoku is pursuing a different and lesser goal than their own doctrine of a perfected human-ruled universe. From the Kolat viewpoint the Gozoku are essentially amateurs, lacking the long-term viewpoint and sophisticated methods required to truly succeed in overturning the Hantei. The ultimate defeat of the Gozoku merely confirms this assessment.

If the Gozoku had actually succeeded in maintaining power over the long term, the Kolat would have adjusted their policies accordingly and moved to gradually take control of the new ruling structure. A large and deeply corrupt bureaucracy run by a committee would have been considerably faster and easier to infiltrate than an Empire governed by honor and ruled by the descendant of the Divine Hantei. It is entirely possible that a "victory" for the Gozoku Alliance would have led within a couple of centuries to a true victory for the Kolat.

their own, letting the GM know in advance makes it much easier for him to incorporate them into the story.

Working With the Gozoku

Campaigns running from the Gozoku's side can take two forms. The first is an all-Gozoku campaign in which everyone is in on the conspiracy. There are obvious plots and duties for a party of Gozoku-loyal samurai: battling political rivals, working their way up the conspiracy's chain of command, and participating in its internal politics just for starters. Such a campaign would also offer opportunities for moral conflict and difficult decisions. For example, PCs assigned as guards to Emperor Hantei Kusada might realize he has the potential to rule effectively, notwithstanding Gozoku propaganda to the contrary. At a lower level, the PCs' duties to the conspiracy might conflict with their obligations to clan and daimyo.

Unusually, the Gozoku can also work in a campaign where the PCs are split in their loyalties. Traditionally, "mixed parties" involving conspiracies or secret organizations are discouraged because as soon as a Kolat, Spider, or ninja character is identified the other characters are obliged to execute him. The Gozoku maintain a veneer of public legitimacy and respectability, however, so Gozoku PCs can mix and mingle with those outside the conspiracy. To be sure, these sort of "team-up" campaigns do take a bit of extra thought to run successfully. Intra-PC tensions are likely to appear when the Gozoku's objectives differ from those of the non-Gozoku characters. Depending on the group of players, the GM may find it advisable to mitigate such tensions by limiting the scope and severity of the disagreement, but with mature players who can maintain the divide between themselves and their characters it may be more interesting to build up the differences and tensions over time. The extra layer of scheming resulting from the group's divided loyalties can become a highlight of the campaign. Even the most simple of adventures can be thrilling when one is not sure whether everyone else is playing on quite the same team. In these sorts of situations, GMs may be wise to have an open discussion about how much intraparty conflict is acceptable to the players.

Additional advice on running a campaign with characters of divided loyalties can be found in the Kolat chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*.

Presenting a Gozoku Campaign

Campaigns using the Gozoku (both those where the PCs are working with the conspiracy and those where they oppose it) lend themselves well to the Relationship Mapping style of campaign. (See the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook, page 296, for discussion of this style of adventure.) The Gozoku is a political entity and the relationship map is a valuable tool for tracking its internal and external quarrels, intrigues, and conflicts. In addition, Gozoku-themed campaigns have the potential to be lengthy and complex political struggles, and the relationship mapping approach can make it easier to track the ramifications of PC actions as they ripple across time.

One issue the relationship map cannot help with is how to justify extending a PC's career across the entire Gozoku period. If the GM intends to run a campaign that encompasses the entire rise and fall of the Gozoku, it may be advisable to consider a dynastic game which tracks the PCs' family or families over two or three generations. This will require both continuity of characters and continuity of storyline.

Continuity of characters means elements of the preceding generation are carried forward to the next one. This requires more than just the entire family attending, say, the Shiba Bushi School. There should be something distinctive that marks the characters as belonging to a single family line. For example, an ancestor may speak to each member of the family, or the entire family might have the Dark Fate disadvantage, or they might have an unusual talent for a particular courtly game reflected in a bonus Rank or two in the relevant skill. Since these continuity elements are important to maintaining the campaign, the GM should probably award them without Experience Point cost, or possibly as part of a larger balanced set of benefits and Disadvantages.

Continuity of storyline likewise should mean more than just the ongoing issue of the Gozoku. It also can involve a continuing story relating to the PC family specifically. A Dark Secret might be passed from mother to daughter, a father disappointed in his goal of becoming the Empire's greatest duelist could pass his sword and skills on to his son, and so forth.

Of course, relationship maps apply to PC families and dynastic patterns as well as to the larger campaign. The changing relationships between members of a family are just as worthy of tracking, and just as good grist for stories, as the interplay between Gozoku and anti-Gozoku factions. PCs who can both fulfill their family's goals and defeat the Gozoku conspiracy can rightly claim to have attained greatness.

Campaigning Without the Gozoku

While the Gozoku conspiracy is pervasive and powerful, not every campaign set in this era has to focus on it. There are several other notable events during this period that lend themselves to adventures and even entire campaigns.

The epic military struggle of the Yasuki War, not so extensive as the full Gozoku period but quite long nonetheless, is an obvious choice here. Of course, running a campaign around the Yasuki War will realistically require all of the PCs to be on the same side and primarily of the same clan (although a few allies and friends from other clans can be worked into the mix). Such a campaign will be militarily focused and allows many opportunities for bushi characters to show their skills, especially certain types of specialized characters who normally have few chances to shine, such as Kaiu Engineers or Daidoji Scouts. The "War" chapter in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* contains many suggestions for ways to incorporate PCs into military campaigns. The GM can even use a map of southern Rokugan to show the players how their actions are impacting the movements of the front line.

Of course, the Yasuki War is not without its moral dimensions. Although border skirmishes and other such small "wars" between clans had been routine for generations, this was the first time two clans truly fought all-out with no restraints on their tactics or behavior, and there were no precedents for such a conflict. More than one samurai felt deeply troubled over the war. Was it inherently wrong to slay the Emperor's subjects on such a large scale? Or was violence so inherent in the nature of samurai that they could always be forgiven for fighting each other? Similarly, the Yasuki family's move to the Crab Clan raised many questions about loyalty and its limits. How far did a samurai have to tolerate his or her lord's improprieties before walking away? If a samurai did leave, where was it acceptable to go? Could another lord accept that samurai's service in good conscience? These and other arguments raged on both the battlefield and in the courts, and any good GM will make sure the PCs are drawn into the debate.

At a slightly smaller scale than the grand tragedy of the Yasuki War, the PCs might become involved in the founding of the Sparrow Clan. This could lend itself very well to a classic "weekly adventure" format, with the PCs confronted by a steady string of small crises and dangers to the fledgling clan. In the time of their founding the Sparrow were penniless idealists, living in some of the worst lands in the Empire and in need of every sort of supply. Varied gameplay and diverse challenges should be the order of the day.

By way of example, low-ranking characters might be ex-Doji courtiers, now serving as Sparrow diplomats responsible for establishing an embassy with their former clan. Allies and friends now become rivals or enemies as the PCs struggle to establish themselves in the Crane courts. Of course, the work is complicated by the likelihood that the PCs and their new enemies have past friendships and possibly even romantic attachments. They must decide how to use secrets learned in trust but now useful to their new clan. Nor need their duties be solely confined to a single court; there are not many Sparrow in this era, so each PC can be involved in virtually any aspect of the new clan's growth.

A GM who wishes to run a more conventional L5R RPG campaign can find the Gozoku era adds some interesting spice to the mix. The traditional magistrate campaign, for example, acquires new depth in the Gozoku era when the conspiracy is working to undermine Imperial institutions. Even without directly addressing the conspiracy, the PCs might have to face bureaucratic interference of every type: poor equipment, confused and contradictory orders (a particular danger for samurai, whose life and honor are dependent on obedience), callous or even dishonorable superiors, spiraling crime rates, and disrespectful treatment from those who have grown used to a corrupt Imperial government. Most magistrate campaigns cast the PCs as the cavalry riding in to save the day, but in the Gozoku period it is easy to recast this into a gritty cop drama where the PCs have to fight both the criminals and their own frustrations with corrupt co-workers and dishonorable situations.

Important Personages of the Gozoku Era

The personalities here are only a few of the more noteworthy and interesting samurai who lived in this time. It should be noted that two of the Gozoku leaders—Doji Raigu and Shiba Gaijushiko—have already been depicted in their clans' respective chapters of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*; GMs seeking more information on this era would be wise to consult that book.

Hantei Yugozohime (Hantei VII)

Little was expected of the Princess Yugozohime, born the fifth of seven children to Hantei Kusada. The Emperor did not bother calling for a Kitsu to take portents for his first daughter's destiny. However, this disinterest proved to her benefit. Had her future been known to the Gozoku she would probably have never survived to adulthood. As it was, she was sent to live with the Lion at age eight, seemingly as a favor for various minor negotiations, though in truth the Dragon manipulated events to make sure she was raised by the Akodo.

The Lion from the beginning taught Yugozohime to embrace Bushido in its entirety. The Imperial Princess trained eight hours a day in the dojo, and at night she read the Ikoma Histories, *Leadership,* and countless other treatises on honor, warfare, and the glorious Imperial line. It was during this training she met Akodo Kurojin, son of Akodo Mitsuyagi and the future Lion Clan Champion. He was also the man who would eventually die at her side during the Battle of White Stag. There are rumors the two fell in love during their youth, but if so they refused to let such passions overcome their honor, and when Yugozohime eventually married she did so for the good of the Throne, not for her own personal wishes.

Upon defeating her brother Soujiro for the Imperial Throne, Yugozohime worked quickly to dismantle the Gozoku's power base. Where some might have carried out brutal retaliations in victory, Yugozohime instead chose a measured response, exiling and forcing retirement on most traitors and accepting seppuku from those who requested it. Execution was imposed only to those who offered violence or refused seppuku. The Empress felt it critical she allow the conspirator clans the chance to cleanse and redeem themselves of the stain on their families' honor.

As Empress Yugozohime went on to become an active and effective leader, controlling her courts with grace and charisma. Her political prowess was surpassed only by her skills as a bushi, and she swiftly came to be respected and admired throughout the Empire for her wisdom and power. Tragically, her glorious reign was cut short just a few years later during the Battle of White Stag, leaving the Empire to be ruled by her uncle Muhaki until her infant daughter could come of age.

The following stats depict Yugozohime after she became Empress.

Hantei Yugozohime, Hantei VII, Empress of Rokugan

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 4 Void: 4
Reflexes: 4 Agility: 5 Perception: 5

Honor: 9.5 *Status: 10.0* *Glory: 5.6*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 3, Courtier (Rhetoric) 6, Defense 4, Etiquette 7, Iaijutsu 6, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Lore: Bushido 5, Mediation 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 5, Tea Ceremony 2, War Fan 3

Kata: Strength of Purity Style

Advantages: Allies (many, starting with the entire Lion and Dragon Clans), Leadership, Irreproachable, Prodigy, Social Position (Empress)

Disadvantages: Idealistic, Sworn Enemies (various)

Bayushi Minoko

Atsuki's Daughter, the Mistress of Secrets

As a child, Bayushi Minoko paid careful attention to the lessons she learned at her father's knee. The first was that loyalty is the paramount virtue. The second was that the Gozoku should be the focus of her loyalty. Minoko was a true Gozoku, absolutely committed to the conspiracy's aims. As the Clan Champion she was dangerous in her own right, of course, able to destroy reputations with a few carefully placed words, or to unleash assassins on anyone who deserved it. She also followed the Scorpion tradition of staying in the shadows as much as possible, avoiding public attention and enmity. Minoko supported her father's view that the Gozoku should remain as secretive as possible, as well as his policy of recruiting criminals into the conspiracy, and opposed Raigu's goals of a more open Gozoku Alliance.

However, Minoko lacked her father's vision. Atsuki trained her to be a perfect replacement, to walk his path and never deviate from it, and Minoko soaked up her father's teachings like a sponge. She did not consider, and perhaps could not imagine, that Atsuki's views and methods might be wrong, and forged ahead with exactly the plans her father laid out for her years ago even in the face of changing circumstances.

The price of this became apparent when the Gozoku become increasingly divided during the 420s. Many in the clan argued for a reconciliation and compromise with Raigu and Gaijushiko's rival factions, but Minoko followed her father's lead in rejecting all such suggestions and treating those who made them as enemies to be disgraced or exiled. This only had the effect of driving the discussion underground and leaving her wondering what was being said behind closed doors. Even as the Lion and Dragon prepared Princess Yugozohime for her strike at power, Minoko was increasingly busy with the Scorpion Clan's internal affairs. Her efforts weakened the clan's preparedness at a critical moment while failing to suppress the dissidents—who turned on her ferociously after Yugozohime struck. Ultimately, Minoko became the first Scorpion Clan Champion to die at the hands of her fellow Scorpion.

Bayushi Minoko, Scorpion Clan Champion

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 4
Awareness: 5 Willpower: 4 Percepton: 3

Honor: 2.1 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 6.5*

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 3/Agent of the Gozoku

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 6, Defense 2, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Courtesy) 5, Games: Letters 3, Games: Sadane 3, Intimidation (Control) 5, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Knives 3, Lore: Gozoku 5, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: Scorpion Clan 4, Meditation 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation (Bribery) 5

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many), Forbidden Knowledge (Gozoku), Higher Purpose (realize her father's dreams), Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Consumed (Control), Dark Secret (Gozoku)

Bayushi Atsuki

Scorpion Clan Champion, Founder of the Gozoku

In Rokugan's history, there have been countless villains who sought to undermine society and rule it as their own, men and women who tried to subvert the Emperor's rule and who considered themselves more fit to rule. Some of these men have been ruthless warlords who left trails of blood across Rokugan. Others have aligned themselves with the Shadowlands, leading to their corruption and descent into madness. Some have even been cunning and sly politicians who tried to draw others to their cause, building a strong political base with which to challenge authority.

...and then there was Bayushi Atsuki.

Bayushi Atsuki, born and raised to be the Scorpion Clan Champion, was a calculating and patient man. He had some political skills and was effective in the courts of Rokugan, but he was even more so at night, when his spies and assassins brought him the information he needed to carry out his true duties for the Emperor. Atsuki, however, suffered from the flaw of pride. He began to feel the Em-

peror was his inferior, a man without the ruthlessness and intelligence to rule. Atsuki believed he was the true power in Rokugan, for was it not he who ferreted out all the plans and schemes of the Empire's enemies? Was it not he who thwarted those plans with a few words, a few simple orders that sent forth killers and seductresses to wreck his foes? Why should the Emperor reign when it was Atsuki who truly brought order throughout the land?

It was Atsuki who devised the concept of the Gozoku Alliance and who recruited Doji Raigu and Shiab Gaijushiko into the scheme. And once the three men had agreed to the plan, it was Atsuki who swept into action, kidnapping the Imperial heir and forcing Hantei Fujiwa to grant them the power they demanded. Atsuki was the true heart of the Gozoku, and as such no other man could rival his power or his determination to make the Alliance succeed at all costs. However, his pride made it impossible for him to listed to others or to consider alternatives to his own path. Over time he alienated the other two leaders of the Gozoku as well as a great many of his own clan. He raised his daughter Minoko to be his heir and carry forward his vision regardless of cost, but as can be seen from her own story, this proved less wise than he might have thought. And Atsuki's pride also made it impossible for him to truly give up power; even after age and illness forced him to pass the rule of the Scorpion to Minoko, he continued to try to maintain control over the Gozoku and the Empire.

Ultimately, Atsuki paid the full price for his pride and his ambition. When the new Empress Yugozohime ascended to power, a vicious civil war broke out within the Scorpion ranks. Within a few weeks, Atsuki's daughter was dead and he was dragged before the Empress in chains.

The following stats depict Atsuki late in life, when his health was failing. GMs wishing to portray him in his younger days should raise his physical Traits by 1 or 2 Ranks.

Bayushi Atsuki, Founder of the Gozoku

Air: 1 Earth: 2 Fire: 2 Water: 1 Void: 4

Awareness: 6 Willpower: 5 Intelligence: 5 Perception: 4

Honor: 1.5 *Status: 7.5* *Glory: 7.5*

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 5

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher, High Rokugani) 5, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 5, Defense 4, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation, Courtesy) 5, Investigation 6, Intimidation (Control) 4, Knives 2, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: Underworld 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 6, Stealth 3, Temptation (Control) 6

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many), Forbidden Knowledge (Gozoku), Heartless, Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Gozoku), Driven (gain power), Sworn Enemies (many)

Seppun Gohoru

Emerald Magistrate

Ryoko Owari is known across the Empire as the "City of Lies," and it was one of the Gozoku's favorite places. At the best of times the Emerald Magistrates' control over the city was marginal, and with the Gozoku working to undercut Imperial institutions oversight was virtually nonexistent. When the conspiracy had a quiet illicit deal to negotiate, Ryoko Owari was the place of choice.

Unfortunately for the Gozoku, there was still at least one pair of watchful eyes in the city. Seppun Gohoru was given a magistrate's badge of office in his youth, barely past his gempukku, and approaching the age of forty he was still serving loyally. He spent most of his career in Ryoko Owari, tracking smugglers and closing the most extreme houses of vice. From behind his low battered desk he read endless reports from his yoriki and gave endless orders to try to stem the tide of crime threatening to engulf the city.

The rise of the Gozoku made Gohoru's work inestimably harder. The incorporation of many criminal elements into the conspiracy meant that Goharu's investigations began to run into political interference at the highest levels of Imperial government. When a Miya herald brought him a directive to stop investigating several specific organizations and people, Goharu realized he had become an unwilling agent of the conspiracy, allowed to enforce the law only against its enemies while its friends did as they wished.

Like a great many honest magistrates during the Gozoku era, Seppun Gohoru did the best he could. He decided to interpret the letter of his instructions rather than the spirit, allowing his office to act against the Gozoku's criminal allies so long as he was not personally involved. Unfortunately, he could not always rely on his yoriki, and attrition was high. Those who earned his trust tended to die even faster than the rest, and he could offer little compensation to his new recruits beyond the knowledge of serving a righteous and honorable cause.

When the Empress Yugozohime rose to power, Seppun Goharu quietly celebrated. Now, at last, he could perform his duties properly once more. Now at last, with retirement approaching, he could be a true samurai again. A few years later, Goharu shaved his head and joined the Brotherhood of Shinsei, content with a life lived by Bushido.

Seppun Gohoru, Imperial Magistrate

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 3
		Agility: 4		
Honor: 6.6		*Status: 4.5*		*Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Seppun Guardsman 2/Emerald Magistrate

Skills: Battle 1, Defense 4, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Courtesy) 3, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation (Interrogation, Notice, Search) 4, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Kyujutsu 1, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: Law 4, Lore: Ryoko Owari 4, Sincerity (Honesty) 3

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Paragon (Duty), Social Position (Emerald Magistrate)

Disadvantages: Sworn Enemies (many)

New Game Mechanics

The following section contains new mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition role-playing game. Although some of these are specific to the Gozoku era, most of them can be used equally well in other eras of play.

New Family: The Nasu

The Nasu are very short-lived by the standards of Rokugan's history, but during their brief tenure they are the most powerful and influential of the Imperial families. The Gozoku arranges for the newly-proclaimed Nasu family to be given special influence and pride of place by Emperor Hantei V, and place it in control of the rapidly expanding Imperial bureaucracy. This effectively means the Nasu "outrank" the long-established Otomo, Seppun, and Miya families, a development which those families regard with hostility but are powerless to prevent.

In many ways the Nasu are what the Otomo later become: a family of powerful bureaucrats who force everyone else to submit to their whims and manipulations. However, where the later Otomo work to keep the clans divided, the Nasu work more directly to support the thee Gozoku clans and weaken the three clans who oppose them. This is hardly surprising, given that their initial membership is recruited from prominent samurai of the Gozoku clans, especially the Phoenix. Once the Gozoku falls, Shiba Gaijushiko manages to save most of the Phoenix-descended members of the family by re-making them into a Shiba vassal family; the rest are forced to swear fealty to the Otomo or commit seppuku.

Any character who wishes to belong to the Nasu family during the Gozoku era must purchase at least 1 Rank of Social Position, reflecting the family's great prominence within the Empire's affairs. After the disbandment of the Gozoku, the Nasu are folded into the Shiba and no longer receive any separate mechanical benefits or effects.

- **Nasu Family Trait Bonus:** +1 Awareness

New Advantage: Imperial Scribe [Social] (4 points)

- **Requirements:** Status 2+, Calligraphy 4+

You have been trained as a scribe in the Imperial City, which is both a recognition of your considerable skill at calligraphy and a means of ensuring that you remain among the most respected calligraphers hereafter. You gain a bonus of +1k0 on all Social Skill Rolls made against shugenja and artisans, who have a great appreciation for your skill and position. Additionally, you gain a Free Raise on Calligraphy Skill Rolls.

New Alternate Path: Agents of the Gozoku

The first Gozoku is perhaps the most wide-ranking and cosmopolitan conspiracy in the Empire's history, and it is certainly the most successful despite its relatively short duration and ultimate failure. (Unlike the far longer-lived Kolat, the Gozoku actually manage to seize the power they want and hold it for over a generation.) The beneficial effects accomplished in the name of the Empire during the Gozoku's reign is something never honestly discussed in subsequent centuries, but the most intelligent and objective of Rokugan's historians are keenly aware of the economic growth and artistic flowering which took place under the conspiracy's rule. Perhaps this is why the Gozoku found it relatively easy to recruit agents from virtually every clan and family in the Empire.

Agents of the Gozoku were able to move among the courts of the Empire with near impunity, as their thinly veiled status as members of the conspiracy protected them from all but the most adamant Imperial loyalists. Few wished to risk the wrath of the Gozoku by acting openly against their representatives. (Perhaps unsurprisingly, only the Lion courts were relatively free of this level of brazen impudence.) It was perhaps these very tendencies that undid the Gozoku; while most of the original members had only the best intentions at heart, a great number among those who served them (and indeed some among their number as well) came to regard the Gozoku as nothing more than a means of seizing personal power and prestige at the expense of others.

This eventually led to a sharp divide among Gozoku agents. The more altruistic members of the Gozoku took after the original vision of Raigu and Gaijushiko: they genuinely sought to better the Empire and the lives of its citizens, and used their abilities to secure whatever was necessary to make this happen. Their counterparts, however, followed the path of Atsuki: they were petty and selfish, and preferred to use the threat of the Gozoku to garner increasing amounts of influence for their own purposes (which sometimes did not coincide with those of the conspiracy at all).

The technique of the Gozoku agents was originally created by Bayushi Atsuki, but he shared them with the

other two founders of the conspiracy; all three men taught the technique to their immediate followers, from whom it spread through the conspiracy. Historically, the technique dies out as soon as the Gozoku are purged, but is revived by Atsuki when he returns to the Empire through Oblivion's Gate in the twelfth century. GMs who wish to diverge from the historical pattern, however, may rule that the technique survives among Gozoku loyalists (especially if the "underground Gozoku" option is used). The technique may also be used to enhance the depiction of any other political conspiracy that recruits agents from multiples factions or clans, such as the Kolat in the various historical settings or the conspiracy of the Three Old Men in the Heroes of Rokugan setting.

New Alternate Path: Gozoku Agent [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Basic School at Rank 2
- **Requirements:** Forbidden Knowledge (Gozoku) Advantage

Technique: Overwhelming Presence

The agents of the Gozoku conspiracy were feared for the power they could bring to bear on any who dared oppose them in court. You may add your rank in the Intimidate Skill to the total of all Social Skill Rolls you make against individuals who are not members of the Gozoku.

New Alternate Path: Agents of the Hantei

To combat the growing influence of the Gozoku conspiracy, Emperor Hantei VI turned to a completely unexpected source to assist him: the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Although the monks of the Brotherhood were of course willing to obey their Emperor without question, they had never been involved with anything like this, and were more accustomed to changing the perceptions of small local tyrants rather than facing a nationwide organized movement stripping power from the Emperor in the name of progress. Some were so horrified by the suggestion that they were simply incapable of providing useful assistance. Others did help but with great reluctance, and a few rose to the occasion in truly spectacular style. Unfortunately, the Brotherhood's leadership was completely inexperienced in this sort of endeavor and was either unwilling or unable to differentiate between these three different groups, leading to the exposure and downfall of the whole effort... and ironically, contributing directly to the downfall of the Gozoku as well. Some later historians speculated this was the plan of the Emperor all along, but in truth, if he had possessed that level of manipulative cunning it seems unlikely the Gozoku could so easily have co-opted his rule in the first place.

The monks who succeeded as spies were predominantly (but by no means exclusively) former Scorpion samurai who had retired for a life of quiet contemplation. Many were delighted by the chance to be active once again, and they were not entirely alone. Sadly, the failures of the more numerous monks ill-suited to espionage led to the capture of all.

Although the Brotherhood Spies officially only existed during the reign of the Gozoku, they could have appeared in almost any era where the Brotherhood of Shinsei found itself drawn into the Empire's political affairs. The technique created by the retired Scorpion-turned-monks could well have been preserved in the Brotherhood's ranks and brought out again in later eras when the monks of Shinsei had need of it. In the twelfth century a perverted form of the technique could even have found its way into the ranks of the Spider Clan by way of the heretical Order of the Spider and Order of Venom.

New Alternate Path: Brotherhood Spy [Monk]

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Brotherhood Monk School at Rank 2
- **Requirements:** Lore: Theology 3

Technique: Bearing the Emperor's Shame

Acts committed in the Emperor's name are done with certainty that can overcome the shame associated with them, even when they are against one's personal code of honor. When acting against a known or suspected agent of the Gozoku conspiracy, or when acting on orders from a legitimate Imperial authority, you gain a Free Raise on all Stealth and Deceit Skill Rolls. You lose no Honor for these Skill Rolls when made under these specific circumstances.

The Era of White Stag

Hantei Yugozohime watched from the Emerald Throne as Gusai Mori entered her court. The Minor Clan lord walked with pride and boldness, but he had his father's wary eyes. The Empress permitted herself to raise an eyebrow at his bold manners, wholly unlike those of other Minor Clan daimyo. She knew he had spent much in the way of favors and alliances to arrange this audience for the foreigners, and she could not help but wonder why.

The strangers themselves walked behind Mori, their postures uncertain. A soft murmur ran through the court behind raised fans as samurai took account of the foreigners, of their garish and bizarre clothing, their unnaturally tall statures and strange hair, their dirty complexions and... the Empress' nose wrinkled slightly as they drew closer... foul odor.

Mori sank to his knees and placed his head to the polished floor, awaiting the Empress' permission to speak. The two gaijin men awkwardly attempted to emulate the bow, but their eyes were darting back and forth, staring openly and without deference. Whispers rippled across the court more loudly, and the Empress narrowed her gaze.

Matsu Mochiko took a step forward, her hand resting on the hilt of her blade. The Empress raised a single finger from her fan and the Emerald Champion stopped, but her icy gaze bore down on the ill-mannered foreigners.

The now prostrated men whispered back and forth, their eyes still darting about, but they did not speak aloud.

Yugozohime tapped her fan lightly on her chin. "Gusai-san, you spoke true. You have indeed brought strangers to our court," she mused.

The Mantis lord shifted slightly, then turned his head and nodded to the two strangers. The shorter and darker-skinned foreigner cleared his throat and spoke, in a clumsy imitation of proper speech. "Apologies much, Daughter of Heaven, my name... Teodoro Cornejo, representative of his Highness King Philip of Merenae." The strange words were like sharp stones amid the Rokugani words. "Please forgive ignorance of customs." The larger, more pale-skinned foreigner remained silent, watching his companion and the court alike with focused attention.

Fans snapped and fluttered as the court reacted, as much to the strange man speaking out of turn as to his limited knowledge of Rokugani.

Gusai Mori cleared his throat. "Blessed Daughter of Heaven, these men are representatives of a foreign land, far beyond the Amaterasu Umi. Their ways are crude and barbaric, but they have come in peace, and wish to open trade and diplomatic relations with us."

The Empress watched the reactions of the courtiers. The Lion looked revolted, but others hid curiosity behind their fans, and a few eyes glittered with avarice. "An intriguing proposal, Gusai-san, but I fear these foreigners bring

disharmony to our court with their ignorant and clumsy ways. Why should we permit them to remain?"

Gusai did not flinch in the face of the gentle rebuke. He murmured something to the foreigners in a strange tongue, and the shorter man nodded jerkily. Bowing repeatedly, he edged toward the Empress slightly and pulled something from beneath his thick coat. The Emerald Champion tensed and stepped toward him, her sword rasping as it pulled six inches from the saya. The man froze for a moment, babbling in his own language.

"It is a gift," Gusai said hurriedly. "An offering to the Daughter of Heaven."

Matsu Mochiko hesitated a moment, then slapped her blade back into its sheath. With trembling fingers the foreigner unwrapped a small package, revealing a tiny golden figure of a horse. As he lifted it before the Empress, the afternoon sunlight that slanted through the court chamber blazed on its delicate carvings.

A smile spread across Yugozohime's lips. "Delightful," she murmured.

The Age of White Stag

The period from the years 438 through 445 was the second major era of strife and violence in the fifth century, one of the more chaotic centuries in Imperial history. The first three decades of the century had seen the Empire struggling with the reign of the Gozoku Alliance and the many political and social consequences of it. The ascension of Empress Yugozohime and the dismantling of the Gozoku seemed to promise a time of rest and recovery, but it was not to be, for only a few years into the new Empress' reign the people of Rokugan come into contact with two foreign powers, the Merenae and the Thrane. The court of Hantei Yugozohime was still a place of considerable intrigue and suspicion in the immediate post-Gozoku era, and the introduction of two foreign parties with their own hidden agendas only made things worse. The final blow that turned uncertainty to bloody war was an unholy artifact called the Helm of Kenshin, and the resulting conflict cost the Empress her life and led to Rokugan becoming a truly isolationist nation.

The timeline presented here begins with the events that lead to the emergence of Kenshin's Helm, the artifact whose malign influence eventually triggers the Battle of White Stag, and concludes with the final expulsion of the gaijin.

Year 438

- Two years after Doji Usan abdicated the Emerald Championship and became the Imperial Consort, a new Emerald Championship is announced. The victor in the contest is Matsu Mochihime. Previously made ronin by the command of the puppet Emperor Hantei Fujiwa, she resisted Gozoku influence for years until she was reinstated in the Lion by Hantei Yugozohime's order. Ikoma historians later record her name as Matsu Mochiko, distancing the honorable Emerald Champion from her ronin past.
- The Scorpion, attempting to rebuild their position after the disgrace of Bayushi Atsuki's reign, make an unusual alliance and sign a treaty with the Crab, sealing it with a marriage between the daughter of the Shosuro daimyo and the Kaiu daimyo's heir.
- Scorpion efforts pay dividends as the Empress proclaims the Imperial Winter Court will be held in Kyuden Bayushi for the first time in years. During the winter a provincial governor of the Lion, Akodo Hatsu, commits a serious breach of etiquette and finds himself in a very tenuous position. His reputation is protected from slander by the timely intervention of Mirumoto Turan, a neighboring provincial daimyo of the Dragon. Hatsu finds himself deeply indebted to the Dragon and the two become tenuous allies in court.

Year 439

- Otomo and Miya mediation in a trade dispute between the Dragon and Crab goes sour when the Dragon are found by the Otomo to be over-representing the value of their goods. The revelation precipitates conflict and weakens the Scorpion-Crab alliance. The Dragon representative, a subordinate of Mirumoto Turan, commits seppuku to cleanse the shame, but the Crab are enraged by the implications and look for an excuse for war.
- The Katai vassal family is formed at the behest of the Ikoma. The former wave men of the Katai once served Matsu Mochihime, now Emerald Champion Matsu Mochiko, during her time as a ronin. The new vassal family is charged with the care of the forest called Kokoro Nezuban Mori.
- Far from Rokugan, Moto and Ide scouts arrive at a remote port city called Aqahba. At the suggestion of a local captain, Shereid Ibn Shihan, a small group of samurai sail overseas and winter with a nation of pale-skinned gaijin called Merenae before returning to their kin. The encounter is generally positive, and results in a Merenae nobleman named Teodoro Cornejo proposing an expedition to Rokugan in the following year.

Year 440

- Lost at sea while seeking Rokugan, Teodoro Cornejo's fleet encounters a Thrane fleet led by the self-titled "Admiral" Garen Hawthorne. The two lend mutual aide and eventually reach Rokugan together; however, Garen Hawthorne secretly plots to kill Teodoro on the return voyage and claim all trade rights and gold from the voyage.
- The gaijin fleet arrives off of the coast of the Empire, near the mouth of Golden Sun Bay, where they are met by Mantis vessels. The gaijin weigh anchor and meet with representatives of the Crane and Mantis, arranging for transportation of a delegation to Otosan Uchi.
- The gaijin delegation arrives at Otosan Uchi, causing a sensation. They are initially housed in the outer regions of the city, as the Empress is unsure what to do about them. Rokugan's reception to the strangers is not completely hostile, but the visitors are kept under armed escort and meet only rarely with representatives of the clans; most Great Clan samurai are initially leery of them.
- Mantis Champion Gusai Mori, sensing an opportunity in the Merenae, meets with them in secret and agrees to vouch for the expedition in return for preferential trade agreements. His bold move earns the Mantis newfound political favor, as a great deal of subsequent contact with the visitors will proceed through Mantis mediation. Mori arranges an audience with the Empress, which proceeds smoothly: Cornejo, having gained a limited knowledge in the Rokugani language from the Unicorn, is able to plead their case successfully and the Empress agrees to grant them safe harbor outside of the Bay of the Golden Sun and a limited trade presence in Otosan Uchi. She gives them two years to prove their honor.

The Gaijin in Rokugan: Trade and Curiosity

Within a month, trade between the visitors and the Empire grows heavy. Commerce is conducted solely in Otosan Uchi and the four surrounding hub villages, but hundreds of individual gaijin are eager to explore the Empire beyond, leading to many clashes and problems and forcing magistrates to crack down on travel.

The Rokugani are curious about the many strange and exotic oddities the foreigners bring, taking interest in book binding, spyglasses, and other examples of foreign technology, while the gaijin are eager to purchase silks, spices, tea, and a variety of artworks. Leery of giving up a military advantage in a foreign country, both Garen and Teodoro agree to keep the existence of *polvora* (gunpowder) a closely guarded secret. Garen makes his presence felt in lesser courts and finds himself being sought for favor by the Daidoji of the Crane, who see him as a possible means to break the Mantis' hold over the foreigners.

Alternate Paths: Gaijin Meet Gozoku

Some GMs may wish to consider the question of what would have happened if the gaijin had come to an Empire still ruled by the Gozoku Alliance. Hantei Soujiro would have been reigning as a puppet Emperor Hantei VII, and in all likelihood he would have accepted open trade with the gaijin; the Gozoku's efforts to expand trade in every possible way are well documented. Requests from the gaijin to gain access to more ports or even to hold land in Rokugan would likely have been granted, generating enormous profits for the Crane but at the cost of permanent gaijin influence within Rokugan. Long term, this could easily have led to ever-growing gaijin power and a slide toward a "colonial" situation in which the Gozoku and its puppet dynasty is propped up by Thrane or Merenae troops.

- During the winter, the Empress invites Teodoro and Garen to the Imperial Winter Court at Kyuden Seppun. They are besieged by the curious and the ambitious. Differences in hygiene, culture, and etiquette quickly alienate the more orthodox and traditional among the Rokugani, who instead ply the Mantis for tales of the gaijin. The Daidoji continue to court Garen, more openly now, and he also develops a curious relationship of shared tales with the aged general Ikoma Genmuro.
- During this same winter the Crab finally gain an excuse to war with the Dragon. Daimyo Akodo Hatsu invites several delegations to a provincial court well away from the strange influences of the foreign visitors. Among these guests are Yasuki Hiroaki and Mirumoto Turan. During the waning weeks of the season an argument ensues over trade imbalances, leading to Hiroaki's ejection from the court and a proclamation of war by both parties.
- Mirumoto Turan calls on his favor with Hatsu, who reluctantly agrees to send troops to support the Dragon. The legion dispatched is led by Matsu Masaru and Akodo Godaigo. Masaru's sister, Matsu Hitomi, boldly proclaims in the hearing of the entire court she will obey and complete any task set before her by Turan.

Year 441

- In the wake of Winter Court's conclusion, the Crane petition the Emerald Champion to let them sponsor Garen Hawthorne and the Thrane, arguing that different nations require separate sponsorship. The Mantis respond that since both arrived together, both should be sponsored by the Mantis. Matsu Mochihime favors the Mantis in her decision, in large part due to the unfamiliarity of the Rokugani with the concept of different nations, not to mention the lack of legal precedent on the matter.
- War between the Crab and Dragon begins in late spring. Hiruma Tatsuya, commander of the Crab forces, leads an expedition northward through Beiden Pass and faces the combined forces of the Lion and Dragon. The first sorties go well for him with the death of Lion leader Matsu Masaru. However, command falls to Maseru's sister Hitomi, who rallies the Lion and leads them to victory after victory against the Crab, harrying them through Lion lands and back to the Pass. Hiruma Tatsuya is defeated in the last of these fights and forced to sue for peace.
- Alarm sweeps through the courts due to a young Merenae man named Alvaro Molinero. The sailor, a devout member of his nation's religion, is seen performing religious rites that appear alien and possibly blasphemous to the Rokugani. He is forced to submit to a test of jade (which he passes). However, heated debate over the religious practices of the gaijin rages throughout the year. Many Rokugani wonder whether or not these people exist in the Celestial Wheel at all, as well as whether their religion may be invoking dangerous or evil spirits.
- Matsu Hitomi's forces return triumphant to Mirumoto Turan to proclaim their victory. The unscrupulous daimyo turns on his former allies and orders Hitomi to conquer a Lion castle on his behalf. She refuses and responds with force, initiating a series of battles that culminate in a duel to the death with Turan. The shame of conflict between allies, however, causes Akodo Hatsu to order Akodo Godaigo to hunt down and execute Matsu Hitomi. Godaigo's advisor, Kitsu Uragiri, has secretly been training in blood magic; Uragiri poisons Godaigo's mind against Hitomi and gifts him with the cursed artifact known as the Helm of Kenshin to hasten his doom.

The Helm of Kenshin

The sinister artifact known as Kenshin's Helm was originally created by an aide of Miya himself, a man named Kenshin, and was an heirloom of the Imperial Families. It was an initial prototype for a helm intended as a gift for the Emperor but never constructed; it was also cursed by the dark magic of a false religion, lost to antiquity before the Kami fell to earth. Kenshin, one of the last priests of that faith, hated the new Empire and the Kami who created it, and so he made the Helm with the power to bring doom on the undertakings of anyone who used it. By sheer fortune, he died shortly after its creation and his lord Miya never wore the helm, instead placing it in a position of honor in his house.

In later years the Helm was worn by several Miya lords. Its influences were always malignant, provoking conflict

and division, but usually subtle enough that the Miya did not recognize its effects. Who would blame a mere helmet for the failure of Crane-Crab peace talks before the First Yasuki War?

In the fourth century, the Miya gifted the Helm to the Lion as part of a marriage between their daimyo's daughter and the daimyo of the Kitsu. How it got into Kitsu Uragiri's hands is a mystery, and some later scholars believe Uragiri actually stole it from the Kitsu temples. Regardless, the Helm's influence on both Akodo Godaigo and the later Miya negotiations with the gaijin was powerful and catastrophic.

- Matsu Hitomi flees to the edge of Phoenix lands, seeking shelter in Toshi no Omoidasu. Akodo Godaigo catches up with her a month later. His sanity is so damaged by the corruption of the Helm and the poison of Uragiri's lies that he unleashes a full-scale assault on the city, killing Hitomi personally. Dying, Hitomi curses Godaigo to an unending life of torment with her final breath; shaken out of his mad fury, Godaigo is filled with shame and self-disgust. He returns the Helm to the Miya family and travels home in seclusion, while Kitsu Uragiri disappears (eventually traveling to the Shadowlands). The Dragon and Lion sign a peace accord, eager to put the sad affair behind them. Despite her attacks on the Dragon, Matsu Hitomi is remembered as a legendary hero.
- Debate over the gaijin spills over in the Imperial Winter Court, again held at Kyuden Seppun. Meanwhile, Teodoro Cornejo's men uncover Garen's plan to betray and kill the Merenae expedition. As cunning as Garen, if perhaps not as cutthroat, Teodoro avoids an open confrontation and instead turns to his Mantis allies for help. Gusai Mori conspires with Teodoro to place false charges against the Thrane in the following spring, hoping to force concessions and gain sole control of trade between Rokugan and the gaijin.

Year 442

- As soon as the Empress returns to Otosan Uchi after Winter Court, Gusai Mori and his Merenae allies seek out a private audience with her and the Emerald Champion. They make their case against Garen Hawthorne, claiming not only that he is plotting the death of Teodoro but also accusing him of plans against the Imperial throne. The charges are at least partially true and are enough to alarm the Empress into action. However, the plan backfires against Mori and Teodoro when she cites the earlier decision by Mochihime, indicating the gaijin are to be judged as a whole regardless of supposed 'national' ties. The Merenae are outraged and demand that the earlier policy be reversed. Tensions rise abruptly and both groups of gaijin post armed guards at their compounds in the city.
- At the urging of both the Mantis and the Crane, the Empress agrees to dispatch Miya diplomats to speak with the gaijin and seek a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Miya Sasuke, wearing the Helm of Kenshin (and unknowing of its properties), undertakes the task with a small force of fellow *shisha*. The Helm's curse causes negotiations to go horribly wrong, and a desperate and enraged Garen Hawthorne orders his men to kill Sasuke and take his entourage hostage. The city's guards counterattack, killing Thrane and Merenae indiscriminately; the Miya are slaughtered and Garen leads most of the gaijin in flight to their ships. Civil unrest breaks out all over the city as outraged Rokugani clash with hostile or frightened gaijin.
- Teodoro Cornejo barely escapes the fighting with his life. He takes refuge in the residence of a Dragon samurai stationed in the capitol, a man named Agasha Kasuga.
- Learning of the crisis in her city, the Empress decides she has had enough of these troublesome foreigners. She issues an edict that all gaijin are to be expelled from the Empire, never to return. Garen's ships are already raising anchor as she makes this order, but much of the Merenae fleet does not depart the port initially, causing fighting to break out at the docks as the gaijin demand word of their commander's status. Others flee to the open seas, where Garen convinces the Merenae captains that Teodoro is dead, urging them to join him in a punitive attack on Otosan Uchi for wealth and supplies. Hundreds of Merenae flee Otosan Uchi on foot, trying to escape northward up the coast.

The Fate of Kenshin's Helm

In the canonical history of Rokugan, Miya Sasuke's body is thrown into the bay with the Helm still on his head. Some weeks later it is discovered on the coast by Bayushi Tesaguri, son of the Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Junzen. Tesaguri leads Miya samurai to the body, but the Helm's sinister whispers cause him to keep it for himself, lacquering it in red and black to disguise its origins. It soon causes problems for the Scorpion as well, leading them to seal it away (see the entry for Year 445 at the end of this timeline).

The Helm eventually resurfaces in the early twelfth century, when it returns to the Miya family and influences the young heir Miya Satoshi to betray his father and try to militarize the peaceful family. Of course, creative GMs can put the Helm to many other uses, especially if it manages to escape Scorpion control.

The Battles of White Stag and the Raging Seas

Garen Hawthorne returns to Otosan Uchi in force, landing on the White Stag peninsula, fortifying the position and launching raids and cannon bombardments against the capital city. The Rokugani are shocked by the gaijin gunpowder weapons, which they perceive as some form of evil magic. The land battle quickly escalates when the Empress and the Lion Clan Champion, Akodo Kurojin, are killed by cannon fire in the early stages of the fighting. Soldiers of every clan converge on the capital city to aid in the struggle against the gaijin—even the Mantis, who decide to cut their losses and call in their fleet to confront the gaijin ships.

The devastating power of cannon and volley-firing muskets nearly breaks the Rokugani troops, many of whom believe they are being struck down by blasphemous gaijin sorcery. The Imperial defenders finally rally when Ikoma Genmuro takes command and uses his insights from the past two winters of speaking with Garen against the pirate "admiral." After hours of pitched battle and the loss of many of the Empire's finest soldiers, Garen is forced to retreat, pulling his remaining men back aboard ship and making a run for the open seas.

In the Bay of the Golden Sun, Garen and his remaining Merenae allies are confronted by a combined fleet of Crane and Mantis ships, cloaked in magical fogs created by the orders of the Crane Champion, Doji Kakumei. The ensuing clash is known as the Battle of the Raging Seas. Despite the protection of the fog, Rokugani casualties to point-blank cannon and musket fire are frightful, but in the end overwhelming numbers and samurai courage prevail. Only a handful of Thrane ships manage to fight free of the battle, led by Garen's flagship, the *Revenant*. They set sail southward, intending vengeance upon the Mantis.

- Garen's fleet becomes hopelessly lost in unfamiliar waters and sails past the Isles of Spice and Silk, eventually entering the Sea of Shadows opposite the Shadowlands. The ships draw the attention of the terrible spirit known as the skull tide and are driven ashore in the Shadowlands. They are not seen again for nearly seven centuries.
- Agasha Kasuga, after extensive conversations with Teodoro Cornejo, privately arranges safe passage for Teodoro out of the city, meeting up with his brethren to the north. There they board a small number of Yasuki trading vessels, likewise arranged by Agasha Kasuga, and flee back to their own lands. Kasuga accompanies them and undertakes extensive negotiations with Cornejo and other representatives of the Merenae people.
- After a month of mourning for the death of Hantei Yugozohime, her uncle Hantei Muhaki ascends the throne reluctantly. Yugozohime's eldest child Retsuhime is not yet of age to rule, and will not be for several years. While the Imperial consort Doji Usan still lives, the consensus of the Imperial Court is that in these chaotic times the people crave the presence of a Hantei on the throne. The new Emperor formally declares trade with the gaijin barbarians is illegal and orders any barbarian in the Empire be executed on the spot. After seeing demonstrations of the terrible gaijin weaponry, he also proclaims the use of "Gaijin Pepper" to be illegal on pain of death.
- Akodo Godaigo spends his entire fortune to lay the foundations for a castle dedicated to Matsu Hitomi's memory. He does not see the completion of the Castle of the Faithful Bride, for he is cursed and Tainted by Uragiri's *maho*. He disappears shortly after the foundation is laid, seeking to find and kill Uragiri once and for all, not knowing Hitomi's curse of immortality will cause this search to span many centuries.

Alternate Paths: The Great Shadowlands Fleet?

Once he reaches the Shadowlands Garen soon becomes Lost, a corrupt monster obsessed with destroying Otosan Uchi and avenging himself for his defeat at White Stag. However, in the canonical history of Rokugan Garen and his handful of ships remain largely unseen until the twelfth century, when he allies with Daigotsu and offers his ships to help the Dark Lord invade Otosan Uchi.

However, what would have happened if more than just a few damaged ships had fled into the Sea of Shadows? What if all of the gaijin had done so, or if Garen commanded a fleet larger than previously thought? This might have led to a mass invasion of mainland Rokugan in later years as Hawthorne and his undead crews attacked the Empire that caused their fall into corruption. A creative GM can easily imagine a scenario in which Fu Leng rides aboard Hawthorne's flagship the *Revenant* as the ship's cannons bring down the walls of Otusan Uchi, allowing a horde of skeletal sailors to swarm through the Imperial city. All manner of epic adventures can be built out of such an alternative timeline.

- As winter approaches, Agasha Kasuga returns to the Imperial capitol and requests a private audience with Emperor Hantei Muhaki. The contents of their talk is known only to them, but afterward the Emperor proclaims Kasuga the leader of the new Tortoise Clan, living on the White Stag peninsula and officially comprised of Kasuga's family and the Yasuki traders who aided him. In fact, the new Minor Clan also includes most of the few remaining gaijin in Rokugan, and its secret duty is to conduct covert trade with the overseas gaijin in order to spy on them and hopefully avoid a future repeat of the White Stag incident.
- **Changing the Histories:** During the winter of the year 442, an informal alliance between the Imperial families, the Ikoma, and the Shosuro begins systematically working to protect the dignity of the Imperial throne in the historical record. They slowly purge discussion of the Gozoku from the official histories, and take pains to ensure that all public documentation on the Battles of White Stag and the Raging Seas paints the Empire and the Empress in the most positive light, glosses over all Imperial and clan indiscretions, and shows the gaijin as nameless rogues and villains.

Alternate Paths: The Battle of White Stag

White Stag and its accompanying naval battle are, in more ways than many realize, formative points of the modern Empire. Clever GMs interested in alternate timelines can make a great deal of use of White Stag and the alternative possibilities it offers.

For example, perhaps a GM might choose not to involve Kenshin's Helm and instead permit the Miya to broker peace. This would allow long-term trade and contact with the overseas gaijin, both Merenae and Thrane, with significant impacts on Rokugan's subsequent development. Religious and cultural conflict between the traditional Rokugani and their foreign visitors would be almost a guarantee. The Mantis, under the Gusai family, might rise to Great Clan status centuries before they did in the canonical timeline, due to the wealth and influence they would acquire through public trade with the Merenae. Rokugan might become more actively involved in exploring the outside world, encountering other foreign nations such as the Ivory Kingdoms and making peace or war with the Yobanjin to the north. And of course the growth of foreign trade would bring with it the confusion and cultural ferment of economic and technological change, possibly leading to either social breakdown or a backlash against foreign influence. The Heroes of Rokugan era, depicted in Chapter Nine of this book, depicts a hypothetical future in which the Empire is wrestling with such issues, and GMs can use it as inspiration for a timeline in which White Stag was averted. Of course, not all players will be interested in a world where the gaijin are influencing Rokugan—the GM should consider their preferences before launching such a story.

Another alternate possibility would be to introduce a less drastic change that allows some 'gaijin flavor' into certain parts of Rokugan without massive social upheaval. For example, in the canon universe, the Cornejo family remains warm towards the Mantis but does not resume active contact until Calixto Cornejo returns to Rokugan centuries later. The GM could instead choose to have the Mantis seek out and secretly trade with the Cornejo family—perhaps right under the Kasuga family's noses, or perhaps with the tacit permission of the Tortoise—in the later years of Gusai Mori's leadership. Such a timeline change would have relatively little impact on Rokugan as a whole, but bring significant differences to the Mantis Clan, who would enjoy vastly increased wealth, better ship designs, and perhaps a secret stash of gaijin weaponry. A daring GM could also use this sort of timeline to covertly introduce gaijin pepper (gunpowder) weapons more widely into Rokugan, perhaps in the hands of pirates, bandits, shinobi, and similar groups... though of course the Empire at large would almost certainly not know what they are and still fear them as some form of 'black magic.'

Year 443

- Gusai Mori returns to Mantis lands after Winter Court, acclaimed publicly as a hero for his actions in the Battle of the Raging Seas despite his earlier involvement with the Merenae expedition. Accepting his losses, he leaves the smuggling trade to the Kasuga and bides his time. Far over the seas, the Cornejo family remembers the Mantis clan's kindness fondly, and when they return to Rokugan in the twelfth century it will be the Mantis they contact first.
- A handful of gaijin remain in the Empire, mostly in small scattered bands who struggle to hide among the populace. The Imperial Legions hunt them down systematically, exterminating them within the year. However, one larger and more powerful group manages to stand off the attacks and offers a truce, requesting a meeting with the Emperor. Hantei Muhaki, anxious to bring an end to violence in the Empire, agrees to meet them—but the offer proves to be a trap. Only through the intervention of an archer named Matsu Koritome is the Emperor saved; the young archer slaughters almost all the gaijin, albeit at the cost of his own life.
- An archery contest is held in the Lion lands in honor of Matsu Koritome's deeds. After two days, two hundred Lion are still in competition; the results so impress the new Champion of the Lion, Akodo Zaruko, that he names the two hundred as the founding members of the Koritome vassal family.

Matsu Koritome and Gaijin in the Empire

Matsu Koritome was a paragon of virtue and one of the most celebrated heroes of the Lion Clan, though few outside of the Lion remember him. He was arguably the finest bowman of his era, possessed of superb natural athleticism and no fear whatsoever. His fame, however, came from the manner of his death. A group of Thrane and Mereane refugees, having lost contact with their fleet the year before, sought revenge by pretending to seek terms for an end to their fighting. They sent missives to the capitol claiming they wished to end the violence and parlay for peace. When the Emperor approached, they opened fire with muskets, devastating Muhaki's Lion and Seppun escorts.

It was by sheer fortune that Koritome was present that day, being merely one of many Lion in the Emperor's guard. With his comrades wounded or dead and the Emperor pinned down by enemy fire, Koritome engaged the enemy alone with his bow, stopping their advance with a barrage of arrows. He expected to die in moments, but his athletic grace and gift for archery proved greater than that. When he finally fell dying before his Emperor, all of the gaijin were dead, pierced by his arrows.

GMs may find the story of Matsu Koritome also provides options for smaller-scale adventures involving gaijin who escaped the Battle of White Stag. Such refugees and conspirators could easily hide for months in the Empire's more remote provinces, perhaps even taking over bandit gangs or selling their services to unscrupulous lords who find gunpowder weapons appealing. Small battles to purge the last of the Thrane and Merenae could be played out for years, as long as the players remain interested.

Year 445

- Concerned about the loyalty of the Yogo family, the Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Junzen hands three of the Black Scrolls to his son Tesaguri. Compelled by the Helm of Kenshin toward a foolish choice, Tesaguri sells the three scrolls to the Phoenix Clan. When the Yogo daimyo, Ichinore, brings this fact to his father's attention, Tesaguri flees with Kenshin's Helm. He is caught and killed by Yogo Ichinore and his agents, who perform an impromptu ritual binding his soul to the tree where he is slain. This establishes the dark traditions of the place that comes to be known as Traitor's Grove.
- In the wake of Tesaguri's actions, the Helm is recognized as being afflicted with some kind of curse. It is stored away beneath Kyuden Bayushi. Tesaguri's deed strains Phoenix - Scorpion relations for generations to come.

The Spirit of the Age

"Bushido is more than any one virtue in isolation. Courage is found within compassion, justice carried out with sincerity. Bushido is not seven separate roads to the same destination, but one path paved with seven virtues."

—Hantei Yugozohime

The reign of Hantei Yugozohime, while strong, was also brief and haunted by the memory and legacy of the preceding Gozoku era. It was a period in which loyalty to the throne was absolute on the surface and none would dare openly question the Empress' power or dominion, but backdoor politics took on a particularly venomous undertone and words truly were as deadly as a man's sword. Rokugan was still recovering from an era when clans had interfered with and subverted the power of the Imperial Throne in a nearly catastrophic way. The Otomo family, previously merely a home for non-inheriting Hantei, found its true role during this period, taking the mandate of Yugozohime with relish and building an environment of mutual hatred and animosity between the clans that would avert any future attempt to build a second Gozoku. Wars such as the one fought by Matsu Hitomi were the result.

This was the environment Teodoro Cornejo and Garen Hawthorne entered: a cesspool of the most deadly politics imaginable. Rokugan would have had difficulty meeting these strangers even in a time of peace, but the massive level of suspicion and unease already present in the Imperial courts made their arrival far more problematic. Joined with traditional Thrane and Merenae animosity and the ambitions of Gusai Mori, this environment led to a tragic

Yugozohime, Muhaki, and Retsuhime

The seventh, eighth, and ninth Hantei Emperors shared a uniquely close familial bond, one stronger than most in history. Otomo Muhaki, the uncle of Yugozohime, was the only member of her family with whom the future Empress shared close ties. An elderly widower, he was a traditionalist who favored absolute Imperial authority and detested the submission of his brother Kusada to the Gozoku Alliance. He visited Yugozohime often during her training with the Lion and supplemented their teachings of Bushido with his own ideals. After she became Empress, he stayed close within the courts, where he could offer advice and counsel. The two were both allies and friends.

Yugozohime's death was a terrible blow to Muhaki, who had no children himself and had come to view her as a kind of surrogate daughter. The Otomo, Lion, and Dragon called on him to serve despite his grief, unwilling to entrust the regency to a Crane so soon after the Gozoku era. With their support he took the throne until Yugozohime's eldest daughter Retsuhime could rule. During his time as Emperor, Muhaki spent much time with Retsuhime, treating her as his own family; he trained her, raised her, and saw to it that she had a deep love for her mother's principles and conduct. She, like her mother and uncle, distrusted the clans of the former Gozoku and also hated anything 'foreign,' leading to a series of small border skirmishes with the Yobanjin tribes beyond the Great Wall of the North Mountains. However, perhaps the most obvious sign of her favoring her mother's and uncle's attitudes was her choice, against her father Usan's very vocal complaints, to marry a Matsu in honor of Empress Yugozohime's ties to the Lion.

conflagration, as though the gaijin visitors were a match thrown into a room full of gaijin pepper.

Several factors played a role in the events that led to White Stag. No one individual was without blame. Teodoro and Garen were both opportunistic and pragmatic men, dishonorable by the standards of Rokugan, and thoroughly ruthless as well—each would have been more than happy to see the other dead in a ditch. Gusai Mori's ambitious nature, so like his father's, led him to manipulate their rivalry in the hope of acquiring vast wealth and power for his small clan. The Empress and Emerald Champion, too, were ill-prepared both due to their overly rigid adherence to traditions from earlier years and their inability to comprehend the distinctions between the Thrane and Merenae, viewing both as filthy, barely tolerable curiosities in their court. The complete lack of experience throughout Rokugan with foreign peoples, coupled with the Imperial Court's generally cutthroat tone, increased every small problem into an international incident. And behind the scenes lurked the Helm of Kenshin, whose cursed influence shattered the last chances for peace that remained, dashing any hope of reconciliation and launching a brief but terrible war.

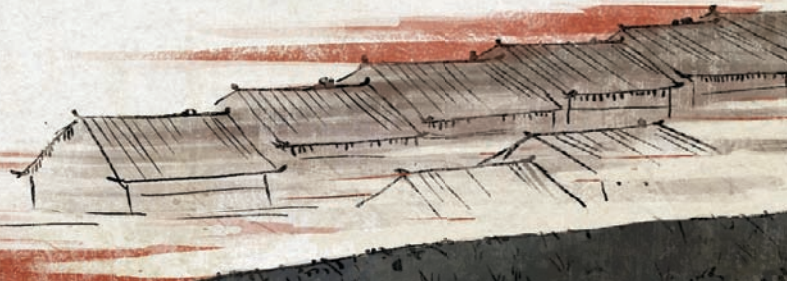
To the Imperial historians of this era, the events of White Stag were a deep embarrassment. A fledgling alliance had already developed between the Ikoma, Shosuro, and Otomo to cleanse and protect the Imperial histories and avoid any aspersion falling upon the throne, and this era strengthened that alliance into an iron unity. Nearly the entirety of Hantei Yugozohime's reign would be expunged from the records, as would most information about the Gozoku. Within a century, Rokugan would remember her as an incredibly strong Empress who reigned over a time of comparative peace, and whose death was a shocking tragedy that could never have been predicted.

The subsequent reigns of Hantei Muhaki and then of Yugozohime's daughter Retsuhime demonstrated the depths of the Empire's wounds. Muhaki became obsessed with promoting and protecting rigid orthodoxy and traditional Imperial authority, even striking against his allies in the Lion in later years by condemning portions of Akodo's *Leadership*. Retsuhime's sole breach from tradition was her decision to marry a Matsu husband; otherwise her reign was an era of silence, with peace within the Empire's boundaries (outside of minor skirmishes against the Yobanjin in the north) but a particularly rigid attitude towards the roles of individuals, clans, and families. Although by the end of her life the histories of her mother's reign had been fully rewritten, her own rule was marked by a lingering sense of unease and she died without heir. The next Emperor, Hantei X, was a distant relative traced through the lineage of the Otomo family, the first time such a measure was taken to maintain the succession.

In the end, it is difficult to say if anyone truly 'won' the Battle of White Stag. The Thrane and Merenae were slaughtered, with only a smattering of either race escaping to their homeland; Garen Hawthorne became one of the Lost. The Empress was dead and the clans would be years recovering from their losses, especially the Crane and Lion. The Mantis had seen their standing soar but then plummet back to earth with a resounding crash, and while they were wealthier they would suffer a lingering distrust from the other clans as long as the Gusai family ruled them. Only the new Tortoise Clan came out of the era truly unscathed, perhaps because it embraced its rather unique new role with such relish: the only clandestine gateway across the ocean.

The State of the Clans

The White Stag Era is a very atypical time in the history of Rokugan. The clans which are usually the most politically powerful have lost considerable influence due to their recent participation in the Gozoku Alliance, while the Lion enjoy an unusually high level of prestige. Many of the clans are also still working to hunt down and purge the last remnants of the Gozoku within their ranks, resulting in uncertainty and disunity even within the famously loyal Scorpion Clan. Naturally, the arrival of gaijin only further confuses things.



The Crab Clan

The White Stag Era is a time of turmoil and rebuilding for the Crab Clan, as the clan recovers from the Gozoku era, stumbles into war with the Dragon, and deals with the frustration of being unable to defend the Empire from an outside threat.

At the beginning of this era the Crab have endured a long period of political impotence and frustration due to the rule of the Gozoku Alliance. The clan makes considerable effort to improve its position, embracing an unusual alliance with the Scorpion Clan and seeking trade agreements with clans all across the Empire. Unfortunately, these very efforts lead to war when trade negotiations between the Crab and the Dragon, mediated by the Otomo and Miya, break down over accusations the Dragon are making false representations. Tensions rise severely as the Crab look for reasons to make war and punish the Dragon for their dishonesty. (In truth, the Otomo actively provoked the conflict as part of their new duty to the Empress.) When a Yasuki courtier is thrown out of a Dragon court after a disagreement about trade, war becomes inevitable.

The war itself is both short and, from the Crab perspective, deeply disappointing. The Crab are forced to march an army through Beiden Pass and into the northern Empire to try to confront the Dragon. Although the Scorpion Clan is happy to allow its new Crab allies to pass through its lands, the Crab are nonetheless very far from home and must face a joint Dragon-Lion army. The Crab experience one of the swiftest defeats in war they have ever known, a disappointment that prompts generals among the Crab to begin studying Lion tactics in case the two clans someday come to blows again.

The Crab as a whole are deeply uneasy with the arrival of gaijin in the Empire; their long service protecting the southern border has made them instinctively hostile to anything coming from outside Rokugan. The clan's new Yasuki family, however, sees the gaijin as an opportunity for profit, profit which is especially useful for a clan still rebuilding from the Yasuki War itself. The Yasuki make many approaches to the gaijin, trying to find ways in which they can use the gaijin trade to rebuild the Crab Clan's economic influence and political power.

It is thus perhaps no real surprise that members of the Yasuki family assist Agasha Kasuga in his quiet plan to help many of the gaijin flee the Empire after White Stag. The Yasuki hoped to maintain covert contacts with the gaijin—especially after witnessing the power of their strange weapons. Indeed, a monopoly on smuggling gaijin goods would have been hugely profitable for the clan. In the event, when Agasha Kasuga and his Yasuki helpers return to the Empire, the ship captains and crews became part of the newly formed Tortoise Clan. Although this was not quite what they were hoping for, it did give the Crab extensive contacts and allies within the new Minor Clan and this connection remained strong for centuries, with the Yasuki able to funnel Tortoise goods to markets they could not otherwise reach and the Tortoise able to smuggle Yasuki goods out of the Empire. (If the Yasuki had taken the initiative to save the gaijin on their own, or if Agasha Kasuga had failed to return alive from the gaijin lands, it is entirely possible the Yasuki themselves might have been granted the duty held by the Tortoise Clan in the canonical history.)

For the rest of the clan, however, the events of White Stag were a deep humiliation. The Crab viewed the death of the Empress as a blow to their own duty as defenders of Rokugan, and while they did not take it quite as badly as the Lion it was still a bitter pill to swallow. The Crab were also shocked by the power of gaijin pepper, and while a few among them (especially in the Kaiu) were intrigued by the strange foreign weapon, most Crab were more than happy to support the new Emperor's decree forbidding the alien substance.

The Crane Clan

In the wake of the Gozoku Alliance and its fall, the Crane Clan finds itself badly out of favor in most courts as well as in the eyes of the Empress and her successors. Indeed, Yugozohime's daughter Retsuhime ultimately chooses not to marry a Crane, something unprecedented in the past and not repeated within the lifespan of the Hantei Dynasty. Thankfully for the Left Hand, Yugozohime herself does choose to marry a Crane, Doji Usan, and his influence helps the clan recover at least

some of its political power. Usan's decision to abdicate his position as Emerald Champion after marrying the Empress is widely seen as a gesture of contrition and penance for his clan's previous involvement with the Gozoku conspiracy.

Despite the efforts of samurai like Usan, the Crane Clan remains a clan that is quietly at war within itself. There are still many Crane who supported the efforts of the Gozoku and believe the Empire was better off under the Alliance than it is under the Lion-influenced Empress Yugozohime. To be sure, these samurai are much less vocal and organized than they were during the previous fifty years, and must guard their words carefully lest they be accused of treason. Nevertheless, they quietly try to find ways to return to the height of their power and to undermine the authority of those who brought down the conspiracy. They also work against the Phoenix Clan in court, since it was Shiba Gaijushiko who ultimately betrayed the conspiracy and helped dismantle its power.

Opposing these lingering pro-Gozoku Crane is the larger group, led by Usan and Clan Champion Doji Kakumei, which seeks to prove to the new Empress that the Crane Clan is once again a loyal servant of the scion of Heaven. These Crane do all they can to uproot and expose those who were once Gozoku supporters, and spend huge amounts of political and economic influence to prove their loyalty to the throne.

A notable but wholly secret development during this era is the development and growth of the secretive group known as the Daidoji Harriers. Originally just an elite branch of the family's scouts, the Harriers begin to evolve into a more ruthless force that is both effective and, unfortunately, quite dishonorable in its methods and tactics. The Daidoji family's close relationship with the gaijin Garen Hawthorne allows them to gain access to gaijin technology and thought, and many of the foreign ideas the Daidoji learn from the ruthless Thrane leader are later incorporated into the methods of the Harriers. This close relationship also allows the Harriers to secretly retain significant quantities of gaijin pepper after the gaijin are expelled from the Empire.

Before the gaijin expulsion, the nobles of the Crane are among the most intrigued by the gaijin and they import many foreign artworks during the two years it is legal to do so. Despite their limited number these pieces of art expose the Kakita artisans to new techniques, some of which are later quietly incorporated into traditional Rokugani artwork. There is even some interest in gaijin writing and poetry, although this is quickly abandoned once the gaijin are expelled.

When the Battle of White Stag erupts and Empress Yugozohime falls, Doji Usan calls on his clan to spare no effort to avenge the Empress' death. Crane soldiers hurl themselves on the fortifications at White Stag with the same fury as the Lion, and the Crane fleet sails into action alongside the Mantis at the Battle of the Raging Seas. Crane casualties are extremely heavy, and while this leaves the clan with much rebuilding to do over the next generation, it also restores the Empire's confidence in Crane loyalty to the Throne, doing much to end the lingering disgrace of the Gozoku era.

The Dragon Clan

In contrast to its relatively passive and retiring behavior in the Gozoku era, the Dragon Clan spends a significant portion of the White Stag era in a military conflict with the Crab Clan. The specific course of events that produces this unusual conflict—and the equally unusual alliance with

Dragon Explorers

It may be noted that up until White Stag, the Rokugani were never forbidden from entering gaijin lands. Although the only known instance of Rokugani travelers visiting the lands of the Merenae and Thrane are the Tortoise and the small Unicorn team that sailed on Shereid Ibn Shihan's vessel, that does not mean there were not others. Aside from merchants, some of the most likely to have reason to leave Rokugan are the tattooed men of the Dragon. Many of the *ise zumi* spend their lives traveling Rokugan seeking enlightenment, and more than one has ventured into the Burning Sands. It is entirely possible that Dragon monks, priests, and philosophers might have left the shores of Rokugan to seek wisdom and enlightenment in the lands of the gaijin. A creative GM can build a game or an entire campaign around such a voyage, or around another group sent by the Dragon Champion to retrieve their missing brethren.

the Lion Clan that ensures Dragon victory—is described in the timeline earlier in this chapter. Much of this involvement in external affairs is because the Dragon Clan Champion chooses to allow the clan diplomats more latitude to make treaties and arrangements than in earlier times. Having restored the Hantei Dynasty to its proper place as sole rulers of the Empire, Togashi wishes the Dragon Clan to be more active for a time in order to ensure the remnants of the Gozoku do not revive their fortunes.

Most Dragon regard the arrival of the gaijin with curiosity rather than with hostility or ambition. Since the Dragon are far less active in trade and politics than other clans, even during this relatively outgoing period of their history, they do not pay much attention to the commercial opportunities of gaijin trade. However, the curiosity and inquiry that lies in the heart of many Agasha and Togashi makes them eager to question the gaijin about their culture, art, and religious beliefs. There are even rumors and tales claiming that a few of the gaijin may have joined the Togashi order, although this has never been confirmed.

Once the Battle of White Stag erupts, the few Dragon troops located near the Imperial capital fight as fiercely as the rest of the Rokugani, and the Dragon Clan fully supports the new Emperor's decrees against further gaijin contact.

The Lion Clan

The White Stag era is a time of great strength and influence for the clan of Akodo. During this era the Lion Clan holds some of the most prestigious positions in the Empire, including the office of the Emerald Champion, and is the favored clan of the new Empress. Nor does this influence easily fade—indeed, a couple of decades after White Stag the new Empress, Hantei IX, marries a Lion. This era also sees the rise of one of the Lion Clan's greatest heroes, Matsu Hitomi, as well as one of their greatest villains, Kitsu Uragiri.

Perhaps the most notable Lion of this era is Matsu Mochihime, who vanquishes all other contestants to become the Emerald Champion. As Matsu daimyo she had been an outspoken proponent of the infallibility of the Celestial Order, so much so that the Gozoku forced Emperor Hantei Fujiwa to declare her ronin. One of Hantei Yogozohime's first acts was to restore Mochihime to the Lion, although later histories remember her as Matsu Mochiko to distance her life as the Emerald Champion from her earlier life as a ronin. She is one of the few Lion ever to become Emerald Champion and her honorable and successful tenure in the office brings much glory and influence to the Lion Clan.

Of course, if Mochihime is the most powerful Lion of this era, by far the most famous is Matsu Hitomi, the legendary paragon of Bushido whose tragic life and death have been memorialized in innumerable plays, poems, and pillow-books. Hitomi's story is recounted in the timeline earlier in this chapter, as well as in her personal entry on page 121 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*. However, Hitomi's story is also the story of one of the foulest villains in the history of the Lion, Kitsu Uragiri. Uragiri was the spiritual advisor to Akodo Godaigo, but he was also a powerful and utterly corrupt *maho-tsukai*. When Godaigo was forced to hunt down Matsu Hitomi, Uragiri poisoned his mind with sinister words, *maho* spells, and the terrible gift of Kenshin's Helm. As a result, the maddened Godaigo attacked Toshi no Omoidasu with overwhelming force, finally realizing his mistake when the city lay in ruins around him and Hitomi was dying at his feet. Hitomi cursed Godaigo with her dying breath: *"You will find no honorable death, betrayer! You will be cursed to walk the earth forever, without death as you are without honor!"* Shaken, Godaigo turned to confront Uragiri, but the treacherous *maho-tsukai* had slipped away during the battle. Hitomi's curse forced Godaigo to wander the Empire for centuries, neither alive nor dead, searching endlessly for the traitor Uragiri.

The Lion are not pleased by the arrival of the gaijin in Rokugan, and are continually the foremost voice urging that the strange, dirty, uncouth strangers be expelled from the Empire. When the

Battle of White Stag erupts, the Lion believe the gaijin have merely shown their true nature, and the deaths of both the Empress and the Lion Clan Champion in the opening stage of the battle drive them into a relentless fury. Lion soldiers hurl themselves against the gaijin fortifications again and again, thousands falling to musket and cannon fire, until finally the foreign troops break and flee. The Lion Clan remembers the dead of White Stag with honor and reverence.

The Lion distinguish themselves yet again in the immediate aftermath of White Stag when a scout named Matsu Koritome saves the Emperor from a pack of gaijin refugees who ambush him under a flag of truce. The Koritome vassal family, formed in honor of this man's heroic death, is the backbone of Lion archery units for centuries to come.

Despite the terrible losses at the Battle of White Stag, the Lion Clan remembers this era as one of unprecedented glory and political influence. The heroism of the Lion armies, the tragic tales of their heroes, and the glorious service of samurai like Mochihime serve to bolster the spirits of not just the clan but the Empire itself, restoring faith in Celestial Order and the Code of Bushido after the long reign of the Gozoku.

The Phoenix Clan

Of the three clans who took part in the Gozoku conspiracy, the Phoenix suffer the fewest long-term effects, in large part because the primary Phoenix conspirator, Shiba Gaijushiko, turned on his fellow conspirators and helped the Empress to dismantle the entire organization. Despite this, during the decades immediately following the fall of the Gozoku the Phoenix are virtual political pariahs. Their participation in the Gozoku makes them politically risky to associate with publicly, while the fact that they turned on the rest of the Gozoku makes them seem untrustworthy to those who were once part of the conspiracy. There are still a few within the Phoenix who enjoyed the unprecedented political power they possessed during the Alliance's reign and who continue to work with agents from other clans, most notably the Crane and Scorpion, to try to regain some measure of that power; however, their numbers are few and their influence continues to dwindle during this era. Conversely, there is a much larger group within the post-Gozoku Phoenix who see the actions of the Gozoku as actual religious blasphemy, an affront to the teachings of the Tao; they actively hunt down those with ties to the conspiracy.

Given this mixture of diminished influence and internal division, it should not be surprising that the Phoenix play little role in the events of the White Stag era. They regard the gaijin as curiosities at best, disgusting blasphemers at worst, and largely hold aloof from the trade arrangements and political schemes that surround them. The few Phoenix bushi and shugenja who are available in the capital do participate in the Battle of White Stag, of course, and the clan heartily approves of the new Emperor's order to halt all further contact with foreigners.

In a strange quirk of fate, caused in part by Kenshin's Helm, at the end of this era the Phoenix acquire three of the Black Scrolls from the son of the Scorpion Champion. At the time, the clan views this as an important measure to ensure these deadly scrolls are not entrusted solely to the Scorpion Clan. However, six centuries later these scrolls will nearly destroy the Phoenix when the Elemental Masters open them—an event recounted in Chapter Six: The Clan War.

The Scorpion Clan

Due to the events of the Gozoku era, the Scorpion Clan spends most of the reign of Empress Yugozohime deeply out of favor in the courts and in the eyes of the Imperial families. The clan has just waged a bitter internal struggle to purge the Gozoku loyalists of Bayushi Atsuki and his daughter, leaving it weakened within as well as without. The new Scorpion Champion, Bayushi Junzen, sets out to court allies from other clans, even clans the Scorpion would normally avoid. The most notable fruit of this effort is a marriage alliance between the Scorpion and the Crab, the Shosuro daimyo's daughter marrying the heir to the Kaiu daimyo.

The Scorpion have mixed feelings about the arrival of the gaijin. Although they are not instinctively culturally hostile to the gaijin as the Lion and Phoenix are, they are deeply suspicious of the foreigners' true intentions, and uneasy at the way their presence disrupts established pat-

terns in politics and trade. The Scorpion make a point of investigating the gaijin carefully and manage to uncover at least some of the secrets of gaijin pepper prior to the Battle of White Stag. When conflict finally erupts, the Scorpion fight willingly for the Empire, seeing the violence as affirmation of their earlier suspicions. They do, however, hold onto the knowledge of gaijin pepper they have already gained, eventually putting it to good use with their shinobi.

In some ways, the Scorpion Clan in this era suffers more from the malevolent power of Kenshin's Helm than it ever does from the gaijin. When the Helm falls into the hands of the Clan Champion's son, it causes the clan to fail one of its most sacred duties, that of protecting the Black Scrolls which held the soul of Fu Leng. Bayushi Tesaguri steals three of the scrolls and sells them to the Phoenix, and when he is finally captured on the slopes outside of Kyuden Bayushi, his gruesome execution gives rise to one of the clan's darkest traditions: Traitor's Grove, a cluster of trees where the souls of Scorpion traitors are bound into the living wood forever.

The Unicorn Clan

During this era the Unicorn Clan is still traveling the gaijin lands far beyond the Empire's borders. However, they are actually instrumental in leading the Merenae and Thrane to visit Rokugan. A chance trip by Moto and Ide scouts to a distant port city leads to contact between the Unicorn and the Merenae. Relations between the two peoples are good, if limited, and prompt the Cornejo family's decision to send a fleet to visit Rokugan itself.

GMs are of course free to run a campaign set among the wandering Unicorn during their long journey through foreign lands, and this era is just as useful for such a game as any other.

The Imperial Families

"Where we once lacked focus, the Empress has granted it to us. There is no greater gift possible than purpose."

—Otomo Hokusai,
Otomo family daimyo, year 439

During the White Stag era the Imperial families are in a time of rebuilding and consolidation, attempting to overturn the last of the Gozoku influence and re-establish the primacy of the Hantei Dynasty and of themselves as its chief supporters. At the same time there is also a quiet witch-hunt within the Imperial families to root out those who actively conspired with the Gozoku Alliance, resulting in over twenty members of the Otomo and Seppun families retiring well before their allotted time.

The Otomo family is the most active during this era, and works feverishly to build a political power base strong enough to fulfill its new duty of provoking conflict and division between the clans. It will be another generation before the Otomo reach full power, and much of their efforts during this era go toward quietly opposing the Crane, Phoenix, and Scorpion, ensuring the three Gozoku clans are not strong enough to resume their mischief. Taxes are funneled away from these three clans, invitations to courts and tournaments lost, census numbers twisted, and so on. In addition, the Otomo also begin to work on provoking wars elsewhere in the Empire, and contribute significantly to the Crab-Dragon conflict.

The Seppun initially find themselves being edged out in their traditional duties by the Matsu and Akodo, who feverishly watch over the Empress day and night. In fact, this causes significant tension between individual Seppun and Lion in the Imperial Palace, even provoking a few duels. After the rise of Matsu Mochihime as Emerald Champion much of the tension is alleviated, as she firmly asserts the honor of the Seppun, and her presence convinces most Lion that the Empress is safe. Under her tenure the Seppun slowly regain their proper position and reputation.

Ironically, the lowly Miya have the strongest actual influence on events in this era, due to the malign effects of Kenshin's Helm. Although the family works hard at its traditional duties, carrying the word of the Empress across the land, restoring confidence in Imperial law, and negotiating peace treaties, the power of the Helm causes their negotiations to fail catastrophically in the most important instance of all: the attempt to avert war after conflict erupts with the gaijin.

The Minor Clans

For the most part, the Minor Clans stay out of the tumult of the fifth century, both during the Gozoku era and the later White Stag era. The newly created Sparrow and Boar Clans in particular prefer to avoid attention and focus on their own affairs. Doubtless a few diplomats and bushi

from the Minor Clans become embroiled in the events surrounding the gaijin, but history does not record their names or specific deeds.

However, the White Stag era is a very significant time in the history of the Mantis Clan. Having attained official Minor Clan status and a family name barely a generation earlier, the Mantis are eager to advance their position in Rokugan. Gusai Mori, the first Champion of the Mantis to wear the Gusai name earned by his father, works hard to take full advantage of the gaijin and the commercial opportunities they represent. Mantis vessels are the first to meet the gaijin as they enter Rokugani waters and it is the Mantis Clan which arranges an audience with the Empress. The Mantis learn much about the ways gaijin conduct trade, and make every effort to study their nautical technology and learn more about the world at large. When things finally go terribly wrong, Gusai recognizes which way the wind is blowing and joins the Crane fleet in fighting the gaijin at the Battle of the Raging Seas.

In truth, the Mantis Clan's success in this era may have been a poisoned gift. The clan leaders became obsessed with advancing their ambitions as quickly as possible, and mere decades later Gusai Mori's son goes too far and takes the Emperor's son hostage.

The other notable event of this era for the Minor Clans is the creation of the small and very odd Tortoise Clan. Formed from a mixture of Yasuki ship captains, hidden gaijin refugees, and the family of Agasha Kasuga, the Tortoise become smugglers and spies, watching foreign ports and maintaining covert contacts with the Thrane and Merenae civilizations. In truth, in their founding they probably accomplish considerably more than that. If Agasha Kasuga had not taken the initiative and helped so many gaijin escape the Empire, there is a distinct possibility the Merenae might have sought war with Rokugan in retribution for the death of so many of their people.

Timelines and Destinies: A Different Rokugan

The time of the Battle of White Stag was a potential watershed moment in Rokugan's history. For the first time since the Kami founded the Empire, a significant social and cultural interaction occurred inside the Empire's borders with sovereign foreign powers. And it was an interaction that ended in disaster. By the time the (literal) smoke cleared, the Empress and many other nobles were dead, along with thousands of other Rokugani and hundreds of Thrane and Meranae; significant damage had been done to Otosan Uchi and its surroundings; a sudden and major shift in the Rokugani political landscape had occurred; and, most significantly, the mistrust of foreigners by the Rokugani was deeply intensified and built into Imperial law. However, while such periods of upheaval often spark changes in a society, Rokugan emerged from the time of White Stag not substantially different than it had been before. For a GM running a campaign set in this period (or soon after it), it is worth examining two basic questions: how could Rokugan have changed, and why didn't it?

Gunpowder and History

For those GMs and players interested in what *could* have changed in Rokugan following the era of White Stag, it is useful to consider what happened in our own real world following the widespread adoption of gunpowder technology. In our world, most historians agree gunpowder was first developed in China in the 9th century AD. It was used for both military purposes (initially against Mongol invaders) and for ceremonial displays such as fireworks. By the 13th century, gunpowder was being used by Middle Eastern powers such as the Mamluks and Moors; it was introduced to Europe shortly thereafter. In subsequent years it came into ever more widespread use, particularly for military applications. Although the actual effectiveness of early gunpowder weapons was poor relative to traditional projectile weapons such as bows and crossbows, cannons were extraordinarily effective at breaching castles and were widely and effectively used—during English king Henry V's invasion of France, for example, he used a pair of early cannon to capture several French fortress towns. Moreover, as firearms themselves gradually became more reliable, they brought about a revolution in military affairs. Using a musket with basic effectiveness required merely rote memorization of a series of repetitive steps, allowing the weapons to be reliably fired *en masse* to compensate for their relatively short range and poor accuracy. This meant it was now possible to quickly train and field large numbers of troops, degrading the value of a professional standing warrior class and making it much easier to raise large armies quickly from peasant levies.

However, the impact of gunpowder technology was felt far beyond the battlefield. It spurred significant advances in metallurgy, manufacturing processes, ballistics, and chemistry. The use of cannons as siege weapons required more accurate instruments for measuring angles and trajectories, which not only pushed innovation in the development of precision optics and survey devices but also promoted more accurate cartography and the publication of better and more accurate maps. This, in turn, led to significant reforms in land ownership and record-keeping, helping to spur a new era of global exploration to map previously unknown regions.

It is easy to see, then, that Rokugan could have undergone fundamental changes had the Thrane and Meranae mission to the Empire not gone so disastrously wrong. Even if relations never developed into open and free trade with these foreign powers, the influence of their technologies over time would probably have brought significant changes to the Empire. The Mantis and Unicorn Clans, for

Firearms as Alien Metaphysics

Over the history of the L5R RPG, there have been several hints that firearms and gunpowder represent not just a different technology but actually a different set of metaphysics than Rokugan's world of the Elements, the kami, and the Celestial Wheel. In particular, the fact that the sacred enchanted walls of Otosan Uchi (which healed any sort of damage they suffered from Rokugani magic, natural disasters, or siege engines) could not heal the craters caused by gaijin cannon bombardment would seem to suggest that gunpowder functioned in some way as "outside" the normal Rokugani cosmology. Some GMs may wish to ignore or minimize this aspect of gunpowder, especially in a game where "gaijin pepper" appears with some regularity. However, a GM who wishes to emphasize the alien, threatening, and unnatural aspects of gunpowder can instead opt to embrace this concept and perhaps even apply it more generally to how the Rokugani interact with gaijin.

If this option is used, damage from gunpowder and firearms ignores Reduction in all forms (including spells, Techniques, Kiho, Shadowlands powers, and other such supernatural effects) and cannot be mitigated by other effects such as Void Points, Invulnerability, the Spirit quality, or other special abilities. GMs may also wish to depict firearms and other types of gaijin technology as being resistant to the effects of Rokugani magic—for example, a summoned fire kami might be unable to set fire to a gaijin ship.

Of course, taking this sort of thing too far may result in gaijin coming across as superhuman unstoppable juggernauts. Since the Rokugani did in fact drive the gaijin out of the Empire, it may be more appropriate to show these effects "scaling" according to whether the gaijin are in their own lands (where their own metaphysics prevail) or in Rokugan (where they are intruders). Thus, using the aforementioned example of a summoned fire kami, the kami might be able to set fire to a gaijin ship in Rokugan (though perhaps with some effort) but would be unable to do so if it was summoned in gaijin lands. For that matter, Rokugani spellcasters in the Burning Sands often find it extremely difficult or even impossible to evoke the kami, and this restriction may be due to genuine differences in the underlying metaphysics of the world rather than some local circumstance. It is up to the GM how far to carry such ideas and how to treat the implications.

example, have proven themselves open to gaijin methods and technologies, while the Crab, ever pragmatic, may have been willing to experiment with gunpowder as another means of defeating the Shadowlands. In addition to the pressures for change and development that would result, the reactionary nature of Rokugan as a whole would have given rise to escalating tensions between these 'innovators' and the more traditional clans such as the Lion, Phoenix, and Crane (although the subsequent use of gunpowder technology by the Crane Harriers shows even the traditional clans have their more pragmatic factions).

Of particular concern to many of the samurai class in Rokugan would be the lessened importance of the samurai caste as a standing body of professional warriors. Warfare in Rokugan, although violent and bloody, is also steeped in honor and tradition, and the skills required to wage it are complex and require a lifetime of study to master. Arming the peasantry with simple ranged weapons that can dominate the battlefield, weapons whose use is readily learned by virtually anyone with a small amount of training, threatens to upset the proper conduct of warfare and render the katana-armed samurai largely irrelevant to the outcome of battles.

Gunpowder in Play

If a GM introduces gunpowder technology to his campaign, there are several things to consider. First, the weapons should be rare. Aside from the Mantis and, perhaps, the Unicorn (who, it should be noted, have not returned to Rokugan at the time of the Battle of White Stag), most of Rokugan will be deeply suspicious of this technology, and some clans will be outright hostile to it. This reaction will grow stronger once it becomes clear that the weapons are both effective and relatively easy to use. Use of such a weapon away from the battlefield, or even use at all in some clans, may well be considered dishonorable and characters carrying such weapons openly may be viewed with anything from wariness to outright hostility by other Rokugani.

The weapons will be primitive, crude, and clumsy. This should be reflected not only in the game mechanics but also in the way they are generally viewed by the Rokugani. Historically, early gunpowder weapons were bulky, unreliable, and generally shorter ranged and less accurate than bows or crossbows, and only achieved significant results when used for massed fire at relatively short range. They also were prone to misfiring or even exploding in the gunman's face. The firearms used by the Thrane and Merenae were relatively primitive: matchlock and possibly flintlock muskets, and matchfuse-ignited cannon. It is unlikely that the Rokugani would be able to devise more advanced forms of such weapons, and a GM who allows more sophisticated firearms will permanently change the nature of the game and of Rokugan itself in very profound ways. This is not a step to be taken lightly.

Finally, it must be remembered that Rokugan is a world in which magic works. There are no historical parallels to use when predicting what will happen when the power of

the spirits interacts with gunpowder technology. In fact, Rokugani magic can produce similar effects to gunpowder; for example, the spells Envious Flames and Fires from Within both function in a manner reminiscent of a firearm, but with far greater accuracy and reliability. On the other hand, such spells can only cast by shugenja, who are quite rare in Rokugani society. Thus it is not clear whether the availability of magic would help or hinder the introduction of gunpowder and other foreign technologies.

A GM should always consider the effect that even a limited amount of gunpowder would have in his campaign world. Do the more ambitious among the commoners, perhaps even some among the samurai, see gunpowder as a potential "equalizer" with regard to magic? Or is gunpowder viewed as a blasphemy against the Celestial Order for the same reason? Do both views prevail? As long as a GM is careful not to let gunpowder technology get too far developed and entrenched in his world, it does offer a variety of interesting avenues to explore, as the characters and the Empire both struggle to come to grips with these new innovations.

So why did Rokugan soundly reject gunpowder and other gaijin technologies even after they were demonstrated so powerfully at the Battle of White Stag? The answer is a deeply rooted cultural one, explained in detail in Chapter 11 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*. Rokugan is a deeply conservative society, founded according to a divine mandate under the original Kami, a mandate expressed in the Celestial Order. Gaijin such as the Thrane and Meranae have no place within the Celestial Order, and their influences—including gunpowder technology—can only threaten to upset that order. Accordingly, the gaijin and their influences are seen as inherently blasphemous, fit only to be rejected. In point of fact, Empress Hantei VII showed remarkable openness in even allowing the most tentative interaction to occur with the Thrane and Meranae; that it led to rising tensions and eventual violence between the Rokugani and the gaijin is actually unsurprising. Thus, the legacy of the White Stag era was not a new period of openness and enlightenment but instead a severe hardening and deepening of staunch traditionalism. In the immediate aftermath of the era, the GM should depict tolerance for gaijin influences as especially limited, and even if the GM decides to let gunpowder weapons come into use they will encounter severe social and cultural hostility.

Interactions Between Rokugani and Gaijin

"These filthy, stinking barbarians seduce our courts with strange trinkets and offers of gold, but they barely speak our language and know nothing of honor, tradition, or etiquette. Can they even be considered human?"

—Ikoma Danjo, year 441

A pivotal aspect of the White Stag era, obviously, is the deepening xenophobia of the Rokugani. Prior to the crises of the Battles of White Stag and the Raging Sea, the Empire was just barely open to foreigners; afterward, it completely rejected all outsiders. Certainly, some low-key relations did continue; for example, the Tortoise Clan was formed after the White Stag period specifically to maintain contact with (and keep a wary eye on) foreigners such as the Thrane and Meranae. Likewise, the Mantis maintained covert contact with the Ivory Kingdoms, and the Unicorn, Scorpion, and Dragon have variously interacted with factions in the Burning Sands. Even the Phoenix kept up a small degree of interaction with the Yobanjin tribes beyond the northern mountains. However, all of these relations are either covert or, if more widely known, result from specific events such as the exile of the Scorpion to the Burning Sands or the Kali-Ma Invasion.

Foreigners and Disease

In our own history, the arrival of travelers from distant lands often brings about the introduction of new diseases, unfamiliar to either group, with potentially disastrous consequences. Widely traveled visitors have something of an advantage in this scenario, having developed resistance to many illnesses while roaming the world for centuries, but they can still fall victim to some new virus or bacteria. In the official Rokugan timeline, the lands of the Thrane and Merenae are devastated by a seaborn plague in later centuries, severely damaging their civilizations and preventing them from returning to Rokugan in force even if they had wanted to.

In the official history of Rokugan, however, there is no major disease outbreak during the era of White Stag. This may have been partly due to Rokugan's obsessive hygiene, not to mention the presence of magic that can sometimes cure illness. However, creative GMs may wish to explore other possibilities. How would the Empire have dealt with a major plague outbreak at the same time as the confrontation with the gaijin? Would the pious Rokugani have seen such a disease as the result of divine disfavor, or would they have perceived a connection to the gaijin presence? And how bad would a foreign disease have become? If Rokugan had faced a plague as severe as the one which wrecks the Thrane and Merenae in later centuries, could the Empire have survived?

In the centuries after White Stag, few Rokugani have any opportunity (or interest) to interact with the peoples of the surrounding world. Unrestricted interaction with gaijin is generally illegal under Imperial law in order to prevent unwanted cultural contamination. In terms of an RPG campaign, interactions with gaijin should broadly fall into one of two categories: unofficial, meaning unconstrained but also covert or otherwise low-key, and official, which will be closely controlled and monitored by Imperial authorities.

Unofficial interactions lack Imperial sanction and are considered illegal. Discovery will mean punishment by Imperial authorities, although the severity of such punishment will depend on the nature of the interaction and the intent behind it (real or perceived). In the most egregious cases, where a Rokugani is known or suspected of engaging gaijin in ways considered treasonous, death by execution can be expected. Even in more innocuous cases—for example, conducting trade with a gaijin merchant solely for personal gain—punishments are still likely to be severe, including reduction in status, imprisonment, or exile. However, the reward may be worth such risks. Gaijin can provide valuable information about the world around Rokugan, as well as being sources for rare items and commodities that are difficult or impossible to find in the Empire—spices, drugs, odd technologies such as scissors or spy glasses, and so forth. There is always demand for such items, and those who can supply them can usually avoid inconvenient questions. Thus a Rokugani PC who is clever, careful, and lucky can find commerce with gaijin to be a lucrative endeavor.

Official interactions with gaijin have Imperial sanction and are conducted as part of a formal and carefully controlled process, usually in specific and constrained locations. While foreign delegations are by no means common at any point in the Empire's history, they have occurred more than once. Samurai who are considered honorable and trustworthy enough to meet with gaijin and perceptive enough to benefit from the experience could find themselves tasked to attend such meetings (perhaps accompanied by heimin merchants and artisans with specific skills and knowledge). Whether they do so on behalf of their clans or of the Empire generally would depend on the situation. This sort of situation can be an excellent roleplaying opportunity and can even serve as the starting point for an entire campaign. Of course, the GM should keep in mind that such meetings are carefully monitored by means both obvious and covert. Any evidence that a Rokugani delegate appears to be wavering in the face of exotic gaijin offerings, or putting his own interests ahead of the Empire, will draw a swift and decisive response.

Besides these two obvious types, there are several other sorts of potential interaction with gaijin which can occur inside or outside Rokugan.

PCs could inadvertently stumble into a meeting with foreigners without intending to do so. For example, a group of PCs lost in the northern mountains could encounter Yobanjin tribesmen, or even be rescued by such tribesmen when they are stranded by a winter storm. PCs travelling through the coastal provinces of the Crane could happen upon a group of shipwrecked Thrane. Such encounters are unofficial, of course, but how they develop depends on the players. Do their characters try to avoid the Yobanjin? Do they take the Thrane prisoner and hand them over to the Emerald Magistrates at the earliest opportunity?

PCs may wind up travelling abroad for some reason, such as taking a caravan to the Burning Sands or sailing to the Ivory Kingdoms on behalf of their lords. In these situations they will have no choice but to encounter gaijin and to deal with them in their home territories. This can lead to all sorts of interesting role-playing challenges, since the PCs will be cut loose from their normal cultural security and forced to take on the role of strangers in a strange land. Of course, the exact interactions will depend on how and why the PCs have been forced to travel outside the Empire. For example, if the PCs are part of a sanctioned Imperial mission to the Caliphate of Medinaat-el-Salam,

their behavior is likely to be more cautious than if they are there for their own purposes. PCs who have been exiled will be entirely on their own, of course, and will have to face many challenges and dangers with no Imperial power to back them up.

Finally, there are a few groups within the Empire that have interactions with gaijin as a matter of course. The Tortoise Clan and the Unicorn Clan are the most obvious example, but the Mantis have also conducted trade with the Ivory Kingdoms for centuries and even travel there in force during the twelfth century. Also during the twelfth century, the Scorpion and Dragon Clans have extensive dealings with the Burning Sands, so PCs from these clans may have valid reasons to be meeting with gaijin. Note, however, that "valid" in this case may be from the perspective of their clan but not necessarily the Empire as a whole. Whether the clan in question will disavow its samurai should they be discovered will depend on the nature of the business being conducted.

Roleplaying Xenophobia

So how does a Rokugani behave when confronted by a gaijin? In other words, what does Rokugani xenophobia look like? There is a general answer, but like all things related to Rokugan and its people, there are many variations and nuances depending on the individuals involved.

Every citizen of the Empire, from the Emperor to the lowliest *eta*, is defined by his place in the Celestial Order, a place that usually can only change through a cycle of death and rebirth that offers reward or punishment for deeds in the past life. Gaijin, who live apart from the Empire, also live apart from the Celestial Order and their very existence undermines this basic world-view. Even worse, gaijin do not recognize the Kami or the Fortunes and may profess to revere strange alien deities. All of this poses a huge obstacle to friendly relations between Rokugani and gaijin. The gaijin is outside the essential social order, cannot be reborn into it, and is thus less than human. At best, a gaijin can come to profess a crude understanding of the proper civilized approach to life, thereby gaining a measure of tolerance and perhaps even some respect. This is best exemplified by the story of Rama Singh, a gaijin from the Ivory Kingdoms who came to Rokugan in the twelfth century and eventually swore allegiance to the Mantis Clan, becoming Yoritomo Singh. However, Singh's experience is a radical exception to the rule. For the most part, gaijin cling to their own customs and beliefs, so the Rokugani continue to regard them as non-human followers of blasphemous cults and false traditions.

Of course, no matter how much contempt the Rokugani may feel toward gaijin, they still have dealings with them if such is needed. Indeed, some clans are quite pragmatic about such things. As both White Stag and the story of Rama Singh demonstrate, the Mantis tend to approach gaijin with relative ease, seeking mutual profit and alliance. The Unicorn, who spent eight hundred years outside the Empire travelling among the gaijin of the Burning Sands and beyond, are also fairly open to dealing with foreigners. And as noted earlier in this chapter, the Tortoise Clan was founded specifically in order to conduct discreet dealings with (and keep a careful eye on) overseas foreigners. However, none of this is to say that Mantis, Unicorn, or Tortoise samurai consider gaijin any less vile and inhuman than do other Rokugani. Rather, circumstance and duty have led these clans to simply be more pragmatic about setting such views aside in order to gain benefit from their interactions with gaijin. The same could be said to be true of the Scorpion, who tend to subsume their personal feelings in favor of whatever advantage they can gain from any situation. Indeed, in modern times the Scorpion also have a history of close interaction with gaijin (albeit under circumstances of duress) due to their exile to the Burning Sands in the Hidden Emperor era.

At the other extreme are those clans with the most insular and traditionalist attitudes who are far more likely to be openly intolerant of foreigners in Rokugan. This especially includes the Lion, of course, as well as the Crane, who consider themselves the custodians of proper behavior and etiquette in the Empire. The Phoenix and Dragon also generally fall into this category (indeed the Dragon are often quite insular even in relation to the rest of the Empire), although their location on the Empire's northern border has forced both clans to maintain some sort of relations with the Yobanjin peoples beyond the Great Wall of the North. In the twelfth century the Dragon become gradually more outgoing, however, and even go so far as

7th Sea Gaijin

AEG has previously published a role-playing game called *7th Sea* that depicts a quasi-European seafaring civilization, roughly equivalent to the 17th century of Earth's history. GMs who own and enjoy the *7th Sea* materials (they are still available through used game dealers or in electronic form) may wish to substitute the civilizations in that game for the Thrane and Merenae of the Rokugan world. The Merenae are broadly "Spanish" (as names like Cornejo imply) with a bit of French mixed in, so *7th Sea* nations like Castille or Montaigne can be substituted for them easily enough. Likewise the Thrane are vaguely "English" with a heavy dose of Dutch, and could be represented by the Avalon or the Vendel.

A GM who uses the *7th Sea* setting should consider that Theah (the world of *7th Sea*) is actually a heavily magical setting and has a radically different cosmology than Rokugan. Combining the two settings will probably invoke the "alien metaphysics" option described in another sidebar earlier in this chapter.

to establish limited contacts with the people of Medinaat el-Salaam.

The Crab are a particularly interesting clan with regard to gaijin relations. Like the Dragon, the Crab tend to be somewhat insular toward the rest of the Empire and often eschew conventions of acceptable Rokugani behavior, but they also share the Mantis pragmatic view that "whatever works, works." On the other hand, given their duty to protect the Empire from the threat of the Shadowlands, the Crab are naturally suspicious of the unknown, so it is more difficult to generalize the behavior of Crab samurai when faced with gaijin. To a greater extent than other clans, a Crab's reaction is likely be an individual one, tempered by personal experience and background more than by any broad clan bias.

It is important to note, of course, that the above "typical" views of gaijin are only a starting point for a character. A Mantis character may tend to be more open-minded and a Lion more naturally intolerant, but this is not a rigid template and players do not have to always conform to it. Rather, players should always consider their characters' individual views and reactions toward gaijin. These reactions are born not only from clan but also from the characters' personal back-stories and experiences. A Mantis samurai who was betrayed and almost killed by unscrupulous gaijin traders may have an especially dim view of foreigners; likewise, a Lion samurai who learned to apply tactical knowledge gained from the writings of *De Bellis Yoditorum* to good effect during the War of Dark Fire may have learned a degree of respect for its Yodotai authors.

Regardless of their attitudes, one should also consider the actual behavior of Rokugani around gaijin. A samurai will not simply fly into a rage or commit casual murder when encountering a gaijin. The more likely reaction is one blending curiosity and wariness with varying degrees of contempt. Only samurai with considerable experience around gaijin are likely to be relaxed in their presence; this does not mean they won't still feel disdain, but they will be better at controlling and concealing it. Such encounters can certainly escalate to hostility if the parties involved don't exercise restraint, but this is not automatic or inevitable.

Since gaijin are not part of the Celestial Order in Rokugan, they have no rights and are not protected by Rokugani law. Thus, killing a gaijin is not even a crime of property in the way that killing a peasant would be considered. However, the *practical* repercussions of killing a gaijin can go far beyond the act itself. The death of a member of a gaijin delegation could have negative effects on future diplomatic relations, cause problems with trade and commerce, or even lead to war. A samurai who kills or injures a gaijin ambassador is likely to at least find himself subject to some hard questions from his superiors, irrespective of the gaijin not being a proper part of the Celestial Order.

Finally, remember that language is likely to be a barrier to any communications with gaijin unless skilled translators are available. Rokugani who speak gaijin languages are quite rare and gaijin who speak Rokugani are equally difficult to find. Miscommunication through mistranslation is an ever-present risk during even the most carefully planned interactions with gaijin.

Gaijin Religious Practices, Culture, and Magic

The designers of L5R have deliberately avoided giving too much concrete information about the religions and cultures of gaijin peoples. Partly this is because the Rokugani themselves know very little on these topics and have never kept concrete records of such things. None within the Empire have ever been able to truly decipher the religious practices and cultural beliefs of the Thrane and Merenae, and what little information survived the era of White Stag always played up the supposed fact that gaijin practices were considered incredibly disturbing and blasphemous. As mentioned in Chapter 11 of the L5R supplement *Emerald Empire*, the Rokugani do believe the Thrane and the Merenae follow the same false religion, or perhaps two different variations on that religion. Some Rokugani have reported hearing Merenae and Thrane use the exclamation "Kharsis" in moments of awe, fear, or excitement, suggesting this may be the name of their god; concrete information on this is lacking, however.

Whatever their religious practices, while the gaijin do appear to be capable of a basic modicum of polite behavior, they lack the true refinement of Rokugani civilization. They are notorious for being unwashed, smelly, crude, and lacking a proper appreciation for delicacy and civility. The gaijin lack of cleanliness is particularly offensive to the Rokugani, as is their tendency to eat large amounts of red meat and to drink equally large quantities of peculiar alcoholic beverages.

From a game play standpoint, leaving the Thrane and Merenae culture and religion somewhat undefined (other than "vaguely European") allows the GM a great deal of freedom to decide exactly what they are like in his campaign. Even in the Heroes of Rokugan setting (depicted in Chapter Nine of this book), where the gaijin play a role in some ways even more prominent than in this era, the details of the Thrane are left undefined so the GM can decide on them (or ignore them, as needed).

Do the gaijin have magic? This is something of an open question. Certainly both the Thrane and the Merenae seem to be familiar with the concept of "sorcery," and certain historical remarks and incidents would suggest they may have some knack for magic themselves, but information is sketchy at best and there is no actual recorded instance of these people using magic where a Rokugani could see it. As with much else, it is ultimately up to the GM to decide whether these gaijin have magic and if so, what kind. (It should be noted that if the GM uses the "gunpowder as alien metaphysics" option described in the sidebar earlier in this chapter, it would probably be inappropriate to let the gaijin have magic in any meaningful form.)

Notable Personalities of the White Stag Era

The following section lists several notable NPCs from this era of Rokugan's history, most of whom are also usable in the latter part of the previous Gozoku era. These NPCs can be used to flesh out a campaign set in this timeline or, under other names, in a campaign of the GM's own devising.

Matsu Mochihime

Emerald Champion

There are many stories about Matsu Mochihime, sometimes called Matsu Mochiko. What is known for certain is that she was once the Matsu family daimyo and Hantei Fujiwa declared her to be ronin at the command of the Gozoku. Some accounts offer a more dramatic version of this event, claiming she threw her haori at the Emperor's feet and refused to continue serving him. Regardless of how it happened, after she became ronin Mochihime went by the name "Mochiko" and became an outspoken opponent of the Gozoku. When she was finally restored to the Lion Clan many years later, she became one of Hantei Yogozohime's most devoted followers. The skills she had honed in long years of wandering the Empire enabled her to win the Emerald Championship two years later, despite her advancing age.

Some legends claim it was Mochihime who, during her long years of wandering the Empire as a ronin, first devised the technique of the ronin band calling themselves the Tessen. However, this may be an instance of later chroniclers exaggerating her deeds. Whether or not this is true, it is undisputed that Mochihime personally had a large group of ronin followers and once she rejoined the Lion her devoted comrades were permitted to swear fealty as well, becoming the vassal family of the Katai.

After her rise to the position of Emerald Champion, Mochihime was relentless in her pursuit of those who had supported the Gozoku. During her time as a ronin she had developed considerable skill at reading the motivations of others, and had also sniffed out the true loyalties of many who never publicly revealed their devotion to the Gozoku conspiracy. As Emerald Champion she saw to it these samurai were punished for their betrayal of the Celestial Order.

Mochihime survived the era of White Stag but never forgave herself for allowing Empress Yugozohime to die at gaijin hands. She finally retired a few years later and lived out her remaining years as a sensei in the Ruby dojo, training Emerald Magistrates.

In later years, many Lion historians referred to Mochihime by her ronin name of Mochiko. This probably began as an effort to distinguish her glorious later career from the early disgrace of being made ronin by the Emperor, but over the centuries it led to confusion as many historians came to believe the women known as Mochiko and Mochihime were actually two different people.

The following stats show Mochihime/Mochiko in her late-life glory as Emerald Champion.

Matsu Mochihime (Matsu Mochiko), Emerald Champion, Former Ronin

Air: 4	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 5
Reflexes: 5		Agility: 5	Strength: 5	

Honor: 9.4 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 9.4*

School/Rank: Matsu Berserker 3/Emerald Champion (Insight Rank 6)

Skills: Battle 3, Defense 5, Etiquette 4, Heavy Weapons 4, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 6, Investigation 5, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Gozoku 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Law 4, Sincerity 4, Spear 5, Warfans (Tessen) 6

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Social Position (Emerald Champion), Heart of Vengeance (Gozoku), Paragon (Courage).

Disadvantages: Driven (Destroy Gozoku)

Agasha Kasuga

Founder of the Tortoise

From a first look at Agasha Kasuga, he never appeared to be a man destined for importance. Balding, middle aged, and just the pleasant side of portly, he came across as mild-mannered and slightly unctuous, to those who could remember his name at all. For almost his entire life he was a man of such unremarkable qualities that he seemed to nearly melt away in the courts where he was stationed. Kasuga would never have had it any other way.

In truth, the Dragon shugenja who went on to found the Tortoise Clan was a man of incredibly diverse and complicated nature. Possessed of a brilliant intellect, he held unorthodox views regarding the teachings of the Elements proposed by Agasha herself, earning him no friends amongst his own kin. In fact, he was assigned to the Imperial Court as a means of keeping him out of the business of his superiors in the Agasha, and quickly found himself relegated to service in the more obscure lower ranks of the courts wherever he went. His assignments generally dealt with minor cultural events such as festivals. Where some would have found this to be insulting or onerous, Kasuga saw it as an opportunity to observe humanity further, taking the teachings of his ancestor Agasha and applying her Elemental and Alchemical theories to human behavior... especially the behavior of the *heimin* and *hinin*, all but ignored by most samurai. The few other samurai aware of his interests generally thought them quaint at best, perverse at worst; only the traders of the Yasuki, themselves accustomed to minimizing caste differences in the name of profit, found him sympathetic.

It was in this role and while fulfilling these duties that Agasha Kasuga encountered the visiting gaijin in Otosan Uchi. He was fascinated by the foreigners and shocked at the sudden and disastrous end of their visit. To Kasuga, the changes brought about by gaijin influences, while not entirely harmonious, had nonetheless contained the promise of future positive results. Confused by the sudden and violent shift in the normal ebb and flow of relations he had been observing, Kasuga suspected something darker had happened that was not the doing of the gaijin themselves. However, he knew in the wake of the Battle of White Stag that Rokugani law would not permit their survival. Risking the lives and honor of himself and his family, he helped Teodoro Cornejo to escape the city, then enlisted his Yasuki friends to arrange passage for Teodoro and many of his people back to their homeland. In Kasuga's view, to not maintain some level of contact risked being unprepared for a future encounter with the Thrane and Merenae. Perhaps worse, it also risked complete stagnation of Rokugani society.

No one but Kasuga and the Emperor truly know what was said between them after his return to the Imperial Capital. The result, however, was the creation of a new Minor Clan with a deeply secret mission: Kasuga and his heirs would spend the rest of their days carefully maintaining a covert link to the peoples across the sea. Kasuga welcomed this duty, for it would give him the chance to

observe these gaijin apart from whatever strange influences had shattered the peace of the Imperial City. Kasuga's followers included a number of Merenae who chose to remain within Rokugan, and he welcomed them into the ranks of his new clan with open arms. He devised the first Techniques of the Tortoise School and Path in conjunction with them. Much of the Tortoise Clan's peculiar attitudes toward commoners were likewise a legacy of Kasuga's beliefs and teachings, and his strange but benign influence is felt in the clan for countless later generations.

Agasha Kasuga, Founder of the Tortoise Clan

Air: 3 Earth: 2 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 3
Awareness: 5 Perception: 5

Honor: 1.1 Status: 7.0 Glory: 3.2 Infamy: 4.3

School/Rank: Agasha Shugenja 2/Tortoise Smuggler 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Commerce 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 1, Forgery 5, Hunting 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation (Notice, Interrogation, Search) 5, Knives 3, Lore: Gaijin Culture (Merenae, Thrane) 5, Lore: Lower Castes 5, Lore: Theology 2, Sailing 2, Sincerity (Lying) 3, Sleight of Hand 2, Spellcraft 3, Staves 2, Stealth 3

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, To Seek the Truth, Courage of the Seven Thunders, Jurojin's Balm, Mental Quickness, The Raging Forge, The Fires From Within, Fiery Wrath, Ravenous Swarms, Death of Flame, Ward of Thunder, Everburning Rage, Path to Inner Peace, Regrow the Wound, Water Kami's Blessing, Wisdom and Clarity

Advantages: Bland, Clear Thinker, Hero of the People, Languages (Merenae, Thrane, Yobanjin), Social Position (Minor Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Black Sheep, Contrary, Infamous, Obligation (Emperor Hantei Muhaki)

Gusai Mori

Champion of the Mantis

Gusai Mori was the eldest son of Gusai, the man who won the Mantis a place in the Empire at the cost of his own life. Mori did not mourn his father's execution, for he knew the benefits far outweighed the cost. Mori never questioned his father's bold acts and indeed took them as a model for his own actions and policies. Given the choice, he always took the bold route, the daring and unconventional path.

With the fall of the Gozoku and the rise of Empress Yugozohime, Mori sought to establish his clan's place in her courts and to usurp the rival Crane Clan's position as the economic powerhouse of the Empire. It was an ambitious plan and one that faced many obstacles. The Yasuki had already begun to take advantage of the Crane Clan's disgrace by expanding their own economic power, and the Empress—for all her Lion heritage—had no intention of letting the Crane wither and die. When Mori's plans did not meet with swift results, he looked elsewhere for opportunities—and found one with the arrival of the gaijin. Mori hoped by being the man who brought distant trade and exotic wealth to the Empire, he would make the Mantis indispensable and establish his clan at the heart of a new network of trade independent of the existing economic structure.

When the gaijin turned on the Empire, Mori was furious but recognized that pragmatic reality required the Mantis to join the rest of the clans in standing against them. He led the Mantis fleet into action at the Battle of the Raging Seas without hesitation, earning glory and accolades from the Imperial throne. However, he never forgave the Crane and the Imperial line for disrupting his great plans.

Mori struggled personally throughout his life with an inability to truly believe in Bushido. He simply never saw any value to its practice, and indeed noted that it often disadvantaged those who adhered to it closely. He did carefully feign loyalty to the Code while in public, of course, in order to protect his clan's reputation. Nonetheless, the combination of Mori's disbelief with his frustration at the outcome of White Stag may well have contributed to his descendents' disastrous move against the Hantei Dynasty a few decades later.

Gusai Mori, Champion of the Mantis

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 4 Void: 2
Awareness: 5 Intelligence: 6 Perception: 5

Honor: 3.1 Status: 7.5 Glory: 4.9

School/Rank: Mantis Bushi 4 (treat the same as Yoritomo Bushi 4)

Skills: Commerce (Appraisal, Merchant) 6, Courtier 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 4, Intimidate (Control) 5, Investigation (Notice) 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Knives (Aiguchi) 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 4, Sailing 5, Stealth 3

Kata: Veiled Menace Style

Advantages: Languages (Merenae, Thrane), Social Position (Minor Clan Champion), Wary

Disadvantages: Greedy, Disbeliever

Doji Usan

Emerald Champion and Imperial Consort

Doji Usan was one of the more curious and unusual figures in the Gozoku and White Stag eras of Rokugani history, and one rarely understood for the deeply idealistic integrity he possessed. He was nearly a savant in the arts of the duel, showing untold promise from an early day and gaining the notice of the head sensei of the Kakita Academy. His gifts with the blade, however, were matched by a keen intellect and a knack for understanding the ways of the courts. He seemed destined for greatness, and served in the Crane Clan magistrates with honor and distinction until his rise to full prominence at the Emerald Championship.

What truly set Usan apart, however, was his staunch loyalty to Imperial authority. Raised by ardent and rigidly devout traditionalists, he privately bridled against the Gozoku Alliance and his sensei and Clan Champion's actions in support of it. Out of loyalty to his clan he would not act out against them so long as he was their servant, but on the day he won victory in the Emerald Championship all that changed. In that moment he become solely a servant of the Empire and the Throne. He supported Hantei Yugozohime and used all the power of his office to track down hidden Gozoku and extract confessions. At Yugozohime's first winter court, Usan forced his own sensei into a duel and killed him, a further step in his relentless anti-Gozoku purge. Despite these accomplishments, he felt secret doubts. He feared his actions in cleansing the Empire of its worst elements had abused the office of the Emerald Champion.

Usan's concerns were abruptly alleviated when the Empress offered him an alternative: to become Imperial Consort. Choosing one of the only Crane she could trust implicitly let her maintain traditional ties to the Doji, while allowing him to step down from the Emerald Championship without loss of face. To him this was only a further confirmation of the supreme wisdom of the Empress, and he was greatly pleased when the noble and honorable Matsu Mochihime took the post after him.

The moment he became consort to the Empress, Usan faded into the background of Rokugan's politics and history. Although he was still one of the finest duelists of his era, he never issued another challenge. Instead he made himself available to the new Champion Mochihime, offering advice and counsel when she asked, but never pushing his personal agenda. Allies often clamored for him to take a more active role, but both the Champion and the Empress knew his motives in hanging back from active politicking and chose to respect it.

In his later years, Usan doted heavily upon his daughter Retsuhime, though her choice to marry outside of the Crane was a terrible blow to his pride. Still, he remained loyal to her just as he had to the Empress, and lived out his life in fulfillment of his ideals.

The mechanics presented here represent Usan as the Emerald Champion, before he became Imperial Consort and dropped out of public life.

Doji Usan, Emerald Champion

Air: 5 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 5

Awareness: 5

Honor: 9.7 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 4.0*

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 4/Kenshinzen 2

Skills: Artisan: Origami 2, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 3, Courtier 3, Etiquette 5, Iaijutsu (Focus) 7, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 6, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Law 4, Meditation 5, Perform: Oratory 3, Sincerity 5, Tea Ceremony 2

Kata: Disappearing World Style, Strength of Purity Style

Advantages: Allies (many), Irreproachable, Prodigy, Social Position (Emerald Champion)

Disadvantages: Idealistic

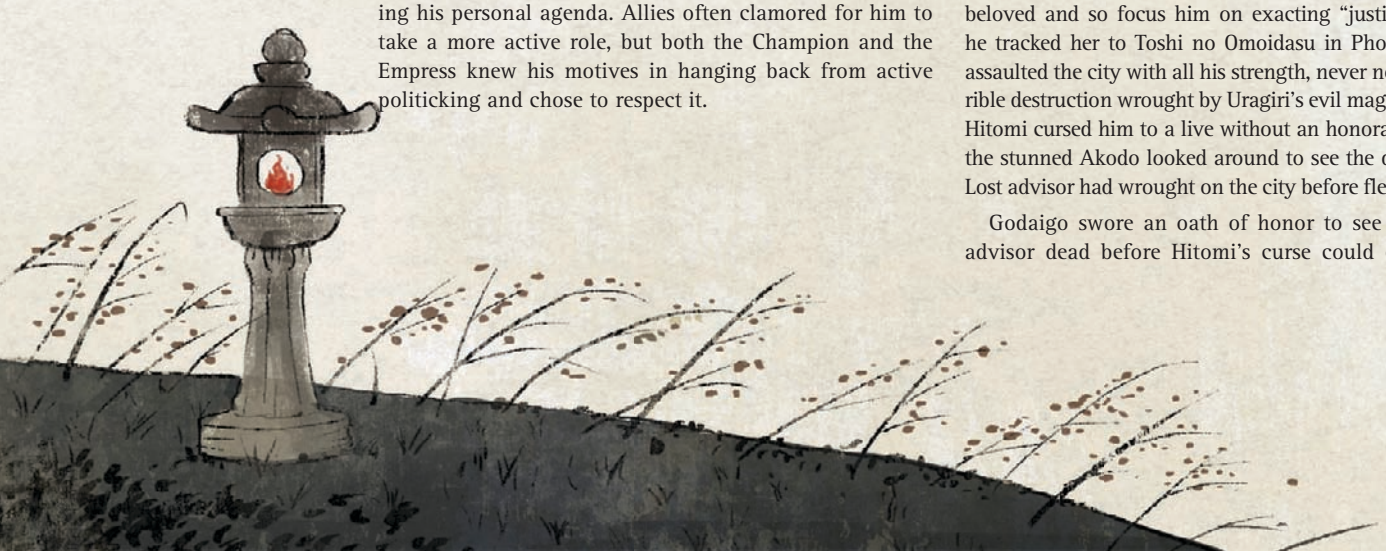
Akodo Godaigo

Fallen Samurai

Akodo Godaigo was once one of the most honorable and stalwart men of his generation. In his heart was nothing but duty, both to his clan and to his beloved and betrothed, Matsu Hitomi. The two seemed a pair matched by the Fortunes themselves, the differences and contrasts between their families somehow managing to merge seamlessly in a harmonious relationship. A relationship doomed to be part of one of the most tragic tales in Imperial History, an event whose repercussions would be felt for centuries because of the Helm of Kenshin's influence.

Godaigo was the man tasked by his lord, Akodo Hatsu, with hunting down Matsu Hitomi when she attacked the lands of Mirumoto Turan. Godaigo's advisor Kitsu Uragiri used the gift of the cursed Helm of Kenshin, along with carefully timed *maho* spells, to corrupt Godaigo's opinion of his beloved and so focus him on exacting "justice" that when he tracked her to Toshi no Omoidasu in Phoenix lands, he assaulted the city with all his strength, never noticing the terrible destruction wrought by Uragiri's evil magic. As she died, Hitomi cursed him to a live without an honorable death, and the stunned Akodo looked around to see the devastation his Lost advisor had wrought on the city before fleeing the scene.

Godaigo swore an oath of honor to see his corrupted advisor dead before Hitomi's curse could come to frui-



tion. Realizing he was now Tainted, he carefully kept his face obscured on the few occasions he appeared to others during his remaining years within the clan. He returned the Helm to the Miya, unknowing of its dark qualities, and gave his fortune up in order to see a castle made in honor of Hitomi's death. Then he departed the Lion Clan, hoping to find peace in the slaying of Kitsu Uragiri once and for all.

The twisted joke of his subsequent existence was that Jigoku saw far greater potential in Godaigo than it ever did in a pathetic wretch like Uragiri. Jigoku craved to corrupt one of the most honorable men ever to become so Tainted, a man ensured by Hitomi's curse that death could not free him from the Taint's grip. Clinging to the last shreds of his honor and his final oath, he lived on, year after year. The Taint fought continually to corrupt him and bend him to his will, but even beyond natural life, even into endless undeath, Godaigo's honor lived on. He dedicated his eternal existence to eradicating the threat of Uragiri, and ultimately also added the destruction of the Helm of Kenshin to his list of tasks. Although he eventually became a sentient undead, he kept himself pure enough to escape becoming Lost, and followed an ongoing regimen of the most rigid lifestyle and constant meditation to protect what purity remained in his soul. His incredible willpower sustained him and he fought against the darkness for centuries, even up through the Clan War when he participated in the final destruction of Kenshin's Helm. His final fate is unknown, although some tales claim he finally achieved true death during the time of the War of Spirits.

The following mechanics depict Godaigo after he became a sentient undead creature.

Akodo Godaigo, Fallen Samurai

Air: 3	Earth: 5	Fire: 4	Water: 5

Honor: 8.5	*Status: 0.0*	*Glory: 0.0*
Infamy: 3.0		*Taint Rank: 3.1*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4

Skills: Artisan: Poetry 2, Battle (Mass Combat) 5, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Hunting 4, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 7, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: History (Lion Clan) 4, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 3, Meditation 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 3, Spears 2, Stealth 2

Kata: Striking as Water, Disappearing World Style

Advantages: Paragon of Honor

Disadvantages: Driven (Destroy Uragiri and Kenshin's Helm), Lost Love (Matsu Hitomi), Sworn Enemy/Nemesis (Kitsu Uragiri)

Shadowlands Powers/Creature Abilities: Fear 3, Jade Sense, Thy Master's Will, Undead

Shadowlands Mutations: Undead Visage

New Game Mechanics

The following section contains new mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition role-playing game. The mechanics here are chosen as being appropriate for the White Stag era, but most of them may be used in other time periods with little difficulty. (The principle exception, obviously, is the gunpowder rules.)

Gaijin Pepper

The technology of gaijin pepper (or polvara, as the Merenae called up) is unknown to Rokugan until the Battle of White Stag. Although the Emperor immediately declares such technology illegal, it never completely disappears from Rokugan. The Scorpion Clan makes covert use of gaijin pepper for its shinobi, and the more ruthlessly pragmatic elements of the Daidoji family of the Crane also employ the forbidden weapon, especially during the ascendency of the Harriers. The Agasha and Tamori families' experiments with alchemy likewise lead them to develop weapons and devices which bear a disturbing resemblance to gaijin pepper, and the pirate fleet led by the corrupted Mantis Yoritomo Kitao employs cannon on its ships.

All that being said, these rules are intended primarily to allow the GM to represent gaijin NPCs. Gunslinger samurai are very much against Rokugan's image and the GM should be very wary of allowing a PC to gain possession of a firearm. Even the most ruthless Scorpion and Daidoji, after all, restrict their use of gunpowder to demolitions, mines, and smoke grenades—as described in Chapter Seven of this book.

New Bugei Skill: Firearms (Intelligence)

- Sub-types: Weapon Skill, considered a Low Skill
- Emphases: Pistol, Musket
- Special: Unless specially permitted by the GM, only gaijin may learn this skill.

Firing a gun is a test of memory and rote rather than of physical skill—one of many reasons why it disturbs the samurai of Rokugan. Gunpowder weapons normally have a very slow rate of fire, requiring three Complex Actions to load and prepare for firing (a skilled and experienced soldier can shorten this time, but only somewhat). This skill is considered Low for any Rokugani, and using firearms carries a host of dire social consequences as well.

Mastery Abilities:

- **Rank 5:** Loading a firearm takes you one less Complex Action.

Can I Play a Gaijin?

The short answer is, it depends. Ultimately, if the GM is willing to let you play a gaijin, you can play a gaijin... but it should be remembered that the whole point of playing L5R is to be a samurai of Rokugan, a member of an Honor-driven traditionalist society inspired by Asian culture and mythology. Playing a gaijin renders the game and setting somewhat moot. If you want to play a gaijin to escape the boundaries of the Rokugani social system, or to run around shooting samurai with a gun, the question becomes: why are you playing L5R?

One possible way to play a gaijin that does not wholly conflict with the themes of L5R is to portray a character who chooses to live in Rokugan and become part of their society. Classic fictional examples of this sort of character include John Blackthorne from the James Clavel novel Shogun, or Nathan Algren from the movie The Last Samurai. Within Rokugan's own history, Rana Singh and the various gaijin who joined the Tortoise Clan fall into this category. Such a character can potentially offer an interesting and compelling personal journey if the GM is willing to allow it.

Regardless, if gaijin are allowed, players and GMs alike will have to work on developing mechanics to depict them. This chapter contains rules on gunpowder, but GMs looking for gaijin Schools will have to invent some—even assuming the gaijin have such things as Schools!

New Bugei Skill: Cannon (Intelligence)

- **Sub-types:** Weapon Skill, considered a Low Skill
- **Special:** Unless specially permitted by the GM, only gaijin may learn this skill.

This skill is used for aiming and firing cannon effectively. A cannon requires a crew of four men to load and fire, but the skill is only used by their commander, who aims the weapon and keeps the men focused on their specific tasks.

Mastery Abilities

- Rank 5: The cannon may be operated with a half crew (two men).

General Effects of Gunpowder Weapons

Gunpowder is an alien substance within the Emerald Empire and its uses and effects strike fear and horror in the hearts of the Rokugani. In particular, the fact that gunpowder weapons allow simple peasants who have mastered some basic drills to slaughter elite samurai warriors seems not merely disgusting but a perversion of the very basis of the universe. What value does the Celestial Order have in a world where such weapons exist?

In general, the use of gunpowder and firearms is shocking enough to inflict a Fear effect on Rokugani, ranging from Fear 1 for a brief or distant exposure up to Fear 5 for samurai charging into the face of muskets and cannon.

All gunpowder weapons ignore the effects of armor on Armor TN and ignore all Reduction from armor or natural toughness. (This includes the Reduction of buildings resisting attack by cannons.) If the GM is using the "Alien Metaphysics" option, they also ignore Invulnerability and any Reduction from magical/supernatural sources.

New Weapon: Pistol

- **Keywords:** Small, Gaijin
- **Range:** 20 feet
- **DR:** 3k2

A pistol's DR is modified by Perception instead of by Strength. Possession of a pistol is an Imperial crime and should also entail Honor loss of an amount chosen by the GM.

New Weapon: Musket

- **Keywords:** Large
- **Range:** 150 feet
- **DR:** 4k3

A musket's DR is modified by Perception instead of by Strength. Some gaijin cultures mount a short blade on the front of their muskets, allowing them to double as a crude polearm. A musket with one of these blades can be used for melee with the Polearms skill, and has a DR of 2k2.

Possession of a musket is an Imperial crime and should also entail Honor loss of an amount chosen by the GM.

New Siege Weapon: Cannon

- **Skill:** Cannon
- Crew: 4
- **Range:** 1,200 feet
- **Damage:** 10k10
- **Area:** The gaijin cannon used in the White Stag era fire "roundshot"—that is, solid cannonballs. These inflict full damage to the target and then blast through and inflict 5k5 damage to anything within a line thirty feet beyond the target. (This follow-through may be stopped by a solid target such as a thick stone wall.) .
- **Rate of Fire:** 1 shot per two minutes, half that with a crew of 2. A cannon cannot be operated by a single man.

Misfires

Historically, real early firearms tended to be somewhat temperamental devices that often failed to work, sometimes endangering their uses in the process. The GM may wish to add this option to the firearms rules to create a greater sense of realism and uncertainty in their usage.

Under this option, any time a firearm misses its target, the GM should check to see if any 1's were rolled on the attack dice. (If the shooter has an Emphasis that allows re-rolling initial 1's, the GM should only check the final re-rolled dice.) If there was at least one 1 in the roll, the firearm has misfired and cannot be used again until it is cleaned (a process requiring at least two minutes). If there are three or more 1's on the roll, the firearm catastrophically explodes, inflicting 3k2 damage on the wielder.

New Alternate Path: Tortoise Guard

Although the Tortoise Clan is too small to have a true bushi school, the clan has always recognized the value of defense, especially given the frequency with which its members must enter foreign ports, smugglers' dens, and other such unsavory locations. The original membership of the Tortoise included a number of gaijin, and over the years they adapted their own strange fighting style to the weapons of their new home; with time it evolved into the technique which the Tortoise teach in modern times. The Tortoise Guards are tasked to protect their fellow smugglers from all manner of dangers, and typically fight without any particular limitation or scruple.

Alternate Path: Tortoise Guard [Bushi]

- **Replaces:** Kasuga Smuggler Rank 4
- **Requirements:** Strength 3, any one Weapon Skill 4

Technique: The Path of One

From their gaijin ancestors and their commoner allies, the Tortoise Guards have learned that samurai Honor can be a hindrance to victory; practicality is more useful. You may attack as a Simple Action with any non-Samurai melee weapon, and gain a +1k0 bonus to damage with any Peasant weapon.

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The Great Famine

"Do you think we'll reach the village before Lady Sun sets, Shoda-san?" The irritated voice of his charge drifts up from behind Akodo Shoda. "As much as I appreciate your skills in woodscraft, I need a bowl of rice and a bed."

"The village should be just past the edge of the forest," Shoda calls to his companion. "But it's not like it will matter what time we get there. There's not going to be any rice to eat. If these farmers had any rice we wouldn't be out here asking why they haven't paid their taxes." Shoda looks back with his lips pursed in mock concern. "You shouldn't worry if you're hungry, though. With that powerful musk you're developing, attracting a boar to kill should be no problem."

"Emma-O take me," Otomo Kyubei laughs. "If I have to eat even one more bite of that foul meat, I fear this stench will never wash off of me. The sooner we're done here and back home eating proper food, the better."

The two men's laughter echoes through the forest for a moment before they turn their attention back to the narrow forest path before them, nudging their ponies forward. Shafts of sunlight slip through the foliage, occasionally dancing across the small jade orb Shoda wears on his obi to signify his position as an Emerald Magistrate.

It is well into the afternoon when the riders finally spot the first buildings of the village between the trunks of the trees. Both men eagerly kick their mounts forward... then pull up their reins as they clear the edge of the forest. A makeshift barricade has been erected across the road.

Kyubei flashes Shoda a quick concerned look. The Lion's eyes narrow as he counts at least eleven men behind the barricade, armed with yari and wearing bits and pieces of armor. A banner hangs limp on a wooden pole next to them.

"Welcome to Sleepy Pine Village, samurai-sama," calls a lanky young man holding a yari. He bows slightly to the approaching samurai. "Is there anything I can help you with?"

Shoda's gaze grows more intent still. Peasants are seldom so disrespectful even in difficult times. "Inform the village headman I wish to speak with him immediately."

"You are already speaking to the village headman, samurai-sama." The youth leans slightly on his spear, his gaze open and insolent. "My father died from the Water Fever last month, and now I am in charge. So again, is there anything I can help you with?"

Out of the corner of his eye Shoda catches a glimpse of Kyubei nervously fingering his jitte. He considers simply cutting down the arrogant peasant... but there are ten others, and he and his companion are only two. He huffs a faint sigh and asks, "Why has your village not paid its taxes this year?"

"Bandits, samurai."

Shoda notes the absence of the honorific and feels his hand tighten on the hilt of his katana. "So your rice has all been stolen then?"

"Oh no, samurai." The ashigaru smiles, his face calm and fearless as his gaze bores into Shoda's eyes. "We've kept all our rice. You see, around here we know exactly how to deal with bandits." A breeze ruffles his hair and tugs out the banner that stands behind him.

Shoda barely notices the cold impact of the yari that drive into his back like striking serpents, piercing his chest. Distantly he hears a choked cry from Kyubei beside him. The only thing he sees is the symbol on the banner, flapping in the light wind that carries away his life's final breath.

The People's Legion.

A Secret History

This chapter presents an era in Rokugan's history that is absent from the official histories maintained by the Ikoma and Otomo families: the Great Famine, a major catastrophe in the second half of the seventh century that unleashed almost a decade of starvation, disease, open warfare, tyrannical leadership, and social upheaval. In addition to the unfathomable death toll of the famine itself, disease and violence also cause immense loss of life. The most significant event of this era is the formation of the so-called People's Legion, a revolutionary army led by a commoner named Asahime, the daughter of a wealthy rice merchant. The Legion's subsequent conquest of the northwest of the Emerald Empire leads to a truly brutal and cruel war, waged amidst starvation and despair. In order to protect the honor and reputation of the Hantei Dynasty, later generations systematically erase the central events of the Great Famine from all official records, and within a century the reign of Emperor Hantei XX is remembered as a time of quiet and peaceful stability which the Emperor presided over with piety and wisdom.

From a GM standpoint, the Great Famine is a perfect example of how "empty" periods of Rokugan's history can be re-worked to incorporate major conflicts and epic storylines without damaging the overall shape of the official timeline. Because the Ikoma and Otomo routinely doctor the historical records to remove anything damaging to the Emperor's repute, it is possible for quite significant and destructive events to be "erased," leaving only a few rumors and folktales to remind anyone they ever happened. GMs should feel free to use the Great Famine as inspiration for developing other such settings for their own use.

Timeline of the Great Famine

The following section outlines the major events of the Great Famine and the wars and peasant rebellions that accompany it. (Secondary events which happened independently of the Famine are discussed at the end of this section.) GMs seeking more background on the stories and motivations of the NPCs involved should review the Clans and Personages sections later in this chapter.

Year 660

- The spring rainy season comes early and brings abnormally heavy rains that persist throughout the planting season and recur in the fall, causing widespread crop failure. Initial appeals to the Emerald Champion, Akodo Kenburo, for a temporary reduction in taxes are refused. Delegations from the Crab and Dragon attempt to lobby the Emperor directly, hoping the Son of Heaven will reconsider Kenburo's decision. Hantei XX is so outraged that servants of the throne would dare ask the Son of Heaven to get by with less that he levies punitive taxes on both clans. The costs of these additional taxes are too much for the Dragon Clan to absorb and the clan suffers famine over the winter.
- Right before the onset of winter Emperor Hantei XX publicly announces that due to the poor weather he will not be holding Winter Court at Kyuden Bayushi as originally planned. Instead he will go to the Crane and stay at Kyuden Doji. While the change of venue is only an inconvenience for most clans, it is devastating news for the Dragon and Scorpion. The Emperor's abrupt decision is only his latest action to undermine the political standing of the Scorpion Clan, while the starving Dragon are unable to send a delegation at all.
- The winter sees continued hard weather, with unusually heavy snowfall throughout the Empire. Monasteries and temples are crowded as samurai and commoners alike pray to the Fortunes for an abatement of their punishment.

Year 661

- The previous year's poor weather continues and lasts the entire year. In the spring the heavy rains combined with run-off from the previous year's heavy snow cause massive flooding of all major rivers and lakes. The floods wreak terrible destruction on low-lying villages and cities, as well as washing out roads and bridges. Many farmlands are ruined as well, particularly in the fertile lowlands of the Scorpion, Lion, and Crane. Moreover, the loss of roads and bridges impedes efforts to ship supplies to regions afflicted by hunger.
- As the price of rice begins to climb dramatically, the Empire's merchants wage increasingly bitter commercial warfare over the dwindling food supplies. The Daidoji and the Yasuki in particular become increasingly vicious and cutthroat, with daimyo Yasuki Miwako and Daidoji Katsunan each working to shut their rival out of every possible market. By autumn the trade war is doing almost as much damage to Rokugan's economy as the bad weather.
- Togashi Toshimasa (the name used by the Kami Togashi in this era) spends the winter in silent meditation and prayer in a chamber within Shiro Mirumoto. He gives instructions that anyone who wishes to see him is to be allowed to enter the room and stay for as long as they wish—but he refuses to speak to any such visitors. By the spring of 662, word of his peculiar behavior is spreading across the Empire.

Year 662

- The flooding finally abates this year but the damage from the two previous years is so severe that many croplands remain unusable, limiting the food that can be grown. By now even the reserve food stores maintained by the Imperial families are dwindling and starvation is widespread among the common folk. As conditions in the Dragon provinces continue to deteriorate, starving peasants and ji-samurai begin flooding out of the mountains.
- Widespread disease breaks out across Rokugan due to the combination of the previous year's floods (which leave many lowlands waterlogged) and the famine which is now weakening the peasant population. The most notorious and widespread disease comes to be known as Water Fever due to its association with flooded regions.
- Lion Clan Champion Akodo Masahisa becomes increasingly concerned about the large number of Dragon refugees gathering across the banks of the Drowned Merchant River. He gathers troops on the Lion side of the river. A month-long stalemate begins, with many refugees attempting to cross the border undetected and the Lion regularly sending squads over the border to cull the refugee population. Lion diplomats demand the Dragon deal with the problem more decisively, but Toshimasa sends no reply.
- At summer's end, Masahisa sends his son Akodo Masaumi to Shiro Mirumoto to deliver an ultimatum. He demands the Dragon remove the refugees from the border region or the Lion will remove them from Ningen-do entirely. Toshimasa does not acknowledge Masaumi, who departs in a rage. Afterward, Toshimasa sends a letter to Mirumoto Umeka, the daimyo of the Mirumoto: "Against fate even the Kami cannot prevail." Frustrated by the situation, Umeka takes it upon herself to mobilize the Dragon armies as best she can despite the growing food shortage.
- Akodo Masaumi marches his army across the Drowned Merchant River and attacks. The refugees are quickly driven back to the foothills, where the Dragon army meets the Lion in battle. The fighting is bloody but indecisive.
- When the Phoenix Clan Champion Shiba Moriaki hears that Mirumoto Umeka is fighting on the front lines, he immediately sets forth with the Shiba House Guard. He joins the fighting during the final weeks before winter forces a truce.
- With the famine starting to take a toll on the Crab Clan, the Clan Champion Hida Tsuneko makes her first trip to the Emperor's Winter Court (held this year once again in Kyuden Doji) since assuming the mantle of Champion a decade earlier. When Tsuneko is finally given time to speak before the

court and the Emperor, she makes a lengthy and passionate plea about the importance of pulling together in dark times and of maintaining the Empire's defenses against the Shadowlands. The Crane Clan Champion, Doji Morito, scoffs at Tsuneko, dismissing her speech as another attempt by the Crab to get something for nothing by overstating the danger of the Shadowlands. The Emperor agrees with his brother-in-law and blandly assures Tsuneko that should the Crab falter the Imperial Legions will be there to push the Shadowlands back across the border. In the wake of this public humiliation none of the other clans are willing to spare any rice from their meager harvests for the Crab.

Hida Tsuneko, the widow of the previous Crab Champion, is a former Matsu and ill-suited to politics; her venture to Winter Court is driven by a sense of desperation. She knows she must convince the Emperor to rescind the punitive taxes he demanded of the Crab, or at least obtain rice from the other clans, lest the Crab be gravely weakened and possibly unable to protect Rokugan. She does her best to play the political game like the Crane, carefully following all the protocols of court and even going so far as to wear only the most fashionable court outfits of the season. Unfortunately, in the court of Hantei XX such efforts count for little and Tsuneko's efforts are wholly unsuccessful.

If Tsuneko had succeeded (or if the Crane had resisted the urge to score a political victory against their frequent rivals), the catastrophic impact of the Great Famine might have been significantly reduced. The trade war between the Crane and Crab would never have escalated to the point of wrecking the Rokugani economy, the bloody Crab-Crane military conflict would have been averted, Crab ships would have been available to support the Mantis fight against the Shadowlands fleet, and the Crane would themselves have remained strong enough to resist the later Lion attacks.

- After weeks of heavy negotiations, near the end of Winter Court diplomats from the Phoenix are able to mediate an end to the Dragon - Lion war. Akodo Masaumi agrees to halt further attacks on the Dragon lands, Mirumoto Umeka agrees to publicly apologize for failing to deal with the refugees on her own, and most importantly the Phoenix agree to allow any Dragon refugees to cross into their lands, hopefully preventing the conflict from flaring up again.

Year 663

- Weather patterns are now back to normal, but the dire effects of the last three years have exhausted most seed stock and emptied all reserve stores. At this point samurai are almost as badly off as the peasants and even the Imperial families find it hard to properly feed their samurai. It becomes increasingly common for clan samurai to defect to other clans or simply become bandits.
- Early in the spring, hearing news of Hida Tsuneko's humiliation at Winter Court, Yasuki Miwako takes it upon herself to defend her clan's honor the only way she knows how: she escalates the trade war drastically, telling her agents to shut the Crane out of every market that has remained open through the last three years, by any means, legal or otherwise. When Daidoji Katsunan realizes what is happening he retaliates in kind, and the escalating conflict grinds the already struggling economy to a halt. By late summer the economic conflict escalates to a military one as Crab troops invade the Crane lands.
- With trade completely stopped it does not take long before riots and peasant revolts break out all across the Empire, with the worst impact initially striking Rokugan's major urban centers. In the Imperial capital, the Legions quickly crush all such uprisings, but elsewhere the depleted clans are less fortunate. The Phoenix lose control of the City of Suffering to bandits and the Scorpion are barely able to contain the riots in Ryoko Owari.
- Late in the spring the Asahina daimyo, Asahina Koresada, receives news that his infant grandson has died of Water Fever. Shaken and grieving, Koresada vows that no other child will die to disease if he can prevent it. He orders the monks and shugenja of the Asahina to travel Rokugan, setting

up hospitals wherever they can to treat the sick. He forbids them to turn away any child, no matter their station or condition.

- A merchant's daughter named Asahime begins organizing peasants in the southern Dragon lands, urging them to resist tax collection and keep their meager harvests for themselves. Initially her followers are few, but as conditions continue to worsen their numbers grow.
- Shiba Moriaki leads the armies of the Shiba to take back the City of Suffering, but the Shiba troops are so weakened by famine and disease they are unable to breach the walls. When word of Moriaki's failure reaches the Imperial capital, Akodo Kenburo mobilizes the Imperial Legions and marches north to Phoenix lands. He infiltrates the city with a few hand-picked Emerald Magistrates who seize and open the gates, whereupon the Legions storm in and execute the bandit leaders along with any rioters who fail to clear the streets. The Emperor praises Kenburo's solution to the problem and holds Shiba Moriaki personally responsible for losing control of the City of Sacrifice. Moriaki commits seppuku. The mantle of the Soul of Shiba passes to Shiba Naho, the daughter of an unimportant magistrate, who has just completed her gempukku.
- After seeing what happened to Shiba Moriaki, Scorpion Champion Bayushi Hideari scrambles to regain control of the near-anarchic Ryoko Owari. He pays a small fortune to the Mantis Clan Champion, Tetsuken, to send Mantis mercenaries to take back the city. The Mantis troops and diplomats use their knowledge of commoner ways to swiftly identify and arrest the ringleaders of the riots, restoring order within a few weeks. Although the move saves the Scorpion from Imperial intervention, it also empties what remains of the Scorpion treasury, leaving them very weak thereafter.
- By autumn the Crab have overrun much of the southern Crane lands, although the major coastal towns are still holding out. Crab forces besiege Jukami Mura, and while the Daidoji army puts up a deadly fight they are unable to stop the final assault. Shortly after the city's walls are breached, Daidoji Katsunan breaks through Crab lines and tries to challenge Hida Tsuneko to a duel. Tsuneko, true to her Matsu heritage, answers by cleaving Katsunan and his mount in two with her no-dachi. With their general defeated the Crane defenders fall into disarray and the Crab push them back through the city, ultimately forcing many of them off a low cliff that overlooks the harbor. The Crane and the Imperial histories remember this as the Battle of Honor's Flight, but Crab veterans mockingly refer to it as the Battle of Flying Cranes.
- Winter Court, held in Kyuden Doji for the third straight year, is tense and sparsely attended, with the Crab and Phoenix sending only the bare minimum delegations required to avoid giving offense. Attempts to forge peace between the Crab and Crane are unsuccessful, much to Emperor Hantei XX's irritation. The Emperor first hears about Togashi Toshimasa's strange meditative silence during this Winter Court, and in a fit of petulance declares he will visit the Dragon lands next winter and "see this wonder with my own eyes."

Year 664

- Heavy rains return as the snows begin to melt. Although the storms are not as bad as previous years, they still strike a heavy blow against efforts to restore rice production, and lead to a renewed outbreak of Water Fever.
- Hida Tsuneko marches her troops north from Jukami Mura, intending to wipe out the remaining Crane strongholds along the coast and seize all their farmlands to grow crops for the Crab. At first her advance seems unstoppable, as starvation drives the Crab troops to fight with desperate ferocity. However, when the Crab reach the outskirts of Mura Sabishii Toshi they are confronted by the Emerald Champion and the Imperial Legions, dispatched by Hantei XX to protect his beloved Crane. Recognizing the near-hopelessness of a battle against the relatively well-fed Legions, and not wanting to anger the Emperor any further then she already has, Tsuneko acknowledges defeat and marches her army back home.
- Fearful the Lion and Crab will now turn their hungry armies loose on the Scorpion lands, Bayushi Hideari begins sending what little food he can spare to those two clans and throws all of the Scorpion Clan's remaining political power behind them in court. The effort succeeds in diverting their attention elsewhere.
- Attempting to minimize the damage to his own lands, Akodo Masahisa orders his samurai to begin

Alternate Paths: The Scorpion War

What if Bayushi Hideari's efforts to appease the Crab and Lion had failed, or worse yet backfired? The Scorpion had some of the better farmland in the Empire and lacked the Emperor's protection, so a combined Crab - Lion invasion would probably have overrun the Scorpion lands in short order. Of course, the Scorpion would in some ways have found it easier to resist such an invasion after it took place, with their shinobi given free rein to fight as ruthlessly as possible. This could easily have led to an extended guerilla war, draining the dwindling resources of both Crab and Lion. It would also have weakened the Lion against the later rise of the People's Legion.

recruiting massive numbers of ashigaru, promising them food in the Crane lands. When the Lion Clan Champion's army crosses into Crane lands its numbers are massively swollen by hungry peasant soldiers who fight with desperate courage for the food to stay alive. Doji Morito is caught off-guard by the scale of the late-summer assault and the Crane armies, gravely weakened by the war with the Crab Clan, are largely ineffectual.

- Doji Morito beseeches the Emperor to send the Imperial Legions to protect the Left Hand's lands. The Emperor agrees, and Akodo Kenburo is dispatched once more. Kenburo meets with his adopted brother Masahisa and convinces the Lion Champion to take what food he has already seized and return to his own lands. Having looted enough to stave off mass starvation for another year, Masahisa agrees and marches his army home.
- By harvest time peasant riots are almost commonplace throughout Rokugan, especially in the lands of the Lion, Crab, Phoenix, and Dragon. In the Dragon lands, the commoner girl Asahime proclaims her followers to be "the People's Legion" and seizes control of several villages. The Dragon Clan is too weakened by the famine to take immediate action against her.
- In keeping with the Emperor's impulsive decision the year before, Winter Court is held at Shiro Mirumoto. In order to properly care for so many guests, Mirumoto Umeka is forced to transport almost all of the clan's remaining food stores to Shiro Mirumoto. Countless Dragon peasants and ji-samurai die of starvation over the winter, but the Emperor seems untroubled by the suffering and spends much of the winter observing the meditating Dragon Champion in his chambers. When the Emperor returns to Otosan Uchi in the spring he orders an exact replica of the Dragon Clan Champion's quarters built in the Imperial Palace so he can meditate in the same surroundings.

Year 665

- At the urging of the Crane, Yasuki Miwako is brought before the Emperor to answer for her devastating trade war. The Emerald Champion arrests her and charges her with treason for intentionally destabilizing the entire Rokugani economy and starting a war between two great clans. She is executed the next morning.
- With starvation stalking the Dragon lands the refugee problem once again spins out of control and the Lion once again invade the southern Dragon provinces. This time, however, they encounter unexpected resistance in the form of Asahime's "People's Legion." She wins several minor but surprising victories against small bodies of Lion troops.
- Inspired by Asahime's stand and seeking redemption for his own perceived past sins, the monk Rojin (the former Lion Clan Champion) mobilizes his monastery and joins Asahime's army. Combining Rojin's years of experience and Asahime's unorthodox tactics, the People's Legion is able to push the Lion forces out of Dragon lands. Asahime takes control of the entire province, with the desperately weakened Dragon forces unable to offer more than token resistance.
- In an uncharacteristically shrewd political move the Master of Earth, Isawa Michikata, begins offering the assistance of his acolytes to help restore damaged croplands in exchange for prestigious marriage arrangements and other political favors.
- As rumors of the People's Legion and its victory over the Lion spreads across Rokugan, desperate peasants, ronin, and even a tiny handful of clan samurai flock to Asahime's banner. She marches her swelling army into the northern Lion provinces (the former Ki-Rin lands). Initially she faces weak opposition, since the Lion armies are to the south. Akodo Masahisa, outraged by the temerity of these rebellious peasants, dispatches his son Masaumi to crush them. Masaumi's army fights a series of battles against the Legion, ultimately (and shockingly) meeting decisive defeat. Shamed beyond enduring by losing to a commoner, Masaumi commits seppuku on the battlefield outside of the village of Bikami.
- On the advice of Rojin, Asahime sends shipments of food from her conquests to the Dragon and Scorpion lands, in effect bribing them not to war on her. For the moment, at least, the tactic is successful.
- Consumed by grief at the news of his only son's death, Akodo Masahisa marches another army to attack the People's Legion despite the lateness of the season. He arrives at Bikami in time for the

first winter snows, his army hungry and cold but still held together by Lion discipline. The fighting is brutal and barbaric, neither side showing the slightest respect or mercy for the other. The People's Legion suffers initial heavy losses but Asahime turns the tide when she manages to lure Masahisa into a trap and kill him personally. The Lion army refuses to retreat and fights to the death.

- Winter Court is dominated by discussion of the shocking events in the northern Empire. Although everyone publicly condemns the uprising, the Scorpion, Dragon, and even the Phoenix open covert diplomatic and commercial contacts with the People's Legion. Many suggest the Emerald Champion should be dispatched to crush the rebellion, but the Lion Clan will not endure such an insult and insists it can quell the rebellion on its own. Instead, the Lion suggest Akodo Kenburo should give up the Emerald Champion's office and become Lion Clan Champion instead. Kenburo refuses on the grounds that he is not of Akodo blood; the Lion accept his decision and name Matsu Ikuko, the Matsu family daimyo, as Clan Champion until Masahisa's closest cousin can come of age.
- Asahime opens trade with the Yobanjin tribes to the north of Rokugan, hoping to gain new wealth to strengthen her fledgling government.

Year 666

- When spring arrives, Hantei XX summons Matsu Ikuko to Otosan Uchi and presents her with Shori, the Ancestrial Sword of the Lion Clan. He commands her to take back every inch of the Emperor's land stolen by the People's Legion.
- The Lion wage war on the People's Legion throughout the spring and summer. The fighting is bloody but indecisive. Matsu Ikuko is shocked at the ability of a peasant army to stand up to the might of the Lion, but refuses to admit any need for help.
- Rokugan enjoys its first normal harvest in six years, and the dire effects of the famine begin to abate. However, most of the Great Clans have been badly weakened and will be many years recovering from the damage.

Year 667

- The People's Legion attempts a counteroffensive into the southern Lion lands. This proves to be a mistake; although their forces are effective in defensive warfare, the Legion lacks the flexibility and organization to wage a major offensive. Asahime attempts to besiege Toshi no Meiyo Gisei, but is unable to take the fortified city. Much of her army falls to disease and the Lion slaughter the rest. By then, however, it is autumn and the Lion cannot risk further campaigning lest they disrupt the all-important harvest.
- In an attempt to rebuild after her disappointing offensive campaign, Asahime begins hiring Yobanjin mercenaries to pad out her forces.
- Rokugan enjoys its second successful harvest. As conditions continue to improve, the other clans begin to break off their covert contacts with the People's Legion and to offer more open support (including some token military forces) for the Lion-led war against the Legion.

Year 668

- The Lion launch a new offensive and push as far as the People's Legion's "capital" in Bikami. Matsu Ikuko leads the Lion's Pride in a wedge attack on Asahime's command staff, and encounters Rojin, who she recognizes as the former Lion Champion, Akodo Akihisa. In the ensuing duel Rojin loses an ear but takes Ikuko's right leg at the knee. The Lion's Pride makes a fighting retreat with their grievously wounded Champion and the Lion army withdraws.
- With the Empire seeing a third good harvest there is general agreement that the Great Famine is over. Pressure increases to suppress the peasant rebellion, especially given that it promotes continuing unrest in regions which should be returning to normal. Many clans begin urging the Emperor to take more decisive action against the People's Legion.
- During Winter Court, Matsu Ikuko appears on crutches and returns Shori to the Emperor, requesting permission to commit seppuku. Hantei XX accepts her request and immediately hands

Shori to Akodo Kenburo, declaring him the new Lion Clan Champion irrespective of his wishes. The Emperor announces he will take the field personally come spring, and commands all of the Great Clans to send their troops to his support.

Year 669

- As spring arrives, the Emperor rides forth from Otosan Uchi at the head of the Imperial Legions. He is joined by the Lion armies (now led by Kenburo) and smaller forces from all of the other Great Clans and a few Minor Clans (notably the Mantis and Badger). The Emperor leads the troops ruthlessly, declaring the Empire need not use honorable tactics against rebels who are traitors to the Throne and the Celestial Order.
- The final campaign is brutally short, lasting only two months. The unified Imperial forces kill all who oppose them, burning whole villages to the ground for a single act of resistance. Scouts and shinobi conduct late-night ambushes, poison wells, blow up supplies, and subvert enemy commanders with bribery or threats, murdering them after the battles are over. By late summer the Legion has been shattered, although small remnants (including the major leaders) are still scattered or hiding. The Emperor places a bounty of 10,000 koku on Asahime's head.
- Shortly before the harvest, some of Asahime's former followers betray her hiding place: a ruined castle in the Dragon lands near her old home. Scorpion shinobi destroy the castle with gaijin pepper, killing all within. Rojin, the only remaining leader from the Legion, vanishes back into the Brotherhood of Shinsei, filled with regret and grief.
- That winter, the Emperor officially proclaims that the "minor peasant rebellion" will never be spoken of again. Life in the Empire slowly begins returning to normal.

Other Events in the Time of the Great Famine

Although the primary focus of events in the decade from 660 to 670 is on the Great Famine and the various wars that accompany it, there are a number of other incidents during this era which are unrelated to the main chronicle. The following section describes the most notable of these—the GM is of course free to add more, since Rokugan's history is always more complicated than any mere timeline can depict. Creative GMs can also choose to relocate these events to other eras of play in order to focus on them without the distraction of the Great Famine.

Year 660

- The Mantis Clan Champion known as Ieyasu the Leper dies of old age. With no designated heir and his eldest son already dead, his children and grandchildren begin squabbling over who will lead the clan. This continues until the beginning of the Imperial Winter Court when Ieyasu's youngest son, Tetsuken, returns with his ship *The Dancing Orochi* from a long voyage and requests an audience with the Son of Heaven. When Tetsuken is brought before Emperor Hantei XX, he presents the Emperor with numerous gifts, including fantastic beasts from far-off lands and crates brimming with priceless treasures. He begs the Emperor to intervene and settle his family's quarrel before it can tear his clan apart. The Emperor agrees and names Tetsuken himself as the new Mantis Clan Champion, much to his surprise. Although the other members of the family are not altogether happy with this result, they bow to the Emperor's command rather than risk renewed Imperial hostility toward their clan.

Year 664

- A maho-tsukai calling himself Dear Uncle begins offering humanitarian aid to the starving peasants around the village of Aka Mizu-Umi. His abundant rice has been enhanced by *maho* rituals, making it fertile but also Tainted. Dear Uncle is surprised his plan works so well—the peasants are so desperate for food they never question its source, and when Scorpion magistrates are sent to investigate, the peasants quietly kill them and hide the bodies. Eventually the Phoenix discover the growing cult and expose it, using the incident to discredit the Jade Champion Yogo Yoshi, whose own investigation was hampered by limited resources and the growing crisis of the Famine. The cult is destroyed; Dear Uncle's fate is unknown.

The Great Famine offers many opportunities for minor threats to grow into terrible scourges—the cult led by Dear Uncle is just one of the more prominent examples. Dear Uncle's true name and the source of his maho powers are both unknown, so creative GMs can make him into whatever they need. Perhaps he is a prominent samurai who uses political connections to undermine investigations into his activities, or perhaps he is simply a peasant with sorcerous powers. The GM may also experiment with allowing Dear Uncle to attain more power and influence than he managed in the historical version of events. Perhaps he becomes the effective ruler of Aka Mizu-Umi, or is able to dispatch assassins to murder samurai who threaten him. Perhaps he convinces his followers to give their names to oni. Perhaps the Phoenix do not discover his activities, leaving it up to the PCs to stop him. (This option would also give the PCs the power to save the office of Jade Champion from the Phoenix Clan's machinations by giving Yogo Yoshi credit for their accomplishments.)

- During the autumn and winter, a small fleet of Tainted ships begins to raid the southern coast of Rokugan. The Crab warfleet is largely unmanned and tied up in port due to the combined effects of famine and the war against the Crane, so the Shadowlands fleet is able to roam freely up the coast, burning ships of both the Crab and Crane in their harbors and further weakening the already crippled Rokugani economy.

Year 665

- Doji Morito approaches the Mantis Champion, Tetsuken, asking to hire him to stop the Shadowlands fleet. Tetsuken agrees in exchange for one condition: if he succeeds, he will be allowed to marry the Crane Champion's daughter. Seeing no other option, Morito accepts.
- Tetsuken fights a series of battles with the Tainted fleet, destroying several of its ships. The fleet's movements are erratic and make little military sense, making it difficult to bring to battle. Finally, toward the end of summer Tetsuken realizes the fleet is trying to draw attention away from its real target: the Imperial capital, Otosan Uchi. Intercepting the Tainted ships before they can sail into Golden Sun Bay, Tetsuken launches an all-out assault, sailing *The Dancing Orochi* directly into the heart of the enemy fleet. The Tainted ships, crewed by Lost, goblins, and oni, ignore their original objective and converge on Tetsuken's ship, allowing the rest of the Mantis fleet to surround and systematically destroy them. When the Mantis finally reach *The Dancing Orochi* they find Tetsuken and his crew dead, surrounded by innumerable slain foes. In keeping with traditions dating back to the days of Kaimetsu-Uo, the Mantis set fire to ship, turning it into Tetsuken's funeral pyre.

Year 667

- Shiba Naho, the new Phoenix Clan Champion, travels north into the yobanjin lands in search of a missing Phoenix shugenja who stole numerous scrolls from the Isawa library. She and her companions eventually reach the Yobanjin stronghold known as the City of Gold, where they confront and ultimately kill the rogue shugenja.

Shiba Naho is absent from the Empire for almost two years on her quest to the City of Gold, which is part of why the Phoenix Clan is relatively inactive during the final years of the war against the People's Legion. However, her story is also an example of how even during the direst of time the GM can still find ways to send the characters on individual adventures that are unrelated to the "epic" events happening elsewhere. A campaign comprised entirely of bloody battles and starvation can quickly lead to the players becoming jaded or depressed, so the occasional change of pace is a good idea.

The Clans and Factions During the Great Famine

At the beginning of the Great Famine era, the Great Clans and other factions within the Empire largely conform to what might be termed their traditional behaviors. However, as the famine progresses and the level of desperation increases throughout the Empire, honorable and traditional attitudes begin to collapse in favor of increasing ruthlessness, cruelty, and dishonorable pragmatism. Customary alliances between the clans also break down in this era, with the exception of the close Phoenix-Dragon alliance which is held together, in part, by a secret romance between the leaders on each side.

The Crab Clan

Things are relatively quiet for the Crab Clan at the beginning of the Great Famine. It has been a decade since the last major attack from the Shadowlands, and while the forces of Fu Leng always pose a threat they are not organized enough to conduct a major large-scale assault. A few years before the famine begins, Clan Champion Hida Higo dies of his injuries, and rule of the clan passes to his widow Hida Tsuneko (a former Matsu) until their children are old enough to inherit. Tsuneko proves to be a popular and capable leader and a fierce supporter of her adopted clan's samurai, earning her the affectionate nickname "Mother Wolf." However, the mixture of Matsu upbringing and Crab influence makes her exceptionally poorly suited to the world of politics, especially in the Crane-dominated courts of Emperor Hantei XX. Due to Tsuneko's familial

connections to the Matsu, the Crab enjoy good relations with the Lion Clan during much of this era, although the famine strains that alliance as it does every other. Oddly, they also have reasonably good relations with the Scorpion Clan, due in large part to the politically weak Scorpion trying to limit themselves to a single foe (the Crane). While the Shadowlands remains the Crab Clan's primary foe in this as in almost every era, the Crane Clan comes in a close second. Crane Champion Doji Morito clearly sees a former Lion at the head of the Crab Clan as a threat and goes out of his way to use Crane political and economic power against the Crab.

Once the famine gets underway, the combination of bad harvests and punitive Imperial taxes leave the Crab in a disastrous situation. Some help is forthcoming from the Mantis Clan, whose Clan Champion Tetsuken sets favorable prices on fish and other seafood to benefit his Crab cousins. This allows the Crab to make it through the famine with losses which, while bitter, are nowhere near those suffered by the Dragon or Lion. This is fortunate, since the Crab Clan's duties leaves it no choice but to maintain large armies on the border with the Shadowlands. (Since the Carpenter Wall has not yet been built in this era, the Crab rely on a layered defense of smaller fortifications and extensive reaction forces to hold the border, making the Empire's defense even more manpower-intensive than in later eras.)

The Crane Clan

At the beginning of the Great Famine, the Crane have been led for nearly forty years by Doji Morito, a highly skilled courtier who has held on to power well past the usual age of retirement. The clan enjoys a tremendous level of power, for Morito has spent his reign making sure almost every influential samurai in Rokugan is in his debt, politically or financially or both. Added to that, the blatant favoritism of Emperor Hantei XX ensures the Crane can get anything they want or need. Crane courtiers can elevate or destroy samurai careers on a whim and Crane trade networks can spread prosperity or poverty wherever they desire.

If there is one aspect of the Crane that suffers in this era of dominance, it is the clan's military forces. With the Crane overwhelmingly dominating the courts, the clan sees little need for armed solutions and the best and brightest young samurai seek glory in politics and art rather than the armies. During the good times before the Great Famine this is of little consequence, since the Crane political machine is more then enough to keep their lands secure. However, it proves a serious weakness once hunger strikes, as the Crane face not only peasant unrest but also significant invasions from both the Crab and the Lion. To maintain order and protect their provinces the Crane governors and daimyo are forced to rely heavily on ronin and Mantis mercenaries. Moreover, as the famine progresses even the formidable Crane food stores begin to dwindle, a problem made worse by the bitter trade war with the Yasuki. Many of the ronin troops wind up going rogue after their food runs low, rampaging across the very lands they are supposed to protect. Ultimately, Morito is forced to trade in most of the clan's hard-won political capital to gain the support and protection of the Emerald Champion and his Imperial Legions, relying on them to deter further Crab and Lion aggression and to try to maintain some kind of order in the Crane lands.

The dire effects of the famine on the Crane, especially combined with the vicious trade war against the Yasuki early on, results in larger effects for the Empire as a whole. Much of the Imperial economy simply breaks down, a devastating blow to a clan whose power is predominantly economic.

The Asahina and Daidoji suffer the most from both the economic collapse and from the general violence and cruelty of the era. Early in the famine their lands are ravaged by Crab troops, with the Daidoji suffering heavy casualties and losing their daimyo Daidoji Katsunan at the Battle of Honor's

Flight. In later years almost the entire region descends into anarchy; the only holdings that remain fully under Crane control are Mura Sabishii Toshi and Shinden Asahina. Asahina Koresada, the daimyo of the family, makes a valiant effort to help the sick and injured throughout the Empire—a rare instance of the Asahina family emerging from its normal isolated existence—but the sheer scale of suffering means his efforts make only a modest impact. It takes the Daidoji years of effort (and extensive assistance from Emerald Magistrates and the Imperial Legions) to restore order in the region, and the Daidoji Trading Council spends even longer rebuilding the trade and commercial networks shattered by the famine.

The Dragon Clan

Of all the Great Clans, none suffers more during the Great Famine then the Dragon. The clan is never wealthy and the years before the Great Famine exacerbate the problem with frequent border skirmishes with the truculent Lion. When famine begins in earnest, starvation strikes swiftly and a huge portion of the clan's peasants flee their homes, taking their chances as refugees rather than die where they are. This in turn makes the whole problem worse as the peasant population declines further and it becomes even harder to extract crops from the unforgiving mountains. In the latter years of the famine the shortages become so acute that many lesser samurai families also face starvation, often committing seppuku rather than endure such an undignified death.

In this era the Kami Togashi goes by the name Togashi Toshimasa. Recognizing there is nothing he can do to avert the suffering of the Empire, he becomes even more remote and distant than in other eras and spends much of his time in silent meditation, either in Shiro Mirumoto or the High House of Light. His few instructions to the rest of the clan are especially cryptic and often contradictory, leaving the clan's lesser daimyo to find their way as best they can. Mirumoto Umeka and Agasha Shunsuke, the daimyo of the Mirumoto and Agasha families, effectively run the clan during much of this era.

The only real ally the Dragon have during this time is the Phoenix Clan, and this is largely due to the public friendship (and secret love affair) between Mirumoto Umeka and the Phoenix Clan Champion, Shiba Moriaki. Due to Moriaki's influence, the Phoenix expend considerable energy trying to shield the Dragon in court, and Phoenix magistrates are a regular sight in the Dragon lands. However, the Phoenix have many problems of their own during the Great Famine and can only offer so much help to the beleaguered Dragon.

By the end of the Great Famine much of the Dragon territory is reduced to essentially a lawless frontier in which the only forces attempting to maintain order are roving bands of Togashi monks and wandering Mirumoto duelists. Umeka eventually decides to grant fealty to any masterless samurai or ashigaru (including those who might have served in the now-defunct "People's Legion") who will serve, using them as expendable forces to clean out the bandits and other criminals occupying many of the Dragon Clan's abandoned holdings.

The Lion Clan

As the Great Famine begins, the Lion Clan enjoys a fairly strong position in the Empire, albeit not as secure as the Crane. The Clan Champion, Akodo Masahisa, is trained as an *omoidasu* rather than as a bushi (his older brother, trained in the War College, dies five years earlier from a fever); although this does lead to a certain amount of tension between Masahisa and his more militant family daimyo, it also allows him to represent the clan well in the courts—a vital advantage in this era. Even better, Masahisa's son and heir, Akodo Masaumi, is betrothed to the Emperor's youngest sister. The Lion also hold the office of Emerald Champion, thanks to the victory of Masahisa's adopted brother Akodo Kenburo in the most recent Emerald Tournament. Economically, during this time the Lion control all of the former Ki-Rin lands, making them one of the wealthiest clans as well as the largest. This also means the Lion are one of the last clans to suffer serious effects from the famine.

Even before the famine, tensions are high between the Lion and their northern neighbors, the Dragon, due to an ongoing series of border skirmishes. The Lion have a more cordial relationship with the rest of their neighbors and are downright friendly with the Crab. When the famine hits, the Lion initially suffer little damage due to their vast farmlands, but the influx of refugees from the Dragon lands quickly draws them into a major conflict on their northern border. As the famine worsens in later

years, however, unrest among the Lion peasants becomes acute and the clan makes war more aggressively on all of its neighbors. Masahisa even deliberately foments attacks by Lion peasants on the Crane to loot their lands for food.

It is the rise of the so-called "People's Legion," however, that truly endangers the Clan of Akodo. Ironically, the Legion is advised by Masahisa's retired father, Rojin, a man shaken to his core by his experience of the violence of war. It is Rojin's counsel that allows the Legion's peasant leader to defeat several Lion armies and ultimately kill both Masahisa himself and his successor Matsu Ikuko, a truly bitter humiliation to a clan that considers itself the dominant military force in the Empire. However, much as with past defeats, the Lion learn from the experience and develop new tactics to oppose and ultimately defeat the Legion. Although the official Ikoma histories delete all mention of the People's Legion and its accomplishments, the texts of the Akodo War College still record all the tactics and methods the Lion developed during the war.

In the short term, of course, the political and economic impact of the Great Famine on the Lion Clan is severe. The loss of so much of their lands and of major battles to a "mere peasant rebellion" weakens their reputation for some time—although the Empire's eagerness to forget the whole terrible ordeal does mitigate the damage somewhat. The clan is also ruled for the next decade and more by Akodo Kenburo, a thuggish former ronin whose bad reputation and penchant for violence do nothing to rebuild Lion prestige. After Kenburo's death in the year 680, the restoration of rule to the true Akodo bloodline helps the clan recover its balance and return to normal.

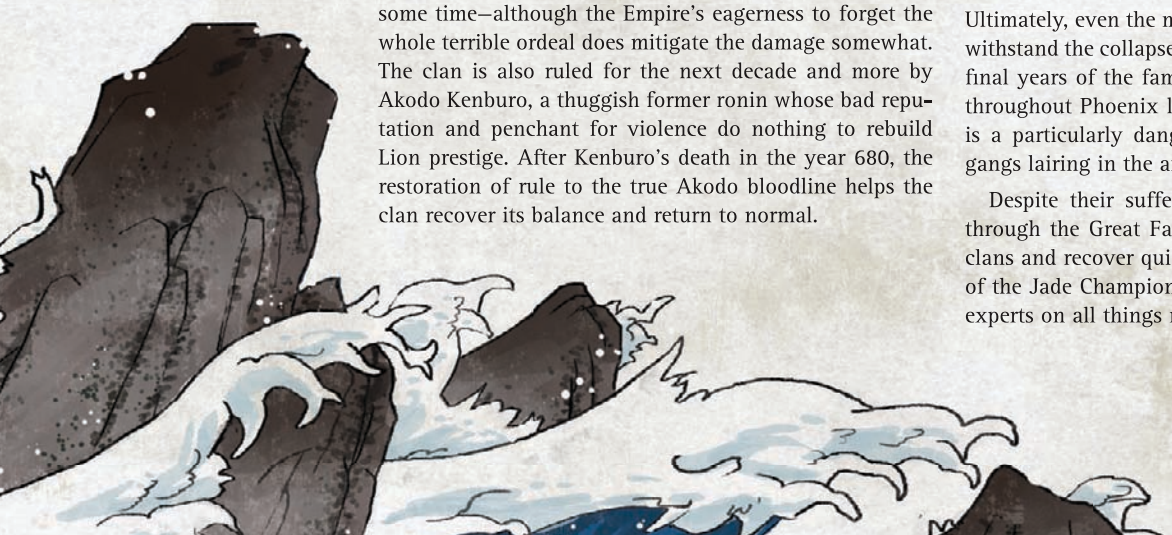
The Phoenix Clan

At the beginning of the Great Famine the Phoenix Clan's rulers, the Isawa, have enjoyed several decades of peace and relative contentment, turning inward to pursue their quest for knowledge and wisdom. The Council of Elemental Masters in this era is dominated by mystics and scholars who are more interested in pursuing magical and theological research than in ruling the clan; their only real political concern is their ongoing campaign to diminish the office of Jade Champion. The appointment of Yogo Yoshi as Jade Champion in the year 658 is very concerning to the Elemental Masters, since he is a strong personality who may restore prestige and power to the office. The Master of Air, Isawa Ryutaro, is particularly focused on opposing the Jade Champion, and after he discovers an outbreak of *maho* in the town of Aka Mizu-Umi he uses the incident to destroy Yoshi's reputation.

Due to the relatively inactive nature of the Elemental Council, the Phoenix Clan Champion, Shiba Moriaki, enjoys a high degree of freedom to set his own policies. In the years leading up to the Great Famine he builds good relationships with both the Crane and Scorpion, often working to keep peace in the courts between the two political clans. However, Moriaki is also engaged in a long-term secret romance with the Mirumoto daimyo, Umeka. This romantic connection leads to the Phoenix involving themselves heavily in the Dragon-Lion fighting that erupts once the famine gets underway, and eventually results in Moriaki's death and the passage of the Clan Champion's position to the young Shiba Naho.

Thanks to the Isawa family's powerful magic, the famine initially has little impact on the Phoenix lands—although hunger is widespread, there is at first no actual starvation. The Master of Earth, Isawa Michitaka, even uses his acolytes to help other clans, winning political favors for the Phoenix. However, as the famine grows worse, rumors spread across Rokugan that the Phoenix still have rice, resulting in an influx of refugees, ronin, and even samurai defectors, straining the clan's resources. Ultimately, even the magical might of the Phoenix cannot withstand the collapse of the Imperial economy, and in the final years of the famine riots and banditry are rampant throughout Phoenix lands. The Dragon - Phoenix border is a particularly dangerous area, with numerous bandit gangs lairing in the area and raiding the Phoenix lands.

Despite their suffering, the Phoenix ultimately come through the Great Famine better than most of the other clans and recover quickly in the aftermath. The departure of the Jade Champion makes the Phoenix the undisputed experts on all things magical, and the alliances forged by



the Master of Earth's assistance allow the clan to improve its political fortunes in subsequent decades.

The Scorpion Clan

The reign of Emperor Hantei XX is not a particularly good time in Rokugan's history to be a Scorpion samurai. The Crane Clan's dominance of the courts and Emperor Hantei XX's blatant disdain for Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Hideari completely stymies the clan's political agendas, and Scorpion courtiers are forced to fight tooth and nail just to maintain the status quo in court. Hideari puts considerable effort into strengthening the Scorpion military to try to compensate for the clan's political weakness, purchasing high-quality equipment from the Crab and working to enroll promising Scorpion officers in the Akodo War College. The one real political victory Hideari is able to secure in the decade leading up to the Great Famine is the appointment of his cousin Yogo Yoshi, a well-respected court shugenja, to the position of Jade Champion.

In an effort to counteract the Crane strength, Hideari spends years fostering better relationships with the Crab and Lion, as well as making overtures to the Phoenix. These meet with only limited success, since none of these three clans are particularly trusting of the Clan of Lies. However, they pay off when the famine gets underway and Hideari manages to avert any direct invasion of the Scorpion lands. He sends military assistance to the Crab, offering Scorpion troops to help man the border with the Shadowlands (and thereby encouraging Crab aggression against the Crane). He also dispatches teams of shinobi to harass and sabotage the Crane armies during their wars with both the Crab and the Lion.

Riots and unrest are major problems within Scorpion lands throughout the famine, especially with much of the clan's strength committed to averting an invasion. Hideari ends up recruiting the Mantis to help with internal security, a drastic step that the Scorpion would normally never have countenanced. It is a measure of how dire the Great Famine is that the Scorpion are forced to resort to this stopgap.

Ironically, the heaviest blow to the Scorpion in this era does not come from the famine at all, but from a *maho* cult cell led by a madman calling himself the Dear Uncle. When magistrates in the region of Aka Mizu-Umi go missing, the Phoenix Master of Air investigates and exposes the cult, destroying the repute of the Jade Champion. Although Yogo Yoshi was investigating the problem, the Phoenix moved more swiftly and then used Yoshi's "failure" to push for the final dissolution of the office of Jade Champion. Yoshi retires to a monastery in shame, the last Jade Champion for over 400 years.

In the aftermath of the Great Famine, the Scorpion Clan is able to recover fairly quickly, almost as fast as the Phoenix. Moreover, the devastation to the Crane and general weakening of all of the other clans allows the Scorpion Clan to greatly strengthen its overall position within the Empire. By the end of the next century the Scorpion will be among the strongest of Great Clans, so much so that by the time the Unicorn return to Rokugan, the Scorpion are regarded as the strongest clan in the Empire.

The Minor Clans

While life for a Minor Clan is always challenging, during this era their burdens are almost too much to bear. The Minor Clans' problems are the same as the Great Clans'—hunger and economic collapse, leading to civil strife—but are often more pronounced due to their small size and political and military weakness. Most Minor Clans do not run much of a rice surplus even during normal years, so when the famine reaches starvation level the impact is even worse for them than for the Great Clans. On top of that, the Minor Clans' lack of political clout makes it all but impossible for them to seek tax abatements or otherwise gain the attention and assistance of the Imperial

bureaucracy. Without adequate food or koku, many Minor Clans wind up losing retainers to wealthier Great Clan daimyo. The loss of so many samurai hurts them for generations to come.

The Minor Clans least affected by the Great Famine are, ironically, at opposite ends of the prosperity range: the Mantis and Sparrow. The Mantis Clan actually profits greatly off the famine, since they largely avoid its effects and the demand for their seafood skyrockets. With the Empire wracked by war and banditry, the Mantis are able to find many patrons for their traditional role as mercenaries for hire, while their covert piracy grows more profitable with the Great Clans too poor and distracted to wage effective anti-piracy campaigns. In the Sparrow lands, meanwhile, the famine merely makes for a slightly more difficult time than normal. Sparrow samurai are already used to making do with much less then the average samurai, and their philosophy of honorable poverty ensures that not a single Sparrow samurai defects during the famine.

Out of the other Minor Clans, the Badger probably suffer the most during the famine. After the People's Legion seizes the northern Lion lands, the Badger find themselves isolated on the wrong side of the Legion from the rest of the Empire. Asahime sends an ultimatum to the Badger Champion, Ichiro Yoshinobu, demanding free travel for her merchants and their yobanjin allies through Badger lands. Yoshinobu is so outraged that anyone, least of all a peasant traitor, would ask him to abandon his oaths that he responds by instantly killing the messenger and sending the corpse back nailed to a merchant's cart. Unfortunately, the Badger lack the strength to resist the subsequent attack by the People's Legion—their defenses are oriented toward an attack from outside the Empire, not from inside. Yoshinobu tells his samurai their future duty to the Empire does not allow them to throw their lives away in a hopeless battle, and commands the Badger to scatter and go underground in the People's Legion's territories, waging guerilla war against them. It is the first time the Badger are forced into such a dire predicament, but sadly it will not be the last—the Minor Clan will stare defeat in the face again in the twelfth century.

When the People's Legion is finally defeated, Akodo Kenburo recognizes the Badger for their sacrifices and gives his own sword, a blade he calls the Ogre's Knife, to Yoshinobu in thanks.

Aside from the Badger, the other Minor Clans of this era—the Centipede, the Fox, and the Tortoise—mostly stay out of the wars and simply struggle to survive.

The Imperial Families

While the Imperial families are far better insulated from the Great Famine then the rest of Rokugan, during the height of the shortages even they are forced to sometimes go hungry, especially if they travel outside of their own holdings. Naturally the Imperial Court itself never lacks for food, especially since the Emperor refuses to abate taxes during the famine and in some cases even raises them punitively against those who earn his wrath.

In point of fact, the reign of Emperor Hantei XX probably contributes significantly to the severe impact of the Great Famine. Taking the throne in the year 650 when his father Hantei XIX retires, the Emperor remembered as Hantei XX is a selfish, devious, and obsessive ruler, exhibiting (in a somewhat more muted form, thankfully) many of the same traits as his terrible ancestor Hantei XVI. He shows a complete lack of concern for the well-being of the majority of his subjects, offers blatant favoritism to the Lion and especially the Crane Clans, and refuses to even admit he may have made any mistakes during his long reign. He is one of the longest-lived and longest-reigning Emperors after Hantei Genji himself, remaining on the throne well after the age of retirement and finally dying in the year 728 on the morning after his 97th birthday. During his later years he is disconnected from most of what is happening in the Empire, and the Imperial historians are already whitewashing his earlier deeds well before his soul departs Ningen-do.

Prior to the Great Famine, Hantei XX's most notable political act is to take many court positions away from the Otomo and Seppun and instead give them to members of the Crane Clan, whose clan he admires to an almost irrational degree. (It is not known whether this obsessive pro-Crane viewpoint was due to his close relationships to his mother and wife, both of whom were of course Crane, or was merely a personal oddity.) The loss of influence is immense, leaving the Otomo almost as powerless in court as the Scorpion. In response, Imperial and Scorpion courtiers frequently work together to undermine the Crane and counter their immense influence with the Emperor. The Seppun, of course, are traditionally a less political family focused on matters of protection and security, but their influence is also lessened by the Emperor's almost fawning admiration for Akodo Kenburo, the Emerald Champion, who the Emperor ultimately appoints as Lion Clan Champion.

The Miya are the only Imperial family that does not suffer a diminishment of influence under Hantei XX's reign, perhaps because their influence was never that great to begin with. The Miya do enjoy a sharp increase in popularity and influence among the Great Clans due to their control of Miya's Blessing. In an era of floods, famine, and war all across the Empire, the Blessing's importance is greatly magnified and all the clans earnestly lobby the Miya for assistance. The Empire spends almost two decades after the Great Famine repairing infrastructure, and the Miya coordinate these efforts to great effect.

The Shadowlands

The Shadowlands has little impact on the era of the Great Famine. While individual creatures and small armies assail the Crab lands in the usual manner, no major Oni Lord or other such leader is able to assemble a large enough force to seriously threaten the Empire by land.

The Empire's southern coast does face a threat from a Shadowlands fleet, comprised mainly of Rokugani ships lost in the Sea of Shadows over previous centuries and crewed by a mixture of Lost and goblins, along with the occasional oni. During the years 664-666 this fleet raids the southern coast of the Empire, and the Mantis and Crab Clans both commit significant resources to battling it. It is not known who actually commanded the ghastly fleet, with some accounts suggesting a powerful oni and others crediting one of the Lost, possibly a former Mantis, Crab, or Crane. (One other possibility is that the fleet was actually organized by the Lost gaijin Garen Hawthorne, who fell to the Shadowlands after fleeing defeat at the Battle of White Stag two centuries earlier. However, Garen's status as a Lost did not become known to the Empire until he joined Daigotsu in the twelfth century, making it unlikely that he posed a serious threat to the Empire this early. Still, GMs who find the idea appealing can certainly portray Garen as the leader of the fleet.)

Fortunately for Rokugan, goblins have poor sailing skills and the fleet tends to move slowly and erratically. Ultimately the Mantis Champion, Tetsuken, defeats the fleet at the cost of his own life.

Gaming the Great Famine: It's A Hard Knock Life, Samurai-sama

Superficially the Great Famine is not all that different from other tumultuous eras in Rokugan's history, such as the Clan Wars or the Race for the Throne. Like these other times, the Great Famine sees wars, political intrigue, Shadowlands threats, and great loss of life in both tragic and heroic fashion. What sets the Famine era apart from these other crises is that it is not just a time of hardship for the common folk but also for the samurai themselves. The most basic assumptions about samurai life come under threat. Samurai usually can assume their daimyo will provide them with all the food they need and with whatever other items or assistance they might require to carry out their duties; they expect to be able to kill non-samurai on a whim without any fear of retribution, to find safe drinking water just a stream away, and to treat money as trivial and often irrelevant. How do samurai react when they are politely told that the daimyo has no rice to give them at this time, or that they should be thankful for the meager ration of millet they've been given? How do they deal with peasants who are no longer willing to take abuse from samurai and have, in fact, conquered the entire northwest of Rokugan? What do they do when fresh water is polluted from floods and disease and they are laid low by virulent fevers? Where do they find even the most basic equipment when abysmal travel conditions and the Daidoji - Yasuki trade conflict have paralyzed the economy?

Alternate Paths: The Shadowlands on the March

In the actual history of the Great Famine, the relatively quiescent nature of the Shadowlands allows the Empire to deal with its internal problems and recover safely. However, what if things had gone differently? If a powerful leader had emerged in the Shadowlands during the seventh century, the Empire might have faced a very dire situation. Early in the famine the Crab committed a large portion of their army to an attack on the Crane, and later the impact of starvation was so acute that the Crab armies were seriously depleted. An all-out Shadowlands attack could easily have overrun the border and pushed on into the heart of the Empire. With Rokugan divided and weak, led by a selfish and cruel Emperor, the consequences could have been apocalyptic.

The presence of the People's Legion would have complicated things as well. Since Asahime and her followers reject all of the Celestial Order, they might well have refused to believe the Shadowlands was truly an enemy—after all, that was what the samurai always told them, and samurai could not be trusted. Nor did the Legion have any understanding of the Taint or the dangers of *maho*, so a few Shadowlands infiltrators could have easily corrupted the whole Legion into an alliance.

On the other hand, the threat of a Shadowlands invasion might have been severe enough to force a reluctant truce on the rest of the Empire, leading to scenarios in which Legion revolutionaries go into battle alongside clan samurai. Of course, such an alliance is unlikely to last beyond the immediate clash with the Shadowlands, and both sides will be watching each other for the threat of betrayal.

These sorts of situations allow the GM to offer a variety of unusual challenges to players accustomed to a more conventional L5R experience. Legend of the Five Rings players often think of their samurai characters in a very idealistic way, portraying their heroes as paragons who never falter in their duty and devotion to clan or Empire. Such idealized and somewhat stereotypical play has an appeal, of course, but it lacks depth. The Great Famine allows the GM to challenge such superficial idealism by confronting the PCs with situations in which it no longer functions properly. When a simple meal of rice and fish is so rare as to seem like a delicacy fit for the Emperor, samurai may find themselves forced to compromise their principles just to get enough to eat. Even foods samurai normally dismiss as disgusting or inappropriate become expensive and sought-after as the Great Famine deepens. How do the players react when their characters face a choice between eating red meat or starving? Does their duty to live and serve their lord outweigh their duty to

avoid the physical (and possibly spiritual) contamination of eating such foods?

And what happens when there is no food at all, appropriate or otherwise? Traditionally, Rokugan feeds the samurai by taxing the peasants. How does a compassionate samurai uphold this social principle when emaciated peasants are dying in front of his eyes every day? For that matter, how do samurai maintain themselves as civilized and refined human beings when they confront food shortages? A mighty Crane duelist is fearless when he faces his opponents sword to sword... but how will he deal with the helplessness of watching his wife and children starving to death?

It is also worth noting that this is an era where strictly following the precepts of honor may be a poor choice for survival. More than most eras, the Great Famine is a time when the pragmatic samurai is the one who comes out on top. Even if player characters are unwilling to compromise their own principles for the sake of survival, the GM can still use NPCs to confront them with these realities. For example, in other settings clan samurai only leave their clan if they are forced out in shame, married off, or are too idealistic to serve a corrupt lord. During the Great Famine, however, many formerly wealthy lords can no longer properly care for their vassals, and numerous samurai abandon their fealty to seek another lord who can feed them. A few even sign on with the People's Legion for the sake of a full bowl of rice. Idealistic PCs may be willing to tighten their belts and show how honorable they are, but the GM can still confront them with fellow samurai who are more practical... forcing the PCs to seriously examine their own choices and consider what Bushido means in such dire circumstances. How will they react to the news that a friend or cousin or sensei is packing up to serve a rival lord in a neighboring province? Perhaps this triggers a blood feud, or perhaps the PCs begin to wonder if they should defect as well...

Peasants in Rokugan are of course driven purely by the need to survive. Even during good times it is not uncommon for farmers to discreetly hide some of their rice harvest from the tax collectors so they can eat a little better over the following year. In rare instances they may even murder troublesome samurai and dispose of the corpses. During the Great Famine, however, sheer desperation combined with the callous disregard of the Emperor drives the peasantry to become unprecedentedly defiant and violent. Although at the beginning of the era PCs can expect peasant behavior to match with L5R's established stereotypes (keeping their heads down, bowing and scraping, and generally fearful of samurai), after a few years this begins to change. The combination of starvation and the growing inability of the samurai to fulfill their traditional role of protecting their peasants from invading armies and roving bandit gangs leads to riot and revolt all across the Empire. Peasant revolts can happen even during normal times when the folk in a city or province are pushed too

far (see page 241 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* for discussion of this). In conditions as dire as the Great Famine, revolts become epidemic, and commoners as a whole begin to lose their fear of samurai—after all, if starvation is already staring you in the face, what more can a samurai do to you? PCs may start to encounter peasants who fail to use honorifics when addressing samurai, who look samurai directly in the eyes when speaking to them, or who refuse to bow at all. They may encounter merchants who demand hard coin for their goods. They may encounter whole villages which rebel rather than pay their taxes. How do the PCs react to these challenges?

The Great Famine is a setting which contains plenty of conventional material for L5R adventures—wars, *maho* cults, bandit raids. But it is also a setting that challenges the players to think about what being a samurai really means. Is Bushido really stronger than an empty stomach?

Revolution in Rokugan: The People's Legion

The People's Legion is a unique event in Rokugani history, made possible only by the extreme conditions of the Great Famine. It is an army of rebellious peasants that manages to wage war against the Empire quite effectively for several years, in the process recruiting significant numbers of ronin and monks (and even a very few current and former clan samurai). The Legion takes control of most of the northern Lion lands—the territory which once belonged to the Ki-Rin and which will be reclaimed by the Unicorn a century later—and holds the territory for three years, refusing to recognize the authority of Emperor Hantei XX. This was such a shocking event that it provokes an extreme reaction from the rest of the Empire, with the Emperor and Emerald Champion employing the most ruthless and cruel tactics to finally defeat the Legion and restore Imperial authority.

The Legion is a revolutionary movement created by desperate and embittered peasants, and as such rejects a great many aspects of normal Rokugani life. It refuses to recognize caste differences, instead using only military ranks to distinguish social rank—there is no acknowledgment of any spiritual distinction between *eta*, peasant, and samurai. Governance is by a military junta headed by Asahime, the brilliant but fanatical commoner woman who created the Legion. Since the Legion has no bureaucracy or other such sophisticated government organization, the junta appoints local "governors" who use direct drafts of food, labor, and other goods to alleviate the effects of the famine within their territory. Since these policies are just as likely to drive people out of the Legion's territory as to lure them in, travel is sharply restricted. Crimes are still punished on the basis of testimony, but no weight is given to the words of samurai (and indeed any samurai who do not join the Legion are killed), and punishments are generally harsh—in particular, any resistance to Legion demands or ideals is considered "treason" and punished with public execution. Given a longer lifespan, the junta might have developed a more sophisticated governing structure and even a tax system, but this was not possible within the three-year span of its survival.

Asahime imposes strict and often very harsh discipline on the Legion soldiers—especially after the former Lion Champion, Rojin, becomes her ally and advisor. The Legion, like the crude government it establishes and supports, relies on forced-draft collection of labor and supplies to keep itself in operation, and assesses mandatory military service on all those who live within its territory. Military service is mandatory for all citizens and any failure of discipline or obedience is punished swiftly and brutally.

In battle, the soldiers of the People's Legion make heavy use of spearmen and archers. There is great emphasis put on working in unison, relying on repetitive drill and superior numbers to compensate for the greater fighting skills of the Empire's samurai. Drafted soldiers are formed into squadrons and companies from the same village or city district, assisting morale and unity. Drill is intense, often lasting as much as four hours per day, and includes periodic military exercises against other units—a training method introduced by Rojin. Later on the Legion also begins employing yobanjin mercenaries, using them as shock troops, an act which only further inflames the enmity of the clans.

In religious terms the men and women of the Legion are heretics or possibly even blasphemers, rejecting the Rokugani social systems based on the Celestial Order and denying the Emperor's divine mandate to govern. This causes them problems within their own ranks, since many of the peasants who are forced into the Legion later on (after they occupy the former Ki-Rin lands) remain devout and believe the Legion is forcing them to perform actions that will earn the wrath of the Fortunes, or lead to their own punishment in the afterlife due to bad kharma. Although the persistence of the famine for so long is subject to several different religious interpretations, within the lands of the People's Legion there is a significant undercurrent that blames it on the Legion's own blasphemy.

The People's Legion's early victories against the Lion Clan are a source of considerable alarm to other clans, particularly the Scorpion and Dragon who share borders with the Legion's territory. Both of these clans are in weak positions already and establish covert diplomatic and economic ties to the Legion, hoping to stave off invasion through quiet gestures of goodwill. Open recognition of the People's Legion is of course a political impossibility, since doing so constitutes treason against the Imperial Throne, but the pressures of the famine make secret contacts quite appealing. Only the Lion Clan refuses to have anything to do with the Legion, treating them from beginning to end as nothing more than traitors and rebels.

The People's Legion and Role-Play Options

The rise and fall of the so-called "People's Legion"—an event carefully expunged from later official histories—offers a unique opportunity for an L5R campaign: a chance to play a game in a different society without actually leaving Rokugan's borders. Samurai PCs who want an unusual challenge could be sent to spy and sabotage within the Legion's territory, or they could be part of one of the covert diplomatic contacts dispatched by clans like the Scorpion and the Dragon. Such PCs will find themselves exploring a land which seems like their own but is nonetheless alien and even terrifying.

A samurai visiting the lands of the People's Legion will have to remain in hiding if he wishes to move completely unobstructed (peasants are allowed to move freely within the Legion's lands but cannot leave its territory). A GM wishing to run an all-ninja campaign will find infiltration of the Legion territory to be an excellent setting, since such PCs can not only move covertly but also have little compunction over disguising themselves as commoners. Samurai who come as diplomats will face a much more restrictive environment: the Legion will assign them guards and carefully control everything they see, trying to present an image as a strong, united, and resilient nation. Such PCs will be shown new construction in every community they pass though, along with constant military drills, groups of well-armed ashigaru patrolling the countryside, yobanjin caravans, public art commemorating the Legion's victories over the Great Clan armies, and similar sights designed to convey an image of strength. The PCs will likely wind up meeting personally with Asahime, Rojin, and their chief sub-commanders, since the Legion "government" is not sophisticated enough to have courts, diplomats, and other such conventions of samurai civilization. This can be an opportunity for the PCs to directly confront anti-samurai fanaticism and try to gauge the strength of the Legion leadership.

The local population will for the most part be hostile to visiting PCs; however, it should be noted that support for the Legion is by no means universal within their territory, and many peasants quietly remain loyal to their old lords

How Organized is the Revolution?

The default assumption for the People's Legion is that it is a relatively crude, ad hoc sort of government, a military dictatorship that resorts to brute force for most of its activities. However, a bold GM may decide to make the Legion a more formidable and unsettling opponent by imbuing it with greater organization and structure, drawing on more recent revolutionary movements for inspiration. In this case, the Legion will quickly develop its own bureaucracy and governing structure, including a sophisticated internal security system with travel papers, police, spies, and informants. Citizens who wish to travel must submit a request to their commanding officers, explaining where they are going, why, and when they expect to return. Once the traveler has reached his destination he must likewise check in with the officer in charge there.

Samurai visiting this more organized version of the Legion will have to register at border stations with their name and any identifying *mon* in order to gain official travel papers, and will be assigned "minders," official escorts who watch over them constantly and make sure they do not see or do anything inappropriate. Asahime's government will actually have something resembling a court where her diplomats will treat the visiting PCs with superficial warmth. (Of course, such warmth will evaporate if the PCs are identified as spies or threats.) Due to Rojin's influence, the style and décor of the court will greatly resemble that of the Lion Clan, albeit stripped of most traditional religious and social symbols.

A more organized Legion government may decide to make more efficient use of lawbreakers and captured foes by putting them to work in labor camps. Prisoners are tattooed to identify them and work long hours on projects such as road and bridge repair and digging fortifications. Obviously some captured samurai will try to commit suicide rather than be subjected to the shame of forced labor alongside peasants, but those who resist such urges will still face the challenge of escaping from the well-guarded camps. Moreover, many of the guards and even some of the commoner inmates at these labor camps will not be able to resist the opportunity to take out their anger on an imprisoned samurai.

or harbor fears that the Legion's actions will draw the wrath of the kami and Fortunes. Covert PCs will especially be able to draw on help from these people.

Regardless, any samurai caught within Legion lands without a proper escort is immediately arrested and will most likely be tortured and executed as a spy. Despite their confident outward front, the leadership of the Legion greatly fears spies and infiltrators and is quite ruthless in questioning and punishing anyone they suspect of playing such a role.

Hopeless Heroism: Joining the Revolution

"I was once a simple mercenary who fought and killed for pay. Now I fight and kill for a cause I believe in, and you call me criminal and blasphemer. I call you my enemy."

—Koro, ronin in the People's Legion

A GM who really wants to challenge his players with an unusual style of campaign can opt to make them part of the Legion itself, as militant peasants or as ronin—or even the occasional clan samurai who joins up for food. This will be a very different sort of game from normal L5R and may require a considerable amount of "homebrew" modification to the rules, especially for peasant characters. On the other hand, it will certainly put the PCs smack into the middle of a classic Asian tale of tragedy, for there are no "good guys" and there is no happy ending in a story told from the Legion's viewpoint. The Emperor and his samurai are oppressive and cruel, but the Legion itself is equally harsh and ruthless. It demands total commitment to its war, force-drafts soldiers and supplies from the population, and brooks no dissent against its rule and its policies. Players looking for an idealistic story of noble common folk battling an oppressive system will not find that tale here.

Military service is mandatory for all healthy adults living within the territory of the People's Legion and military activities consume a large amount of their time, so any campaign set within the Legion will be focused primarily on war and conflict. Chapter Ten of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* contains many suggestions on how to run a military-themed campaign, and these can fairly easily be adapted to a game set within the People's Legion. Due to Rojin's influence the People's Legion has the same overall military organization and command structure as a traditional Rokugani army, but the units are recruited geographically down to the smallest level. So, for example, all members of one family might be in the same squadron, a company would be recruited from a single village, and so forth up the scale. Status within the Legion is based entirely on military rank; promotions are supposed to be based solely on performance, though in practice there is plenty of favoritism.

Aside from the relentless demands for military service and the absolute refusal to allow anyone to leave, the Legion for the most part does not interfere with the private lives of the peasants who live within its borders. Commoners are free to travel as they like within the Legion territories and can conduct business, marry, and otherwise carry on their personal affairs as they please. However, there is the constant risk that the Legion will confiscate food, equipment, or other goods to support the war effort. Commerce is limited and takes place mostly on a local scale; wealthy and wide-traveling merchants generally flee the Legion territories rather than lose their wealth—and quite possibly their lives.

Justice and law within the Legion territories is upheld with military force, with criminals judged and sentenced by a tribunal of three military officers. Beatings, confiscation, and death are the usual punishments, with death certain for anyone who is suspected of "treason" (working for the Empire). This harsh system may give pause to those PCs who are trying to fight for a better future, and this sort of moral quandary—fighting in a cause thought just, but then coming to the realization that one's own side is no better—is a classic theme of Asian tragedy.

PCs who win battles or otherwise distinguish themselves on behalf of the People's Legion will be able to advance in its ranks, eventually coming into contact with Asahime herself. It is up to the GM whether to portray Asahime as an idealist struggling with impossible burdens or a

bitter fanatic driven by hatred; either option will present the PCs with moral and emotional quandaries. Meanwhile, the Imperial Legions slowly close in and the war grows steadily more cruel and bitter. Where do the PCs make their stand? Do they fight to the death for the Legion's principles, or abandon a dream that has gone sour? Epic and memorable campaigns are born from such decisions.

Notable Personages from the Great Famine

The following section describes several notable individuals from the Great Famine era. It should be noted that the Glory and Infamy listed for the leaders of the People's Legion (Asahime and Rojin) are those they would have to the rest of Rokugani society. Within the Legion and the lands it controls, they treat their Infamy as Glory.

Asahime

The Revolutionary

Asahime is the greatest general history has ever forgotten. She was born the only daughter of a wealthy rice merchant in the southern Dragon provinces, and had a very privileged upbringing by the standards of the *heimin* caste. Her mother had died of fever, so her father spoiled her, buying her anything her heart desired—which, as a child, was everything. She was constantly changing hobbies; it seemed that every month something new completely consumed her attention, only to be discarded when the next great thing came along.

It was on a trip to Kyuden Ikoma with her father that Asahime's life changed forever. For the first time in her life she saw real samurai doing real military drills, something that looked to her like the most beautiful dance ever choreographed. She became completely obsessed with samurai and their art of war. Her obliging father spent a small fortune obtaining copies of works such as the *Book of Sun Tao*, Akodo's *Leadership*, and any other manuscript detailing the art of war, no matter how obscure or expensive. Asahime read and re-read them obsessively. She also began practicing martial arts in secret—even her indulgent father would not hire her a combat instructor.

When the Great Famine began, Asahime's father began spending his fortune to try to alleviate the effects. When Asahime complained about their own straitened circumstances, her father replied that it was the responsibility of those with power to help those without. A few months later, Lion magistrates come to their house to claim her father's excess stock of rice. He refused to give it to them, and the samurai cut him down and took what they came for. Asahime was left alone, suddenly poverty-stricken and embittered against the samurai caste she had once idolized. Most young women would have starved and died, but instead Asahime began to speak against the samurai, urging her fellow commoners to join her in resistance against their corrupt and selfish governance. So the People's Legion was born.

Asahime proved to be a natural tactical genius whose skills were further enhanced by her studies of Rokugan's classic military works. She also possessed considerable drive and charisma, and her mere presence on the battlefield often inspired her followers to feats of astonishing heroics. Unfortunately, she also possessed in full the inexperience and naïvete of youth, sharpened over time into inflexible fanaticism. Left to herself, her movement would probably have collapsed after a year or less, but the assistance

of Rojin allowed it to grow into a full-fledged army and even, briefly, a nation of a sort.

Ashime spent her short remaining life obsessed with the struggle to preserve her movement and defeat her samurai foes. She had little time for herself and others often had to remind her to eat or sleep. Although rigidly inflexible in her beliefs (to the point of flinging accusations of treason against those who disagreed with them too strongly), she was good at listening to tactical advice, especially from Rojin who she trusted implicitly. It is unknown whether she had any other friends or romantic relationships, although it seems unlikely given how larger events consumed her life.

Asahime, Leader of the People's Legion

Air: 2	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 3
Reflexes: 3		Agility: 4	Perception: 4	

Honor: 0.0 *Status: -10.0* *Glory: 8.0* *Infamy: 10.0*

School/Rank: People's Legionnaire (Insight Rank 2)

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 7, Commerce 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Hunting (Tracking) 3, Jiujutsu 3, Knives 3, Lore: War 5, Spears (Nage-yari, Yari) 7, Stealth (Ambush) 5

Advantages: Hero of the People, Leadership, Tactician

Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage: Heimin, Sworn Enemy (Emperor of Rokugan)

Akodo Kenburo

Emerald Champion and Champion of the Lion

Akodo Kenburo was one of the most unlikely Emerald Champions and Lion Champions in the history of either office. The bastard son of an unknown Crab and an outcast drunkard samurai-ko, Kenburo spent his childhood wandering Rokugan's cities with his disgraced mother. His "dojo" were back-ally gambling houses and cheap sake dens; he learned the power of intimidation working as a leg-breaker for criminal bosses, the importance of observation by stalking their rivals, and the darkness that lived in the hearts of all men while collecting information to blackmail the local magistrates. Kenburo grew up disgusted by false faces, by the cancer of depravity and dishonor that lurked beneath the honorable surface of Rokugan, by his mother... and most of all by himself. On the morning of his fourteenth birthday Kenburo stole his mother's sword and money, striking out on his own and leaving her to her sake. He never saw her again.

Despite his lack of formal training Kenburo quickly developed a reputation as a deadly duelist. He spent the early years of his independence traveling from dojo to dojo, berating and intimidating the students into challenging him to duels. Kenburo's style was completely unique, built around his ogre-like physique, intense intimidation, and keen observation of his opponents. He fought with his mother's long and heavy katana, a deceptively crude-looking weapon which he nicknamed the Ogre's Knife.

At the age of nineteen Kenburo hired on with the Lion Clan as a mercenary, fighting in one of their periodic campaigns against the Crane. During the campaign's climactic battle Kenburo intercepted the Kenshinzen sent to duel the Lion Clan Champion, Akodo Akihisa. Kenburo killed the Kenshinzen and slaughtered his entourage, ensuring a Lion victory. In a show of gratitude Akihisa offered Kenburo fealty to the Lion and named him as his personal champion for the rest of the campaign against the Crane. The two men grew close, for each was ruthless and brutally pragmatic; Akihisa saw Kenburo as the son he wished he had borne, instead of his heir Masahisa. When the campaign was over and the Lion had returned home, Akihisa adopted Kenburo as his son, although pressure from the rest of the clan prevented him from naming Kenburo as heir over Masahisa.

After Akihisa's retirement, his son Akodo Masahisa encouraged Kenburo to enter the Emerald Tournament, both to win prestige for the Lion Clan and to discourage any possible rivalry between Kenburo and himself. Kenburo triumphed at the Tournament, in the process winning a duel against Kakita Taki, the Kakita daimyo, during the final round. Legends claimed Kenburo's sword actually shattered Taki's Kakita blade, although such tales were widely dismissed even at the time. What is indisputable is that Taki was deeply shaken by the experience, later telling his wife, "To stare into that monster's eyes is to have Jigoku stare back at you."

Kenburo's methods as Emerald Champion were harsh and direct, employing the Emerald Magistrates to crush all those guilty of corruption and dishonor, and unleashing the Imperial Legions more often and more aggressively than any Champion before him. A particularly notable example occurred when Kenburo discovered a daimyo was guilty of embezzling taxes, bribing magistrates to conceal the crime. Soldiers of the Imperial Legions swept into the lord's modest castle, subduing the guards and rounding up all the daimyo's family and personal retainers in the main courtyard. Kenburo declared they are all traitors and personally executed every man, woman, and child. Word of this and similar deeds earned him considerable enmity, and the dubious title of "Emerald Butcher," but delighted Emperor Hantei XX. Kenburo quickly became one of the Emperor's favorites, and it is not surprising that the Son of Heaven later appointed Kenburo as Lion Clan Champion, relying on him to finally crush the rebellion of the People's Legion.

Kenburo was deeply enraged when he finally learned that the former Akodo Akihisa was now the monk Rojin and a major leader of the People's Legion. He was even more enraged when he was unable to locate and duel Rojin during the final defeat of the Legion. Two years later, while visiting a Lion ancestral shrine, he spotted Rojin performing a tea ceremony for visiting noblemen. Kenburo sat down across the table from Rojin... and beat the old monk to death with his tessen.

Kenburo never retired, lacking the temperament for monastic life. He served as Lion Clan Champion until the year 678, when Masahisa's cousin replaced him, but held the Emerald Championship until his death from illness in the year 684. Most of Kenburo's brutal actions and all details of his early career were deleted from the Imperial histories, but the dueling technique he developed is still preserved within the Ruby Dojo.

Akodo Kenburo, The Emerald Butcher

Air: 3	Earth: 5	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 5
Reflexes: 5		Agility: 5	Strength: 5	

Honor: 3.1 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 8.0* *Infamy: 5.2*

School/Rank: Kenburo's Way / Matsu Berserker 2 (Insight Rank 6)

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 4, Courtier (Manipulation) 2, Defense 5, Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 2, Games: Fortunes & Winds 2, Hunting (Survival) 5, Iaijutsu (Assessment, Focus) 8, Intimidation (Bullying, Control) 7, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 6, Knives 3, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Underworld 4, Stealth 3

Kata: Striking as Void

Advantages: Blackmail (numerous), Great Potential (Iaijutsu), Inheritance (the Ogre's Knife), Large, Social Position (Emerald Champion, later also Lion Clan Champion), Touch of the Spirit Realms (Toshigoku)

Disadvantages: Failure of Bushido (Compassion, Courtesy)

Tetsuken

Mantis Clan Champion

Tetsuken was a bold adventurer who spent most of his relatively short life exploring the remotest areas of Rokugan, defeating bandit lords, sailing to far-off lands on his ship *The Dancing Orochi*, and slaying monsters. Even during his lifetime, exaggerated tales of his exploits spread widely—he was credited with discovering lost treasures, slaying mighty beasts, traveling to other spirit realms, and enjoying romantic encounters with ladies of the court and beautiful foxwives. Whenever anyone asked about any of his exploits, Tetsuken would flash a smile and reply, "Asking me to remember every one of my adventures is like asking me to count all the sand on the beach."

Tetsuken was the youngest son of the Mantis Clan Champion, Ieyasu (sometimes called Ieyasu the Leper due to a chronic skin disease) and as a result was one of the few Minor Clan samurai permitted to compete in the Topaz Championship. Unexpectedly he won the tournament and immediately after began recruiting his fellow competitors to join him in a bold sea venture to confront pirates ravaging the Empire's southern coast. Ieyasu himself rewarded Tetsuken for his victory with his own ship, *The Dancing Orochi*, and Tetsuken set out on the first of many adventures. After two years he captured the leader of the pirate fleet and brought him to the Imperial capital in chains.

Not all of Tetsuken's accomplishments were public knowledge. He spent years pursuing a futile secret romance with Doji Saneyo, the daughter of the Crane Clan Champion. Like many such romances, it ultimately ended

in tragedy. Tetsuken knew that as a Minor Clan samurai, even the son of the Mantis Champion, he had no real hope of marrying into the line of Crane lords. However, he dared to hope his fame and achievements would make him so successful that even the Crane would not be able to reject his request for a marriage. In some ways Tetsuken was thus a driven man, constantly seeking greater and more extravagant successes, each time hoping this would be enough to finally win the hand of his true love. Unfortunately, even after he became Mantis Clan Champion his overtures to the Crane were rejected. Perhaps it was this which drove him to a suicidal assault on the Shadowlands fleet that threatened the Empire during the Great Famine; regardless, Tetsuken's death in that battle further cemented his reputation as one of the Mantis Clan's great heroes. Legend claims that after his death Doji Saneyo shaved her head and joined a monastery, although whether this is true or not is ultimately a matter for individual GMs.

Tetsuken, Adventuring Ship Captain and Mantis Clan Champion

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 4
Reflexes: 3 Stamina: 4 Agility: 5 Perception: 4

Honor: 4.8 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 9.2*

School/Rank: Yoritomo Bushi 4 / The Topaz Champion

Skills: Athletics (Climbing, Swimming) 4, Commerce 3, Defense 5, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Kenjutsu 4, Knives 5, Kyujutsu 4, Perform: Storytelling 6, Perform: Oratory 5, Sailing 7, Sincerity (Honesty) 3

Kata: Disappearing World Style, Striking as Fire

Advantages: Allies (numerous), Daredevil, Fame, Inheritance (The Dancing Orochi), Social Position (Mantis Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Driven (marry Doji Saneyo), Overconfident, True Love (Doji Saneyo)

Rojin the Monk

(formerly Akodo Akihisa)

For most of his life, the man called Rojin was actually the Emperor's Right Hand, Akodo Akihisa, lord of the Lion Clan. Akihisa ruled over the Lion as a relentless and merciless warmonger, finding excuses to wage war on every one of his neighbors at some point during his reign as Clan Champion, usually jumping on some minor provocation to justify his aggression. He always attacked with overwhelming force and preferred to employ scorched earth methods, refusing to accept surrenders (even of shugenja) and routinely executing enemy peasants and burning captured holdings to deny their use to the enemy. During one of these wars he met the brutal young ronin Kenburo and ultimately adopted him as his son.

After a particularly brutal campaign against the Crane Clan, Akihisa returned home to find a monk had built a small shrine to Jizo, the Fortune of Mercy, outside of his estate. Akihisa demanded to know why the monk had dared build a shrine there; the monk replied it was a gift to help fill the void in Akihisa's soul and make him a complete human being. Enraged, Akihisa destroyed the shrine and executed the monk for his temerity. However, the following year Daidoji Katsunan captured the Lion city of Tonfajutsen and burned it to the ground. Witnessing first-hand the suffering he had so often inflicted on other clans shook Akihisa to his core. Filled with regrets, he ordered his sons (real and adopted) to rebuild the shrine to Jizo and then shaved his head, joining the Brotherhood as a monk.

Rojin spent many years as a simple monk living in a Fortunist monastery in the southern foothills of the Dragon mountains. However, despite laboring in the fields and studying the Tao extensively, he remained haunted by the sense that he had been an agent of cruelty and needed to find a way to redeem himself. When the People's Legion rose up and made war on the Empire, Rojin became convinced this was his long-awaited chance and led his fellow monks to join the rebellion. He served as Asahime's chief advisor throughout her short reign as the ruler of the Legion's lands. After the collapse of the Legion he returned to the Brotherhood, heartbroken by the bloody end of the peasant rebellion he had helped to lead. Two years later, he died at the hands of his former adopted son, Kenburo.

Rojin, former Lion Clan Champion and Rebel Leader

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 4 Water: 5 Void: 4
Agility: 5 Perception: 6

Honor: 3.7 *Status: 1.0* *Glory: 4.6* *Infamy: 6.3*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4 / Akodo Tactical Master 1 / Thousand Fortunes Monk 1

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 6, Defense 5, Etiquette 4, Horsemanship 3, Hunting 5, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation (Bullying) 4, Jiujutsu (Martial Arts) 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology 3, Meditation 4, Spears 5, Staves 4, Tea Ceremony 3,War Fan 6

Kata: Strength of Purity Style, Striking as Water

Kiho: As the Breakers, Ride the Water Dragon

Advantages: Hands of Stone, Heart of Vengeance (Crane Clan), Multiple Schools, Tactician

Disadvantages: Driven (seek redemption), Social Disadvantage (monk)

Mirumoto Umeka

Mirimoto Family Daimyo

Mirumoto Umeka was born the daughter of a Mirumoto father and a Daidoji mother, and her Crane blood showed true: she was one of the finest duelists the family produced in generations. Her mother died when Umeka was in her teens, and thereafter she dyed her hair white to honor her

departed parent, earning her the nickname "the Crane of the Mountains." She also inherited her mother's grace and artistry, and was known for her beautiful calligraphy. In adulthood she often credited her dueling skills to learning proper brush control for calligraphy, a position that irritated her sensei in the Mirumoto school.

Like most samurai, Umeka's marriage was nothing more then a political arrangement. As the only daughter and heir of the Mirumoto daimyo she could not marry someone above her station, so she was paired to a minor Dragon nobleman of considerable wealth but dour temperament. However, prior to the marriage her father arranged for her to serve two years in the Imperial Legions; he intended this to expose her to the rest of the Empire (since as a daimyo she would have to conduct diplomacy) and to make contacts and alliances for the future. When Umeka received the news she smiled for the first time since her betrothal was announced.

Umeka spent her time in the Legions in the Phoenix lands, and it was there she met a handsome young Phoenix samurai named Shiba Moriaki. The contrast with her betrothed could not have been more stark, and unsurprisingly the two quickly fell in love. They spent all of their off-duty time together, but their romance was cut short a few months later when Umeka's father died in a mountain-climbing accident and she was recalled to Dragon lands to marry her betrothed and take up the position of Mirumoto daimyo. Several years later, Moriaki himself was chosen by the Soul of Shiba to be the new ruler of the Phoenix Clan.

Despite the call of duty, the two lovers remained faithful to each other and managed to arrange a handful of covert visits over the course of twenty years. Umeka's third son was actually Moriaki's, and out of all of her children he would always be her favorite. In order to protect the honor of her children, her lover, and her husband, Umeka kept the truth hidden for the rest of her life. The death of Moriaki during the Great Famine broke her heart but she concealed her grief and continued to lead the Mirumoto for another eight years before retiring to a monastery and handing the rule of the family to her eldest (and legitimate) son.

Mirumoto Umeka, Mirimoto Family Daimyo

Air: 5 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 5
Reflexes: 6

Honor: 5.2 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 6.6*

School/Rank: Mirumoto Bushi 4 / Swordmaster 1

Skills: Battle 3, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 5, Courtier 3, Defense 5, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu (Assessment, Focus) 7, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Theology 3, Meditation 2

Kata: Striking as Void

Advantages: Prodigy, Social Position (Mirumoto Family Daimyo), Soul of Artistry (Artisan Skills)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (love affair, illegitimate son), True Love (Shiba Moriaki)

New Game Mechanics

This section contains new game mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition RPG. Some of the mechanics in this chapter are specifically oriented toward the era of the Great Famine but can potentially be used in other settings as well; for example, the technique of Kenburo's Way is preserved in the Ruby Dojo and could potentially be taught to any Imperial magistrate in later generations.

New Ancestors

New Mantis Ancestor: Tetsuken [6 points]

The Mantis Clan remembers Tetsuken as a great and glorious hero who had many adventures and ultimately saved the Empire from attack by a Shadowlands fleet. The rest of the Empire is less familiar with his deeds, in part because they took place during an era which Rokugan was determined to forget. Tetsuken's hopeless quest for his true love's hand drove him to ever more spectacular deeds and ultimately to his death. While Tetsuken guides you, you may substitute twice your Glory Rank for your Honor Rank when resisting Fear, Intimidation, and Temptation effects.

- Demands: Tetsuken will abandon you if you ever forsake a True Love or pass up an opportunity to gain Glory.

Crane Ancestor: Asahina Koresada [5 points]

Asahina Koresada was the preeminent healer of his time, and in his youth he served as Emperor Hantei XIX's personal physician. After his infant grandson tragically died from Water Fever, Koresada spent his twilight years traveling the Empire with many of his fellow Asahina, healing sick children regardless of their caste. Koresada will bestow his guidance on any Crane descendent with a passion for medicine, encouraging them to more altruistic in the use of their gifts. When Koresada is watching over you, you gain +1k0 to any spellcasting rolls for spells that heal wounds or treat poison or sickness, and a Free Raise on any Medicine Skill Roll made to treat an injury, disease, or poison.

- Demands: Koresada requires you to emulate his respect for the health and well-being of children. If you ignore or refuse to treat any sick or injured child, or knowingly allow a child to be harmed, Koresada will abandon you.

New Alternate Path: Kenburo's Way

Akodo Kenburo devised his dueling technique while he was a young ronin, roaming the streets and confront-

ing other ronin, criminals, and thugs. During his tenure as Emerald Champion he taught the technique to a few of his most trusted magistrates, and after his death they preserved it within the Ruby Dojo and passed it down to later generations. Kenburo's core tenet was that it was not the fastest, strongest, or most skilled duelist who won the duel, but the duelist who most frightens his opponent. "Break their spirit and their skill doesn't matter," he commented. "Make them think they are certain to die and even the boldest samurai will falter."

Kenburo's Way is only known within the Ruby Dojo and is thus normally only available to Emerald and Jade Magistrates. However, given that it was originally devised by Kenburo while he was a ronin, GMs may also wish to experiment with making the technique available to other ronin—after all, who knows whether Kenburo taught it to anyone before he won the Emerald Championship?

New Imperial/Ronin Alternate Path: Kenburo's Way [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Any bushi at Rank 4
- **Requirements:** Intimidation 5, Iaijutsu 5. Must be a student of the Ruby Dojo.

Technique: The Butcher's Gaze

During an iaijutsu duel, before Assessment rolls are made, you may spend a Void Point to take a Free Action and make a Contested Intimidation/Willpower roll against your opponent. (This is considered a Fear effect for the purpose of abilities and mechanics that resist Fear.) If you win the Contested Roll, your opponent's dice do not explode on his Assessment and Focus rolls for this duel.

New Ronin Path: People's Legionnaire

After the commoner Asahime began organizing her army of peasants, she worked with her monk adviser Rojin to develop a spear-fighting technique that would allow simple ashigaru soldiers to stand their ground against samurai opponents. The technique was designed to capitalize on working together, using numbers and discipline to overcome the superior fighting skills of samurai opponents. Unsurprisingly, in Rokugan's canon history the technique did not survive the ultimate defeat of the People's Legion, but creative GMs can use it to represent any peasant or ronin army that lasts long enough to develop some discipline and organized training.

New Ronin Path: People's Legionnaire [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 1
- Benefit: +1 Stamina
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Hunting, Knives, Spears, Stealth, any 1 Merchant or Low Skill
- Honor: 0.0 (peasant fighting technique)

- **Outfit:** Ashigaru Armor, Sturdy Clothing, Yari, any 1 Peasant weapon, Backpack, 5 zeni

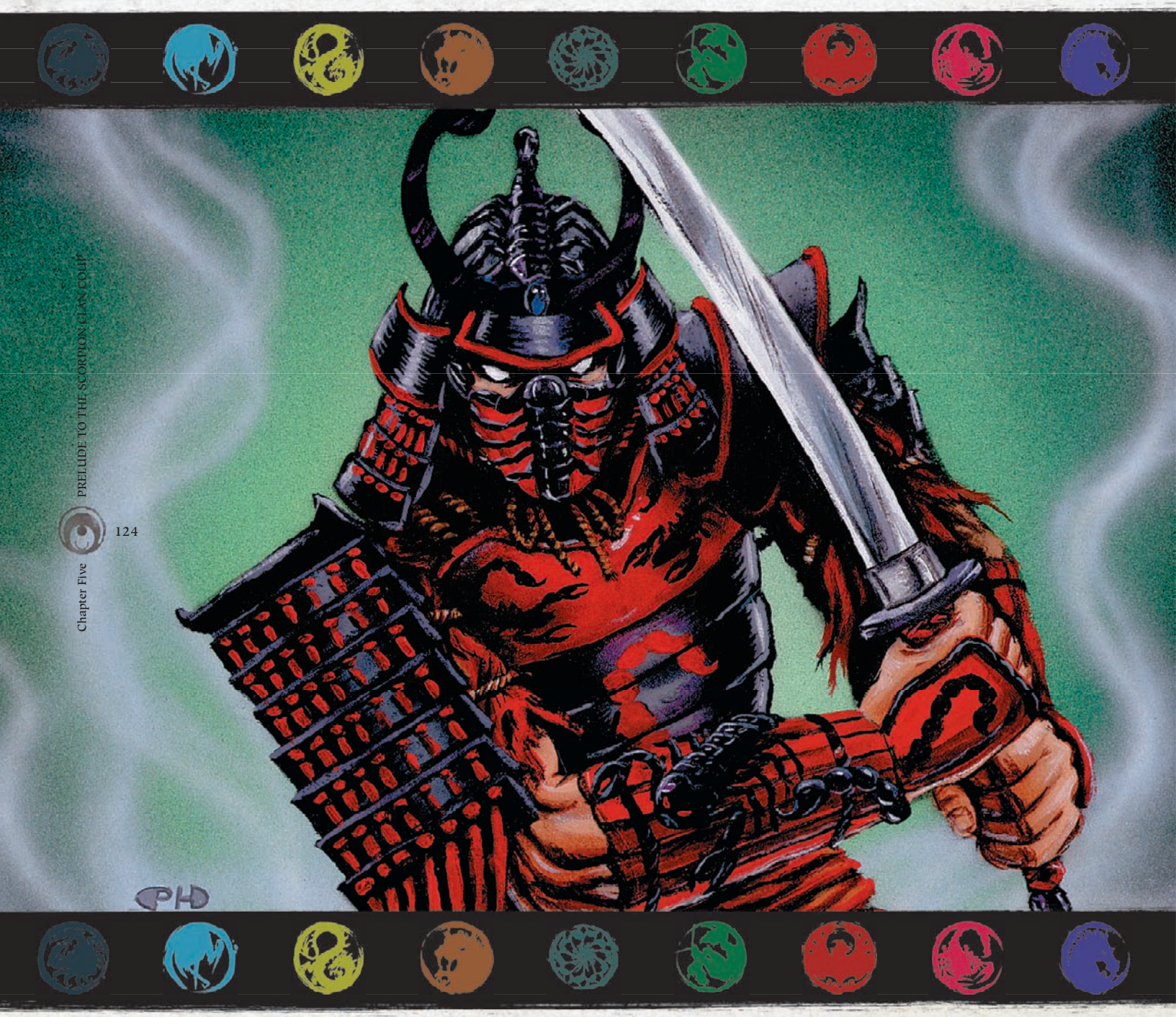
Technique: Unity of Purpose

The People's Legionnaires drill endlessly, learning to act in unison on the battlefield. After Initiative is rolled at the beginning of a skirmish, you may take a Free Action to lower your Initiative score to match that of an ally who is also trained in this technique. If you and an ally with the same Initiative attack the same opponent, you each gain a +1k0 bonus on your attack roll for each such ally striking the same foe. The maximum number of bonus dice you can gain on a single attack roll is equal to your Insight Rank +1.

New Disease: Water Fever

Water Fever is the name given to the very lethal waterborne disease which ravaged the Empire during the Great Famine era. Although it is associated with that era in history, it could potentially appear in any time period when conditions are right. The disease grows in stagnant pools of water and thus poses a greater threat during floods, when the unclean water gets spread easily to other bodies of water. Water Fever is usually caught when the diseased water is consumed, but may also be picked up if the victim swims or bathes in the water. The disease incubates for one to three days before symptoms appear. Water Fever causes high fever, severe abdominal pain, and diarrhea. If left untreated the victim will likely die within three to five days.

- **Effects:** Anyone exposed to Water Fever must make a Stamina roll at TN 25 or become infected with the disease. Starting one to three days later, at the beginning of each day the victim must roll Stamina at TN 30 or lose 1 Rank each of Stamina and Strength. This continues until the victim dies, the disease is successfully treated, or the victim succeeds in three Stamina rolls (at which point the disease is overcome). Once the disease is defeated, reduced Traits heal at the rate of 1 Rank per week.
- **Heal:** Medicine (Disease) / Intelligence at TN 35 to successfully treat Water Fever.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Prelude to the Scorpion Clan Coup

The city's chief magistrate peeked through the discreet viewing port in the shoji screen that separated her personal office from the waiting room. The young samurai waiting there could not seem to wipe the grin from his face. He had been waiting there for almost an hour, but the time seemed if anything to have only intensified his good mood. It appeared keeping the boy waiting would not accomplish anything. With a grimace, the magistrate slid the screen open and gestured for the young man to enter.

"Thank you, honored magistrate!" he said. "I have been eagerly awaiting the chance to meet you!"

"Yes, I could tell," she replied wryly.

"Your exploits are almost like legends!" he bubbled. "My father used to tell me stories about your work!"

The magistrate smiled slightly and straightened her kimono where the mon of her clan's dojo was. The dojo where she had studied with the boy's father. "Yes, well... we are old friends, your father and I."

"I have always dreamed of working alongside a hero such as yourself," the boy admitted. "I cannot believe it is actually happening!"

"You performed very well at the Topaz Championship," the magistrate nodded. "The lords of our clan found you very promising. Magistrate status for one as young as yourself is a great honor. I hope you appreciate it."

"Oh, I do!" the boy proclaimed. "I only wish..." His smile finally faltered somewhat, but he did not finish the sentence.

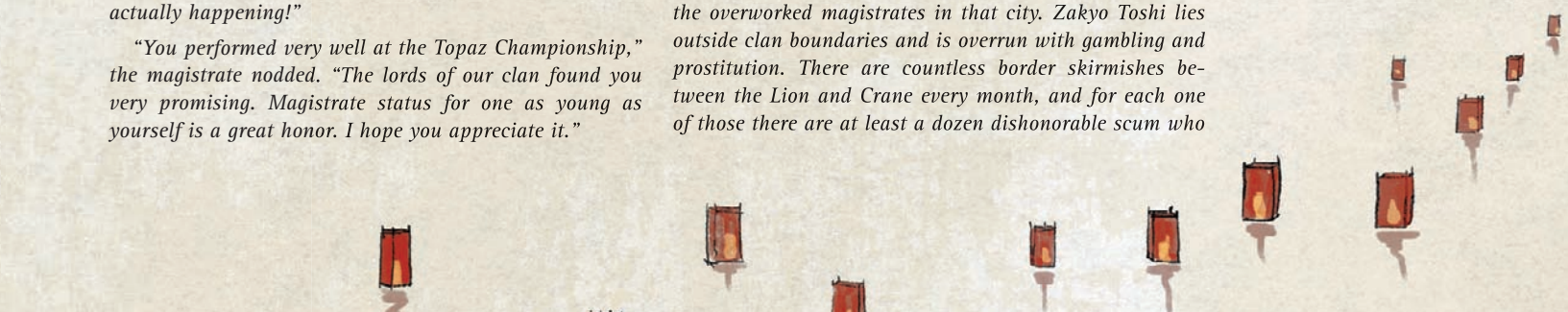
The magistrate raised an eyebrow. "What were you going to say?"

The bow frowned. "I do not wish to seem foolish, but... there are so few threats present in the Empire in this day and age. I despair of ever proving myself to be a magistrate and hero of your caliber. I would not wish for war," he added hastily, "but I would like a means to... to prove myself."

The magistrate laughed aloud. "So few threats? Are you completely mad?"

"I... uh... what?" the boy stammered.

The magistrate began to tick off on her fingers. "The Shinomen Mori is plagued with bandits and scarcely a day goes by that we do not receive some report about mysterious snake-like creatures around the forest edges as well. The City of Lies, the largest city in all of Rokugan, is plagued with criminal cartels who run circles around the overworked magistrates in that city. Zakyo Toshi lies outside clan boundaries and is overrun with gambling and prostitution. There are countless border skirmishes between the Lion and Crane every month, and for each one of those there are at least a dozen dishonorable scum who



want to take advantage of it, and at least one Scorpion who wants to exacerbate the situation for no apparent reason. And this is to say nothing of the piracy problems off the coast or the constant testing of the Great Kaiu Wall by the Shadowlands." She stopped for a moment and caught her breath. "So really, the only thing stopping you from making your mark, so to speak, is if you are an idiot." She peered at him intently. "Are you an idiot?"

The young man stared at her blankly for a moment. "Maybe," he finally said. "But perhaps that can change."

"Very good," the magistrate smiled. He did so remind her of herself... and his father.

This chapter describes the ten years prior to the infamous Scorpion Clan Coup, one of the most significant events in all of Rokugan's history, as well as the Coup itself. The Coup brought an end to the historical period traditionally (and inaccurately) known as the Thousand Years of Peace, so there are few overt conflicts during this period, much less outright wars (although there are as always many small border skirmishes between various clans). Most of the conflicts that do take place are not particularly well known, and after the Coup they are either forgotten or politely ignored in order to preserve the reputation of the Thousand Years of Peace and honor the memory of the Hantei Dynasty.

Although the Pre-Coup era is not especially dramatic as a story, from the standpoint of a GM running an L5R campaign it is in many ways ideal. There are no huge events and steamroller epic plots to disrupt the activities of the player characters or shove them out of the spotlight. The problems of this era are small-scale and an ordinary group of PCs can easily deal with most of them. Moreover, the absence of an overarching plot means this era is well-suited to non-epic campaign structures such as Open World, Character-Driven, Relationship Mapping, or Episodic. (See the *Book of Void* in the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook for discussion of these different campaign styles.)

And of course, if the GM later decides to introduce more epic themes and events into his campaign, the Clan Coup itself can be used to jump-start such a storyline.

Chronology of the Era

The following section offers a year-by-year review of the decade leading up to the Scorpion Clan Coup. Most of the event depicted here are relatively trivial compared to those in other chapters, an inevitable side-effect of the Pre-Coup era's essentially peaceful nature.

Year 1113

- During the early winter months, Mantis soldiers seize control of the isolated outpost of Kyuden Suru Kokai, a minor Crane holding nestled in the cliff-sides of the Doji coastline. A Scorpion representative, Shosuro Kachiko, attempts to mediate but is taken prisoner by the Mantis Clan Champion: an angry and ambitious young man named Yoritomo. Ultimately the incident is resolved by a victorious Crane attack, and comes to be referred to as the Battle of Ice and Snow due to the harsh weather conditions during the brief occupation.
- At the end of Winter Court, the Phoenix Champion Shiba Burisagi is manipulated by the infamous Scorpion courtier Shosuro Kachiko as part of her ongoing court games with the young Crane heir, Doji Hoturi. She creates the impression that Burisagi attempted to force himself upon her, and Doji Hoturi challenges and kills Burisagi for his shameful behavior.
- Shiba Ujimitsu ascends to the position of Phoenix Clan Champion when the soul of Shiba comes to him.

Year 1114

- Shortly after the conclusion of Winter Court, Shosuro Kachiko weds the Scorpion Champion, Bayushi Shoju. There are persistent rumors of a secret romance between her and Doji Hoturi, although no public confirmation is found.
- The Dragon Champion, now going by the name of Togashi Yokuni, appears unannounced at Fukurokujin Seido, the Empire's greatest temple to the Fortune of Wisdom. He speaks privately to a young acolyte named Soh. The boy, only fourteen years old at the time, accepts Yokuni's invitation to join the Togashi tattooed order. A short time later, he receives his first tattoo and takes the name Togashi Mitsu.

Year 1115

- The Lost general Moto Tsume leads a surprise attack against a Crab outpost on the western end of the Great Wall, a region normally largely devoid of Shadowlands activity. Despite heavy resistance, Tsume and his forces kill everyone there and then retreat to the Shadowlands. The reason for the attack and subsequent withdrawal remains unknown.
- A bandit attack in the Unicorn provinces nearly results in the deaths of the Clan Champion's two youngest children, Shono and Shonoko. However, the children's governess—a retiring young priestess named Iuchi Shoan—summons incredible willpower and protects her charges with a powerful wall of water, holding the bandits at bay until rescue arrives. Overcome with gratitude, Shinjo Yokatsu grants her a unique family name by adding the prefix Hori- (meaning "moat") to her name. The Horiuchi family is born.

The immediate Pre-Coup era does not see the creation of any Minor Clans, and the Horiuchi are the only new family to appear. Sadly, the tiny family has only a short history, surviving about half a century, but their charitable nature and actions set them apart from other families that existed for more than a thousand years. The quiet and retiring Horiuchi Shoan is initially reluctant to allow others to swear fealty to her; however, after the Clan War begins a few years later, she takes it as her mission to find and take in the orphans created by the war. Shoan cares for any child who requires it, but those who are of samurai birth are permitted to take her name, and thus a small but intensely loyal and devoted Horiuchi family line is born. This charitable nature characterizes the family for the whole of its existence, but also ultimately spells its doom. In the late twelfth century, the Horiuchi care for the victims of a terrible and virulent plague, and their province becomes so widely and terribly afflicted with the plague that the entire province is razed by reluctant Imperial decree. The harsh decision reduces the family to less than half a dozen members and effectively ends its existence.

Year 1116

- The ronin hero Yotsu Yatoshin, legendary for his rescue of the Emperor's heir from the grip of the Bloodspeakers several years earlier, begins offering fealty to honorable ronin and granting them the right to use his name. Despite the questionable nature of this offer of fealty, most look the other way due to the Emperor's known fondness for the Yotsu. Yatoshin and his children become the leaders of a ronin band known as the Sword of the Yotsu, who dedicate themselves to the protection of the downtrodden and the innocent.

Year 1117

- A talented acolyte of earth named Isawa Tadaka makes his first trip to the Crab lands to study with the Kuni family.

Year 1118

- During the annual Topaz Championship in the Crane city of Tsuma, the daimyo of the Badger Clan, Ichiro Akimoto, is assassinated. The incident causes considerable outrage among the attendees, but the assassin is never caught. The Lion delegation uses the murder to cast doubt on the honor and prowess of their Crane hosts, beginning a long period of deterioration in diplomatic relations between the two clans that will culminate in full-scale war.
- A youth named Akodo Toturi, the younger brother of the Lion Clan Champion, spends the summer training with the Unicorn Clan before joining the Brotherhood of Shinsei for a life of contemplation. The trip to Unicorn lands is made at the suggestion of his sensei, the venerable Akodo Kage. Toturi comes away from the experience with many allies

among the Unicorn and a profound appreciation for the value of cavalry on the battlefield.

- An unexpected attack on the Great Carpenter Wall takes place, led by a spawn of the dreaded Oni no Akuma, one of the Oni Lords. Due to the relatively quiet nature of the Kaiu Wall in this era, the attack faces a somewhat weak defense initially, and the Shadowlands forces manage to briefly cross the Wall and besiege Shiro Kuni for a single night before being driven back. Although details are sparse, it is believed the Shadowlands had an ally of some sort inside the castle who assisted in breaching the defenses at a critical juncture, greatly exacerbating the severity of the fighting. The conflict becomes known as the Battle of Twilight's Honor.

This period of history does not see any overwhelming assaults launched by the Shadowlands. Attacks on the Wall do take place with regular frequency, but these are generally of limited scale and pose only modest threat to the Crab—the Battle of Twilight's Honor and Moto Tsume's raid are the only attacks which manage to inflict any significant damage. For the most part, this is a period of limited skirmishing and quiet brooding by the forces of Jigoku. Some later historians argue this relative quiet was a deliberate gambit by the Shadowlands to goad the Crab Champion Hida Kisada into his ill-fated march upon the Empire a few years later. To be sure, it does seem to stretch credulity that the Oni Lords and other leaders of the Shadowlands were wise enough to use boredom and impatience as a weapon against their enemies.

Year 1119

- The Phoenix Master of Earth, a prideful man named Isawa Rujo, becomes incensed that one of his acolytes, Isawa Tadaka, is spending so much time studying with the Kuni. He perceives this as an insult to his teachings. Rujo demands Tadaka return home immediately. Tadaka does so, but the two men soon find themselves in a magical duel, with the loser vowing to leave the clan as a ronin. Shockingly, Tadaka wins. Rujo is made ronin and Tadaka becomes the new Master of Earth.
- A Scorpion diplomat and well-respected member of the Shosuro family appears to go mad and brutally murders a Lion woman he had known during his time in the Lion lands many years earlier. Although the reason for the Scorpion's madness is not known at the time, he actually succumbed to the influence of the Lying Darkness. The Scorpion's two sons Akodo Ikawa and Shosuro Ikawa (born on the same day to different mothers) unite and hunt their father down, destroying him. The two men do not part on good terms; they will not meet again until the battles of the Clan Coup in 1123.
- In the heart of the Shinomen Mori, a single Naga scout called the Shazaar suddenly awakens. He has no idea why he has awakened but finds it impossible to return to the Great Sleep. Unsure what else to do, he chooses to journey secretly out of the forest and discover what he can about the world, all the while hoping his kinsmen will soon awaken and join him or the Great Sleep will reclaim him.

Year 1120

- The renowned magistrate Kitsuki Kaagi disappears during his investigation of the ninja myth. Kaagi is taken by the Lying Darkness, but before his disappearance he has an *eta* servant deliver his personal journal to Shiro Kitsuki. The journal's revelations

Adventure Modules

The era prior to the Clan War was the setting for the original 1st Edition of the L5R RPG, and as such there were many printed adventure modules for both the 1st Edition and 2nd Edition of the game that depicted events taking place during this timeline. Many of these adventures appear as events in the year-by-year timeline presented in this chapter, and GMs may wish to seek out such adventures for games set in this era. Although these modules are no longer in print, many of them can be found at used game dealers or can be purchased as PDFs online from locations like DriveThruRPG.com. Some of the modules in question include:

Year 1118: The death of the Badger Champion takes place in Test of the Topaz Championship, found in the L5R 1st Edition core rulebook. The Battle of Twilight's Honor is portrayed in the module named, appropriately enough, *Twilight's Honor*.

Year 1120: The conflict between the Lion and Scorpion at Kenson Gakka takes place in *Silence Within Sound*, found in the L5R 2nd Edition GM's Screen.

Year 1121: The story of Otomo Yoroshiku and the ronin of Nightingale Village is found in the module *Code of Bushido*. The outbreak of Tainted evil in Ryoko Owari is depicted in the module *Night of a Thousand Screams*.

Year 1122: The war between the opium cartels is found in the *City of Lies* boxed set, along with many other interesting adventures in Ryoko Owari. The stories of Kyotei Castle and Suboten Castle can be found in the module *Honor's Veil*.

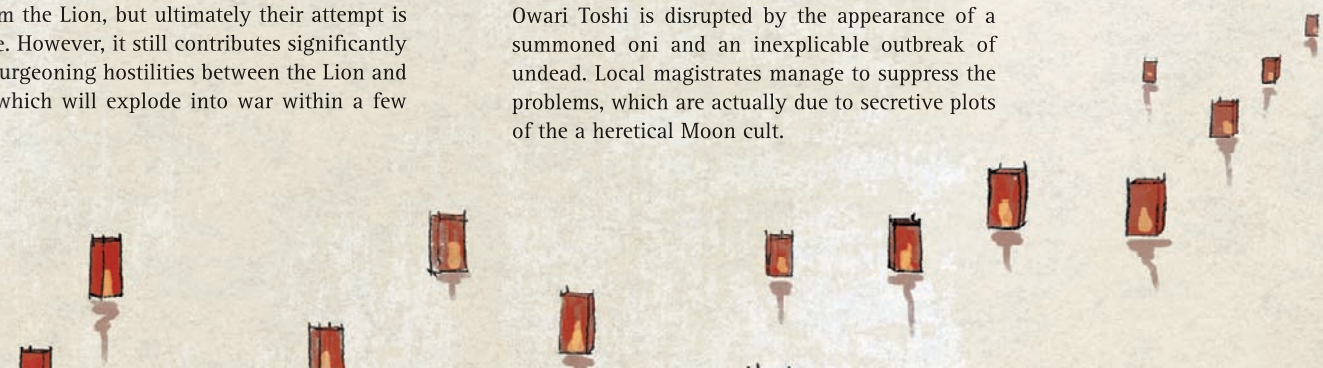
Year 1123: The events involving the Hare Clan can be found in the L5R 1st Edition GM Screen adventure called simply *The Hare Clan*. Both the Darkfever plague and the Mantis-Crane piracy events are described in the module *Midnight's Blood*. The events surrounding the succession of the Oracle of Fire can be found in the module *Void in the Heavens*. Finally, the entirety of the Scorpion Clan Coup is described in one of the books of the *Otosan Uchi* box set.

and the obvious spiritual corruption it carries are both deeply concerning to the leaders of the Kitsuki family, since they point to a significant and previously unknown supernatural threat to the Empire.

- A well-known member of the Togashi order, Togashi Kokujin, succumbs to the terrible effects of Enlightened Madness. His mind snaps and he flees from the Dragon lands. (More details of Kokujin's dark career can be found in chapter three of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*.)
- The Lion assault the city of Toshi Ranbo, attempting to recapture it from the Crane vassal family of the Tsume. The assault fails and the strength of the Daidoji defenders is a shock to the Lion. The Clan Champion, Akodo Arasou, is cut off by a Daidoji ambush and killed in the gates of the city. His betrothed, Matsu Tsuko, survives the battle but is filled with rage and hatred against the Crane.
- In the aftermath of the fighting at Toshi Ranbo, the Lion Clan Champion's brother, Akodo Toturi, is recalled from the monastery and appointed Clan Champion. The ascension of this quiet, contemplative young man, a stark contrast to his dead brother, causes many in the Lion to question his ability to lead the clan. Matsu Tsuko despises Toturi from the start.
- Asako Oyo, a Phoenix *henshin* who has spent nearly two centuries following the Path of Man, escapes his caretakers and flees into the Empire. Oyo has long since strayed onto a False Path of questionable spiritual advancement, and suffers from terrible visions and nightmares concerning the future of the Empire. Although his Henshin brothers search desperately for him, he evades them for years.
- A Scorpion assassin corrupted by the Lying Darkness eliminates Akodo Ikare, the commanding officer of the Lion city of Kensen Gakka, and replaces him with a Shosuro imposter. The imposter orders an attack on the Yaruki Jukko monastery within the city—which is currently receiving guests from the Crane Clan. This incident further exacerbates the decline of Lion-Crane relations. The Scorpion hope to exploit the affair to recapture the city from the Lion, but ultimately their attempt is a failure. However, it still contributes significantly to the burgeoning hostilities between the Lion and Crane, which will explode into war within a few years.

Year 1121

- An ambitious and talented Scorpion general, Shosuro Tomaru, takes a small army to push through the Sparrow lands to the coast, in the process punishing the perceived "insolence" of the minor clan. When the two forces meet, the Sparrow forces are unexpectedly bolstered by support from Wasp Clan archers and Fox Clan shugenja. Tomaru and his forces are caught completely off guard and forced to retreat.
- In the aftermath of Shosuro Tomaru's defeat, the young Scorpion officer is sharply rebuked by the Scorpion Champion. Meanwhile the lords of the three Minor Clans meet following the battle. The Wasp Champion, Tsuruchi, proposes an ongoing alliance for mutual assistance, and the Three Man Alliance is created.
- During the Setsuban Festival in the Phoenix provinces, the Emperor's niece Otomo Yoroshiku announces she is seeking a suitor to marry, resulting in a major influx of influential young samurai trying to forge a connection with the Imperial families. The young woman is kidnapped by ronin living in a nearby unaligned settlement called Nightingale Village. Samurai are conscripted from the Festival attendees to recover Yoroshiku from the ronin, in the process discovering treachery among the wave-men and a dangerous secret: the girl's lineage is illegitimate.
- The Bon Festival in the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari Toshi is disrupted by the appearance of a summoned oni and an inexplicable outbreak of undead. Local magistrates manage to suppress the problems, which are actually due to secretive plots of the a heretical Moon cult.



Year 1122

- **The Opium War:** Manipulated by outside forces, the three major criminal cartels in the city of Ryoko Owari Toshi—each controlled by one of the Scorpion families—declare war on one another. For weeks, the three fight in the streets, destroying each other's holdings and causing massive fires and riots. Sales of non-medicinal opium plummet as the cartels' stock is destroyed. Emerald Magistrates are dispatched to resolve the matter, and while they are able to temporarily eradicate what remains of the cartels, the city's criminal nature cannot be purged so easily.
- Tsume Retsu, lord of the Tsume vassal family of the Doji, is murdered in his quarters at Shiro Kyotei, the family seat. The incident throws the Kyotei court into disarray and threatens to further inflame relations between the Lion and the Crane (if such can be possible). A few guests at the castle eventually trace the murder to a geisha who is actually the last survivor of the Lion Damasu vassal family, whom Retsu eradicated when seizing the Kintani valley region from the Lion two decades earlier.
- Shiro Suboten, a provincial holding of the Lion Clan, is home to considerable intrigue when a Scorpion agent uncovers collaboration between two samurai of the Lion and the Scorpion clans. Both men are working together to increase their individual prestige at the cost of their loyalty and honor. Naturally both dispatch vassals to silence the Scorpion agent, resulting in a confusing web of betrayal and death. A group of samurai attending the court manage to discover the truth, leading to the seppuku of Shiro Suboten's daimyo.
- More and more Naga awaken within the Shinomen Mori, struggling to deal with a world in which their own civilization lies in ruins and the strange human creatures are everywhere. Realizing the time has come for them to face the Foul, the Naga begin exploring the world around them in a more systematic way, leading to rumors in Rokugan of demonic snake-men roaming the forest.

Year 1123

- Usagi Ozaki, the son of the Hare Clan Champion, travels to the Imperial Capital to find a husband for his sister. While there he inadvertently kills a Kolat operative and comes into possession of an encoded scroll of Kolat plans. Soon after, he discovers a clue to the location of the lost Hare Clan Sword and retrieves it from the ruins of Shiro Hiruma in the Shadowlands. Upon his return, however, he discovers Shiro Usagi besieged by the Scorpion, who soon assault the castle and virtually destroy the clan. Soon after the Scorpion offer justification for their actions by accusing the Hare of *maho*; the Emperor formally disbands the clan. Ozaki goes into hiding, swearing to find the truth.
- A dishonorable Lion samurai secretly encourages conflict between the Crane and Mantis clans by manipulating piracy along their mutual ocean-going trade routes.
- The current Oracle of Fire prepares to abandon his mortal body and ascend to the Celestial Heavens, serving in the court of his master, the Fire Dragon. The Oracle's choice for a successor appears to be a young *eta* woman, something with immense theological consequences for the Empire. Agents from the Scorpion Clan immediately attempt to manipulate the Oracle into choosing a different successor, but their schemes are complicated by the actions of traveling samurai in the area. Ultimately the Scorpion fail and the Oracle's chosen successor assumes the mantle of Fire.
- In a startling display of magical prowess, a ritual conducted by Asahina Tomo awakens the full spiritual potential of Isawa Uona. Uona is released from earlier obligations and becomes the new Master of Air.
- In Phoenix lands a solar eclipse frees an oni from imprisonment within the Isawa Mori. Although still confined to a long-forgotten Isawa estate deep in the forest, the demon is able to unleash a virulent plague that magically spreads with great speed. Later named the Darkfever, the plague quickly overruns the Phoenix lands; hundreds are sickened and many die. Samurai finally manage to ferret out the supernatural cause of the illness and defeat the oni, ending the threat.
- Scorpion Champion Bayushi Shoju is enormously troubled by an apocalyptic prophecy that the last Hantei will doom the Empire. Urged on by the inescapable whispers of the Bloodsword Ambition, he decides to attempt a coup and destroy the Hantei Dynasty, believing this can save the Empire. He visits the Kami Togashi in Dragon lands

and asks his guidance; Togashi replies, "If you do this, a bloodline will end. If you succeed, the Empire will be saved." Shoju takes this as affirmation of his plans. A few months later, he launches the Scorpion Clan Coup.

The Scorpion Clan Coup

"I have found an ancient prophecy," Shoju said gravely. "It says the greatest among us will cause the Empire to fall and release an ancient evil into the world. I need your blessing to take every action necessary to avoid this fate."

—from the Ikoma Histories

It goes without saying that the Scorpion Clan Coup is the most significant event of this era and indeed one of the most significant in all of Rokugan's history. It was prompted by two separate forces. The first was the subtle influence of the Bloodsword Ambition acting on the latent psychological flaws of the Scorpion Champion, Bayushi Shoju. The second and more important factor, however, was Shoju's discovery of an ancient prophecy that the last Hantei Emperor would bring about the doom of the Empire and the return of Fu Leng. These two forces in conjunction overcame the loyalty of the Scorpion Champion and led him to the notion of staging the Clan Coup.

After months of careful planning, on the 14th day of the Rooster in the year 1123 Bayushi Shoju enters the Imperial Court, wearing the Bloodsword Ambition at his side. He tells the Emperor of a terrible catastrophe that awaits: the return of Fu Leng and the destruction of Rokugan. The Emperor orders Shoju to take whatever action is needed to save the Empire. The Scorpion Champion answers by drawing his blade and cutting down Emperor XXXVIII. Scorpion agents overrun the city and slaughter every Imperial they can find, determined to exterminate the Hantei line, but the Emperor's son Sotorii is spirited out of the city by loyalist Phoenix and Imperial samurai. Although the Scorpion quickly seize control of the city, guerilla fighting continues to rage throughout the streets.

Having secured the city, the Scorpion shugenja make subtle alterations to the enchantments on Otosan Uchi's magically enhanced walls in order to stymie attackers. This proves a wise choice, as Unicorn and Phoenix armies arrive within a day. The rapid response of these clans is an unpleasant surprise for Shoju, but he adjusts his plans and proceeds accordingly. Lion and Crane forces arrive the second evening, and the battle for the city—the first ever to take place within the Imperial capital—begins in earnest. The next day, an engagement between the Scorpion and Crane forces results in Bayushi Shoju grievously wounding Doji Satsume, the Crane Champion and Emerald Champion. Satsume dies within a day, dealing a major blow to the morale of the attacking clans.

The 16th day of the Rooster is the true undoing of the Scorpion. Akodo Toturi, who the Scorpion believed had

Alternate Paths: Emperor Shoju

Although Shoju's Coup fails in the canonical timeline, this was by no means inevitable. If Shoju had approached Hida Kisada differently, the Crab Champion might well have decided to side with Shoju's strength against the confused and divided forces of the other clans. The combined armies of the Crab and Scorpion would probably have prevailed even against Akodo Toturi—the young Toturi was not yet the veteran general who would triumph in the Clan Wars, but Kisada was already an experienced commander of great skill. Of course, for the Coup to truly succeed, the Scorpion would also have to have killed the young Hantei Sotorii before the Phoenix could spirit him away.

What happens if Shoju does become Emperor? On the one hand, his success would indeed avert the prophecy of Fu Leng's return, at least for a time. On the other hand, a military victory at Otosan Uchi would not reconcile many of the other clans to rule by a usurper. The Lion in particular would fight to the bitter end, and given the huge size of their armies at this time that end would be very bitter indeed. The Crane and Phoenix would also be unlikely to support an Emperor Shoju, and indeed Shoju is likely to be remembered as "the Bloody Emperor," waging constant and brutal warfare to keep his throne.

On the other hand, the Kolat-dominated Unicorn might ultimately decide that rule by Shoju was better than rule by the Hantei, and the ambitious and practical Mantis would likely support Shoju as well. The choice of the Dragon, of course, would be as inscrutable as their Clan Champion—it is entirely possible they simply withdraw from the rest of the Empire and keep their own councils.

Moreover, although the Second Day of Thunder may have been averted by a successful Coup, this will hardly mean an end to supernatural threats to Rokugan. The Lying Darkness has been building its power for centuries, and by the twelfth century it is ready to make its own play for power. Given the degree to which the Shadow infiltrated the Scorpion Clan, the bloody rule of Emperor Shoju might have given it unprecedented opportunities to spread its power and tear away at the structures of the universe. With the Empire torn asunder by Shoju's reign, would the clans have been able to come together against the power of the Lying Darkness?

been poisoned, in fact was only drugged. He manages to escape the city walls and joins the clan armies. The next day, Hida Kisada and the Crab armies arrive on the scene. Shoju has secretly requested aid from Kisada, knowing the two clans together cannot be beaten and believing Kisada, as an outspoken opponent of the Hantei Dynasty's weakness, will support him. When he sees the Crab armies he almost dances in jubilation. However, Kisada believes Shoju's request for aid shows weakness, and throws in his lot with the other clans.

Toturi takes command of the unified clan forces and coordinates the final assault on the city. The Scorpion forces are utterly defeated. Shoju is killed in a duel with Toturi, while Shoju's son and heir Dairyu dies in a duel with the Crane daimyo Doji Hoturi.

Toturi immediately realizes the power vacuum left by the Emperor's death will lead to fighting between the clans. Hoping to prevent this, he reluctantly declares himself Emperor. However, in the hours and days following the coup, the Phoenix have hurriedly sped the Emperor's son through his gempukku to become Hantei XXXIX. His return to the Imperial capital is wholly unexpected. Akodo Toturi instantly renounces all claim to the throne in favor of the rightful heir, but the new Emperor does not forgive him for trying to take power.

Incensed at his father's death, Hantei XXXIX officially disbands the Scorpion Clan and orders them all killed except for Bayushi Kachiko, who he takes as his wife. Akodo Toturi advocates leniency for certain members of the Scorpion, further enraging the Emperor, and in a fury the Son of Heaven makes Toturi ronin and disbands the Akodo family as well. Many Akodo swear fealty to other Lion families, many others to commit seppuku, and a significant number join Toturi as ronin.

The aftermath of the failed Scorpion Clan Coup has ramifications that change the face of the Empire for generations to come. The dissolution of both the Akodo family and the entire Scorpion Clan vastly increase the number of ronin in the Empire, to a total higher than ever seen before; this will play an important part in the Clan War a few years later when Toturi organizes Rokugan's wave men into a cohesive fighting force. Meanwhile the disgrace and destruction of the Scorpion leads many of its survivors to take active steps against the Empire—most notably the already-unstable Yogo Junzo, daimyo of the Yogo family. Other elements of the clan, left to their own devices and with no resources to speak of, were seduced by the subtle and terrible power of the Lying Darkness, something that would haunt the Empire not only throughout the Clan War but on to the subsequent conflict known as the War against the Darkness.

Clans and Factions in the Pre-Coup Era

The Great Clans of this era are in many ways the archetypal clan stereotypes that form most perceptions of Rokugan, regardless of era. This is somewhat to be expected, given that this time period lies at the end of the Thousand Years of Peace, the era in which traditional clan stereotypes were cemented.

The Crab Clan

This era is one of unusual, one might even say unprecedented, tranquility for the Crab Clan... and the Crab despise it utterly. The Shadowlands are never truly quiet, not in the manner that other Great Clans believe, but even the Crab cannot deny that during this era that dark realm is vastly less active than at any time in recent memory. The so-called Battle of Twilight's Honor and the raids that preceded it are probably the only periods of significant conflict amid entire decades of relative quiet. Boredom is not an enemy the Crab have had to fight a great deal since the erection of the Great Carpenter Wall, and it is not an enemy they are well-suited to fight under any circumstances.

Although it goes unnoticed to many, the events behind the Battle of Twilight's Honor are a significant warning of the changes being wrought upon the Crab by the tedium and ennui of this era. One faction within the clan looks at the period of inactivity and sees an opportunity to strike. They mistakenly believe the strength of the Shadowlands is ebbing and its inactivity represents a weakness that can be exploited to destroy their immortal enemies once and for all. This faction, best represented by the head of the Kuni family, Kuni Yori, begin

to delve into the dark secrets better left alone. Their hope is to gain insight into their enemy, using their strengths against them and destroying them utterly. Unfortunately, those who meddle in such things are all too often forever changed by them, and the effect on some of them is more immediate and pronounced. The man who betrayed the Crab at the Battle of Twilight's Honor was one such individual, and he is destined not be the last. In the years following this era, Kuni Yori's name comes to be reviled as one of the clan's greatest traitors.

There is another faction within the Crab, however, which does not consider the activity of the Shadowlands to be a divine sign of imminent victory. Instead, they find the time allowed them for reflection has only increased their resentment and disgust with the Empire as a whole. With time to actually examine the clans, families, and institutions they have protected for more than a thousand years, these Crab find the Empire as a whole unworthy of their protection. In particular, they perceive the Emperor Hantei XXXVIII as weak and ineffective, relying on the strength of others while possessing virtually no redeeming qualities of his own—at least as perceived in a traditional Crab mindset. This growing discontent eventually gives rise in later years to one of the clan's greatest disgraces, the alliance with the Shadowlands during the Clan War. For the most prominent member of this faction within the clan is none other than the Clan Champion, the legendary Great Bear, Hida Kisada.

The Crane Clan

This era is one of prosperity and political domination for the Crane, unsurprising given their customary record of success during times of peace. The Emerald Champion is a Crane and serves as one of the Emperor's most trusted advisors and closest friends. The clan dominates the political landscape throughout this time period, but they are not without rivals in that regard. The Otomo, ever jealous of the Crane's perceived superiority, pettily undermine them whenever an opportunity arises, and the Scorpion Clan also enjoys a period of significant success with Bayushi Shoju's status as the Emperor's most trusted friend and his wife Kachiko serving as Imperial Advisor.

Despite their seemingly flawless exterior, all is not well within the Crane ranks. The Emerald Champion and Clan Champion Doji Satsume is bitterly estranged from his eldest son, the Doji family daimyo Doji Hoturi. Satsume (and for that matter a great many others) regard Hoturi as a thoughtless playboy who gives little consideration to his duties or the wishes of his father. These allegations are not without merit, but Satsume is hardly blameless in the matter. Satsume's youngest child Shizue serves with distinction in the courts (although her physical disability limits her abilities somewhat) and his middle son Kuwanan serves valiantly with the Lion Clan (an arrangement to which he is ideally suited), but the entire clan feels the reverberations of his bitter relationship with his eldest son..

Beyond such personality conflicts, however, the Crane Clan's most significant issue during this era is the steady increase of hostilities with its neighbor to the west, the Lion Clan. The two clans have never been allies and the ancient feud between Matsu and Kakita has made them frequent enemies, as if eternally continuing the original clash at the first Test of the Emerald Champion. After a thousand years and more, the Matsu family still seems unable to forgive Kakita's perceived terrible insult... and to be fair, the Kakita seem unable to refrain from bringing it up in court at least once a season. For much of history the Lion have had other matters to distract them, but in the placid Pre-Coup era there is only the Crane and their long-standing "insult" to the Lion's honor. The Crane leadership is somewhat divided on the issue, as it is in so many other things. Satsume recognizes the Lion conflict as a potential problem but places great faith in his own status as Emerald Champion to mitigate the threat. His trusted vassals Kakita Yoshi and Daidoji Uji, daimyo of their respective families, share his sense of confidence but for different reasons. Yoshi is certain the Crane can emerge victorious from any potential conflict by manipulating the courts (assuming that the Lion are bold enough to actually attack), while Uji believes the Lion are so overconfident in their military abilities that they can be defeated with the use of unconventional tactics—a field in which he excels.

The Dragon Clan

As in most past eras, the Dragon in this time take very little direct action in the rest of the Empire. This is of course due to the influence of their Champion, the enigmatic Togashi, in this time going by the name

Togashi Yokuni. The ancient Kami is keenly aware of the coming conflict and the impending resurgence of Fu Leng, and seeks to maintain his clan's forces in readiness for that future war. This does not mean he is idle, however; far from it. Yokuni actively opposes the ongoing attempts by the Kolat conspiracy to gain a foothold within the Dragon Clan, and periodically strikes out against other Kolat agents as well (albeit in an unpredictable pattern that makes no sense to the Kolat itself). Yokuni is also instrumental behind the scenes in the events of the Battle of Twilight's Honor, compelling a group of samurai to travel to the Kaiu Wall and take part in the battle, ensuring they are able to stop the traitor who threatens the entire Crab defensive effort.

One crucial event that takes place within the clan during this period is the infamous duel between Mirumoto Satsu, eldest son of the Mirumoto family daimyo, and Hida Yakamo, eldest son of the Crab Clan Champion. The duel ends in Satsu's death, and leads his younger sister Hitomi to pursue a lifelong vendetta against Yakamo. The consequences will reverberate through the later Clan War era in a host of ways.

This era also sees the rise of two men who will come to characterize all that is good and all that is evil about the Dragon Clan. A young monastic acolyte named Soh is recruited to join the Togashi order and becomes the ise zumi named Togashi Mitsu. Despite his youth, Mitsu quickly becomes known as a force for good in the Empire and an example to all who wish to follow the path of enlightenment. He is a contemporary of a very different man, Togashi Kokujin, a charismatic and impassioned ise zumi who holds great influence within the tattooed order despite being ignorant of its true origins. When he learns the truth behind Togashi and the monks who bear his name, Kokujin's mind breaks and he succumbs to Enlightened Madness, fleeing the Dragon lands. Although he is not heard from for some time, those who do encounter him during this period attest to his growing madness. In the future he will wreck great harm on both the Dragon and the Empire as a whole.

The Lion Clan

"You question my honor, you question the honor of every man who follows me. Are you prepared for that challenge, Crane?"

—Akodo Matoko, year 1123

As the Pre-Coup era begins, the Lion are at perhaps the greatest point of frustration in their history. Centuries without a true war, centuries with nothing more than handfuls of all-too-brief skirmishes, has left the clan with fully staffed armies, a massive war machine waiting for a conflict that can quench the fires in their bellies. Unfortunately, there seems to be is little on the horizon for them to anticipate. Their frustration and anger only grows with each passing year. The situation is made worse by the death of Clan Champion Akodo Arasou at Toshi Ranbo, where the small scope of the battle—little more than a glorified skirmish—allows the Crane to ambush and kill Arasou.

Unquestionably the death of Arasou is the most significant event of this era in the eyes of the Lion Clan. Arasou is unanimously respected and admired by all families and factions within the clan, and his death is a devastating blow. His replacement by his long-absent younger brother Akodo Toturi is like water that freezes in the cracks of a rock, shattering it. Toturi's brilliance as a leader is dulled in the eyes of the clan by his moderate political leanings, his friendship with Doji Hoturi, and his dispassionate demeanor. In the eyes of the Lion families, he is all that is negative about the Akodo family, whereas his brother possessed all that family's positive blessings and more. Toturi's many strengths will not come to be appreciated by the Lion Clan until many years later, at the end of the Clan War era.

It is perhaps no surprise that in this environment of unspent military resources and frustrated hostility the Lion have no shortage of immediate enemies. Foremost among them, of course, are the Crane, always the clan's most persistent and hated rivals and regarded with especial bitterness in this time due to the fighting over Toshi Ranbo. Cooperation between the two clans has occasionally taken place in past eras, but in living memory the Lion have seen nothing but strife and conflict with the Emperor's Left Hand. Toshi Ranbo is unquestionably the most significant factor in current hostilities; the city has changed hands countless times over the centuries, never in the possession of one clan or the other for

more than a generation at a time. During the immediate decade before the Clan Coup, Toshi Ranbo is in the possession of the Crane Clan, an insult that the battle-hungry Lion find unacceptable. The clan constantly builds up forces on the Crane border, training and drilling them for a hoped-for war that will reacquire the city, and thus constantly irritating the Crane. The resulting barbs, insults, and political manipulation in court only makes the Lion even more devoted to reclaiming the city.

The conflict with the Crane is not without outside encouragement, although the Lion are largely blind to that fact. The Scorpion, bearing a grudge against the Matsu for an insult offered one hundred years previously, are eager to see the two enemies go to war, a situation which will incidentally offer considerable benefit to the Clan of Secrets. Throughout this entire era the Scorpion stoke the fires of Lion anger, painting the Crane as even more arrogant and passive-aggressive than they would otherwise appear. Their actions make a likely war into a certainty.

The Phoenix Clan

This period is generally one of prosperity and success for the Phoenix Clan, with a few exceptions. The clan has had no significant enemies or conflicts for many years, allowing it to build up its resources and institutions with relatively little interruption. This is not to say the Phoenix do not occasionally encounter setbacks or difficulties, of course; this era begins with a major disgrace for the clan when the Champion, Shiba Burisagi, dies in a lethal duel ordered by the Emperor himself. This unprecedented action is an enormous shame for the entire Shiba family, and creates considerable difficulties for the subsequent Champion, Shiba Ujimitsu. The tragedy further undermines the role of the Shiba family within the clan, cementing the stranglehold the Isawa possess on leadership of the Phoenix Clan. The Isawa are not without their own difficulties, however, as the rise of the magically-spawned plague known as the Darkfever and the forced abdication of Master of Earth Isawa Rujo both cast doubt on their claims of superiority in the area of magical prowess.

The greatest difficulty for the Phoenix during this era is one they fail utterly to recognize: hubris. The long period of prosperity and security has allowed the most powerful members of the Isawa family, particularly the members of the Council of Elemental Masters, to grow complacent and assured of their own wisdom and superiority. The Masters have forgotten many of the important lessons learned in previous centuries, when hostilities with other clans were more frequent and painful. In broad terms, they have become convinced they really are as powerful as everyone believes, and therefore they are best suited to deal with any and all dangerous supernatural threats within the Empire. This philosophy is harmful enough on its own, but in addition to believing themselves worthy the Phoenix also regard all others as unworthy. Thus when the explorations and research of Isawa Tadaka, the young prodigy shugenja who unexpectedly replaces Rujo as Master of Earth, suggest the Shadowlands may be up to something strange, many in the Council begin considering trying to explore the dark wisdom within the three Black Scrolls they acquired from the Scorpion Clan centuries ago. In the subsequent Clan War era this train of thought will lead to the majority of the Council becoming corrupted by the Taint and in some cases driven insane.

Although they are unaware of the existence of the Lying Darkness at this time, the Phoenix unknowingly feel that entity's influence through as the appearance of the tragic shugenja called the Nameless One—the former Isawa Ujina—and the strange apprentices who gather around him. These individuals, their souls touched by the Darkness in ways that no one understands, are a mystery no one within the clan is able to decipher, and the enigma troubles the clan's scholars greatly. Between this and the disappearance of Asako Oyo, which will eventually lead to the exposure of the Asako family's *henshin* sect and their strange philosophies, the clan is divided by a number of troubling issues that seem to have no apparent solution.

The Scorpion Clan

This era is a time of unusual prosperity for the Scorpion Clan, but ends in absolute disaster for them. At the beginning of the twelfth century the Scorpion enjoy tremendous good fortune and favor, as Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Shoju is one of the Emperor's favored vassals. This only improves over the course of the decade leading up to the Clan Coup, as Shoju not only becomes the Emperor's close personal friend and most trusted ally but his wife Kachiko is also appointed as Imperial Advisor. Perhaps this familiarity breeds contempt in the eyes of Shoju, or perhaps he genuinely regrets what he feels is necessary to save the Empire from a reborn Fu Leng. Regardless, his decision to launch the Clan Coup leads to the Scorpion Clan's ruination and dissolution, the only time an entire Great Clan has been dissolved in the whole of the Empire's history.

Notwithstanding that eventual tragedy, however, for the majority of this period the Scorpion are in an extraordinarily good position. In addition to the Emperor's favor, the Empire's recent relative peace has given rise to an abundance of energy and hostility among the other Great Clans, creating many openings for the Clan of Secrets. Manipulating their enemies against one another is a relatively simple matter in this era, and the Scorpion are eager to ensure the other clans are diverted from their own endeavors by turning them against one another.

Unfortunately, although they are not aware of it, this era takes its toll upon the Scorpion as well. More Scorpion than ever before succumb to the influence of the Lying Darkness, for the shadow brands that the Soshi and Shosuro use to enhance the abilities of their greatest agents slowly turned minds and hearts away from the interests of the clan and toward the as-yet-unrevealed plots of the Nothing. No Scorpion truly realize this is happening, and indeed only a tiny handful of the Soshi and Shosuro are even aware of the Nothing. The dissolution of the clan after the Clan Coup results in further encroachments by the Darkness, and the clan has a serious issue with compromised agents during the later eras of the Clan War and the War Against the Darkness.

In addition to supernatural threats, there are other all too human threats that endanger the Scorpion. Although the Scorpion have benefited greatly from the boredom and complacency of other clans, the same issues present problems for them as well. Many young among their ranks are arrogant and overconfident, eager to prove Scorpion superiority. Perhaps it is this same feeling that leads to Bayushi Shoju's contamination by the song of Ambition, or to the wrathful opening of the first Black Scroll by Yogo Junzo after the Scorpion Clan is defeated in the Coup. Indeed, perhaps the Coup itself would never have happened if the clan was not so eager for a real threat to confront. Perhaps one among them would have seen the signs of Shoju's madness and the entire affair could have been avoided.

The Unicorn Clan

This period of peace and prosperity is not a particular boon to the Unicorn Clan. Despite having returned to the Empire more than two centuries earlier, the Unicorn are still not wholly welcome, and with no external conflicts to distract them the other Great Clans often focus a portion of their ire on the descendants of the Ki-Rin. All too many samurai continue to regard them as outsiders, which is especially exasperating to the clan because of the simple fact that by this time every one of them—and indeed their grandparents and great-grandparents—has been born within the Empire's borders. The Clan of the Ki-Rin is accustomed to overcoming external threats and triumphing despite all odds, but xenophobia remains one threat that its mighty cavalry cannot overcome.

Secretly and sinisterly, the lords of the Unicorn do not consider this a disadvantage, but rather a potent opportunity. This era is a major period of expansion for the Kolat conspiracy's ongoing infiltration of the Unicorn Clan. Already many of the highest ranking members of the Shinjo family, including the Clan Champion himself, are members of the Kolat, and every passing year in this period brings more and more samurai into the fold.

In this era the compassionate nature of Lady Shinjo is publicly held up by all Unicorn as an ideal to emulate every day. For some this is indeed a genuine representation of their desire to be like the founding Kami. For the Kolat, this superficial loyalty to Shinjo's ideals is a useful means of subtly undermining the rigid caste system of the Empire, weakening the fundamental aspects of Rokugani civilization that the Kolat despise as creations of the original Kami.

This era also represents the beginning of the modern Unicorn magistrate phenomenon. At the urging of both the genuine followers of Lady Shinjo as well as the Kolat infiltrators, the Shinjo family begins training more and more of its youths as magistrates, sending them to serve throughout the Unicorn provinces and encouraging more senior and experienced magistrates to seek posts into the ranks of the Emerald Magistrates and the Imperial Legions. The true Unicorn regard this as an opportunity to come into contact with more of their Rokugani kinsmen, to convince them the Unicorn are not so different, and to create a network of allies throughout the Empire. The Kolat regard it as an opportunity to gain influence in other organizations, accumulate valuable information, and spread their subversive ideology through the Empire.

Although it is a relatively minor event during this era, the time which Akodo Toturi spends with the Unicorn is vital to events that follow in decades to come. Both factions within the clan have reason to find common ground with Toturi, and when his campaign against the Shadowlands begins during the Clan War years later, the Unicorn are among his most ardent and enthusiastic supporters.

The Minor Clans

Although they do not know it, in this era the Minor Clans exist on a razor's edge between extinction and greatness. The Empire's recent centuries of peace are not a beneficial thing for the Minor Clans, generally speaking; although the Great Clans' skirmishes with each other seem small and trivial to them, when they conflict with a Minor Clan the scale of the encounter suddenly changes. Although an ancient Imperial proclamation officially prohibits the Great Clans from waging war against the Minor Clans, over the centuries the Great Clans have found many ways to work around this restriction and to make these tiny clans into easy targets for venting their militant frustrations. Although the Imperial law has prevented the Minor Clans from being wholly eradicated, they suffer heavily from conflicts which the rest of the Empire barely notices.

Even for those Minor Clans who do not suffer overt military oppression during this era, agreements and alliances with the Great Clans are easily forgotten or rewritten at the convenience of those Great Clans, with corresponding misery and bitterness. The Mantis are one of the few Minor Clans that prospers unreservedly in this time period, mainly due to their huge navy and extensive trade networks. The Tortoise also fare well, but this is due primarily to their location in the Imperial City and their technical status as direct vassals of the Emperor, which protects them from the hostility of the Great Clans. Likewise the Dragonfly Clan continues to benefit from the unwavering (if dispassionate) support of the Dragon Clan. Aside from these three, the Minor Clans find this era a struggle for survival on a season-to-season basis, much as they have for centuries.

However, it is from this very struggle that the seeds of greatness begin to sprout during this era. The Three Man Alliance—banding together the three Minor Clans whose provinces border on the Scorpion holdings, the Wasp, Sparrow, and Fox—is seen as trivial at the time, but in truth it has tremendous ramifications for decades to follow. The creation of the Alliance fires the imagination of Yoritomo, the ambitious Mantis Clan Champion, and he immediately begins looking for clans who might be willing to form a similar alliance with the Mantis. To have seen three Minor Clans bloody the nose of a Great Clan, even if only superficially, is an occasion of such celebration to Yoritomo that he does not even notice how nervous the idea makes the other Minor Clan lords. To the other daimyo, a greater consideration is that the Great Clans might now look upon the Minor Clans as slightly more of a threat than before. The later Scorpion destruction of the Hare Clan seems to prove this fear is justified.

Average samurai from the Minor Clans during this era are generally poor but are relatively free of the burdensome political problems which assail their Great Clan counterparts. With the exception of the Three Man Alliance and the Hare, none of the Minor Clans face direct military conflict. The samurai of the Three Man Alliance are elated at the prestige and attention their victory has garnered and hope it will gain them allies against any future Scorpion aggression. Of course, they are quite well aware—especially after what befalls the Hare—that they defeated a relatively minor task force, and a true Scorpion army could likely eradicate all three Minor Clans with little difficulty.

The Imperial Families

In many ways this period represents the heyday of the Imperial families. Hantei XXXVIII is not a particularly powerful Emperor, but neither is he weak, and he maintains extremely close ties with the Lion, Crane, and Scorpion Clans to ensure the stability of his reign. Only the Crab and perhaps the Mantis consider him weak. Hida Kisada, the Crab Champion, makes no real attempt to keep his views a secret, while Yoritomo of the Mantis is a bit more discreet. The Emperor and his Otomo vassals are aware of the Crab's disdain but dismiss it, certain in the knowledge that the Crab are too busy defending the Wall to cause trouble. Besides, the Crane, Lion, and Scorpion would never permit open rebellion against their Emperor.

As is often the case after the Gozoku era, the Otomo are the most active Imperial family during this period. The long peace has ensured they have much to do in their secret duty of turning the Great Clans against one another. Although they have not been directly involved in the fomenting of hostilities between the Lion and the Crane, they take no steps to prevent it either, for it is very much in their interests to have two such powerful clans at one another's throats. After so many years of pitting different

clans against one another, it has become more difficult for the Otomo to find suitable foes to match against one another without stretching credulity unnecessarily. Some of them have begun looking more closely at the Dragon as a possible target of their machinations, although others consider such an idea questionable at best.

The Seppun continue to fulfill their duties as they have for more than one thousand years. However, the kidnapping of the Empress a decade before is very much in the forefront of their collective consciousness. The lords of the family are in something of a conflict with Doji Satsume, the Emerald Champion, who tends to hold the average Seppun in low regard. Over recent years, many Seppun have undergone tours of duty within the Imperial Legions, and the demanding Satsume has not always been pleased with the level of their training when they enroll. Regardless, the Seppun are a highly respected and well-organized group and their loyalty and devotion give the Emperor a tremendous sense of security for himself and his family... perhaps too much so.

The Miya are as they have always been: loyal servants of the Emperor who bring his word to the people. The lengthy peace and lack of significant difficulties throughout the Empire have seen them become increasingly bureaucratic in their duties, issuing minor corrections and addendums to decrees mostly authored by the Otomo rather than the Emperor. This has diminished the prestige of the family in the eyes of many samurai and even some among the common populace. This causes some dismay among the leaders of the family, who are generally very attentive to the atmosphere of Rokugan's lower classes.

The Shadowlands

The Shadowlands are uncharacteristically quiet for much of the period leading up to the Scorpion Coup. It is never *truly* quiet on the Great Carpenter Wall, of course, but major attacks occur with much diminished frequency; for most Crab, life is largely the same as it has ever been, just a bit slower and less exciting. Most Crab know not to allow such periods to lull them into a false sense of complacency, of course, but the sustained boredom does lead to more serious errors (as discussed in the Crab section earlier in this chapter).

The one significant engagement launched by the Shadowlands against the Empire during this ten year period is the attack that becomes known as the Battle of Twilight's Honor. An ambitious and exceptionally bloodthirsty spawn of the Oni Lord Akuma marshals a significant force and launches an extended attack against the center of the Kaiu Wall. The assault is formidable in its own right, but it is made infinitely more dangerous due to the complex subtlety of its nature, something grossly out of character for an Akuma-spawn. The Shadowlands forces had already arranged for a compromised samurai to be in Shiro Kuni, the command post for this sector of the Wall, at the time of the attack. The traitor disrupts the defenses, allowing the enemy to cross the Wall and briefly besiege Shiro Kuni itself. The gambit ultimately fails, but had it succeeded the Crab would have been in danger of losing control of the Wall and even Kyuden Hida itself could have been in danger.

Although they are not directly affiliated with the Shadowlands in any way, the Bloodspeaker Cult is ultimately also aligned with Jigoku, and the Cult is quite active during this period, more so than at any time since the second fall of Iuchiban centuries earlier. Although it does not come to the public eye, a group of Iuchiban's most loyal and devoted followers work tirelessly to free him from his prison in the specially-constructed tomb where his spirit lies bound. Guided by Iuchiban's mystical projection as the Oracle of Blood, they pursue an elaborate and far-reaching plan involving numerous nemuranai, corrupted inquisitors, and even an outbreak of undead in the City of Lies during the Bon Festival. Although the chaos fomented by the various efforts of Iuchiban's lieutenants complicates the lives of countless magistrates throughout the central and southern Empire, the schemes ultimately fail and the dread Bloodspeaker is not released from his bondage... at least not yet.

Before the Coup: A Default Setting

Since the days of the first edition of the L5R role-playing game, fans of the game have utilized the period of Rokugan's history immediately prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup as a default setting for innumerable campaigns. As noted in the sidebar concerning adventure modules earlier in this chapter, the sourcebooks and adventure modules of L5R's 1st Edition utilized this era almost exclusively. What makes the years prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup so appealing and so effective for running or playing in an L5R campaign? There are a number of answers.

First and foremost, this era represents a period of relative peace and prosperity for all the clans. The seven original Great Clans are all present in the Empire at this time and all of them are strong and effective. While there is little to no overt war during this time, there are lesser battles and hostilities aplenty that provide opportunities for military adventures and rich character backgrounds. At the same time, the relative peace makes it much easier to run a group of characters from many different clans. In contrast to periods like the Clan War when clan loyalties can limit character cooperation, during the Pre-Coup era a diverse group of PCs can work together toward common purposes, with clan identity adding just enough internal friction to deepen the game experience without forcing unavoidable conflict. While the Mantis Clan is not yet a Great Clan at this point in Rokugan's history, the clan is still prominent and influential both in its own right and because of the increasing links between all the Minor Clans. Most of the other Minor Clans exist in this era as well, and both ronin and the monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei are likewise available and accessible for players who prefer more unusual character options. In a very real way, this era offers the perfect combination for players to maximize their character options in a campaign.

Another significant factor that makes the Pre-Coup era popular is that it represents the L5R setting and game as it was first created. The iconic heroes and villains who first appeared in the Collectible Card Game version of Legend of the Five Rings are all present during this era and can interact with player characters. Some fans of the role-playing game may not have much interest in these characters, but for players who have followed L5R from its early years it can be extremely appealing to play in a setting where they can interact with these famous individuals. For many players, the Clan Champions, daimyo, and individual heroes of this era are the archetypal and definitive representations of Rokugan, the faces of the Great Clans, and being able to stand alongside them in an RPG campaign is a very tempting idea.

A third reason for this era's appeal is that it represents an Empire on the brink of change and transformation. The Pre-Coup era represents the end of the so-called Thousand Years of Peace, a time when most wars were relatively limited and Empire-wide conflicts rare indeed. The Scorpion Clan Coup at the end of this period changes the Empire forever, inaugurating a period of societal decay, increasing hostility between the clans, and the final doom of the Hantei Dynasty. The Clan War is the immediate result of this, but that conflict is only the beginning of a long series of devastating wars and supernatural threats that deplete the Empire's every conceivable resource, including arable land and manpower. Yet all of this is not set in stone. It is what happened in the canonical history, but other outcomes are possible, and players whose characters adventure through this era have the potential to create an entirely different outcome for the Great Clans, the Hantei Dynasty, and the Empire as a whole.

Ultimately, perhaps the greatest appeal of the Pre-Coup period is that, like the greater Thousand Years of Peace of which it is a part, it is the perfect default way to use the L5R role-playing game rules for whatever manner of campaign best suits a gaming group. There is very little in the 4th Edition core rules, a ruleset designed to incorporate every possible permutation of Rokugan's history, that cannot be used in the Pre-Coup era with little or no modification. If a GM and group are looking for a period that allows maximum diversity and opportunity for role-playing campaigns with minimum interference from an established "canon" storyline, the Pre-Coup era is an ideal choice.

More Information on the Pre-Coup Era

Because the Pre-Coup era was the default setting for the original 1st Edition of the L5R RPG, there is actually a significant amount of additional information available on this time period, something that sets this era aside from most of the other chapters in this book. As mentioned earlier in the timeline discussion, there were many adventure modules and sourcebooks published for 1st Edition, all of which used as their default setting the time period of the early 1120s. It was not until the release of the *Otosan Uchi* boxed set, which for the first time presented full information on the Scorpion Clan Coup, that the timeline of the RPG shifted to the Clan War era. Thus, GMs looking for more information on this setting will find an abundance of useful details in older books, whether purchased used or as PDFs.

The Scorpion Clan Coup: A Game Event

The era depicted in this chapter culminates with one of the most significant events in all of Rokugan's history, rivaling the two Days of Thunder. The Coup itself results in the dissolution of a Great Clan and the disbanding of a family within a second clan, and it also sets the stage for the Clan War and the end of the Hantei Dynasty, both momentous events as well. This is to say nothing of the immense social and psychological changes wrought in the Empire in the wake of a Clan Champion assassinating the Emperor.

Many players and GMs may find an event of this magnitude simply too awesome and epic to resist depicting in play. The execution of an event of this scale, however, can be difficult to pull off while retaining the appropriate feel and scale required. Years ago, AEG published an entire boxed set devoted to the Imperial City, Otosan Uchi, and included with it everything a GM would need to implement the Scorpion Clan Coup in an L5R campaign. Unfortunately, that resource is now largely unavailable, but the demand for such information remains. Hopefully the material presented here, while limited, will help GMs who wish to implement something of this magnitude.

The first and perhaps most significant consideration regarding the Scorpion Clan Coup is that it was planned with exacting details for months. Virtually every resource available to a Great Clan, a very significant capability, was devoted to the planning and successful execution of this audacious scheme. Hundreds, even thousands of loyal Scorpion samurai were removed from their existing duties and specially placed to ensure the Coup was successful, while those too young, too compromised, or simply too morally conflicted to be used were sent to fill the vacated positions and ensure the mass migration of Scorpion was not noticed by the other clans. Scorpion player characters who live during this era, especially if they are skilled and known to be loyal without question, may well be commanded to take part in these preparations, although they may not realize what they are preparing for. Conversely, non-Scorpion PCs may find themselves targeted by the clan in the lead-up to the Coup, with sudden mysterious outbreaks of assassination attempts, frame-ups, and similar machinations.

Once the Coup takes place, it is primarily a military event, and can offer GMs and players many opportunities to use the Mass Battle rules. However, there are plenty of other adventures that can be built around the events of the Coup. The PCs can wage guerilla warfare against the Scorpion within the occupied Imperial city, for example, or help smuggle important personages past the walls. Scorpion PCs can be put on the opposite side of such struggles, trying to track down key resisters or capture important NPC targets.

Preparations and Goals

The essential preparations for the Coup began with the Scorpion creating a list of those who could pose a significant threat to their success or who would be an immediate problem in the vital hours and days following the Coup's execution. This included a great many powerful and influential individuals throughout the Empire. Some were slain and their deaths covered up in a variety of different ways, but others were deemed too important to kill, since their sudden deaths might have jeopardized the Coup's secrecy. Among the foremost of the Coup's targets were the Emerald Champion, Doji Satsume, a personal friend of the Emperor and perhaps the most dangerous duelist in the Empire; Akodo Toturi, the Lion Clan Champion, leader of the Right Hand and widely regarded as a great military mind; and Kitsuki Yaruma, the head of the Dragon delegation to the Imperial Court and a celebrated magistrate. Satsume was deemed too dangerous to kill, so problems were engineered outside the Imperial City that would demand his personal attention during the Coup. Likewise Toturi was too prominent for simple assassination, but fortunately the man had a well-known personal weakness: a love affair with a particular geisha named Hatsuko. The Scorpion manipulated the geisha into poisoning the Lion Champion during his visit, when he would be in a position of weakness. (Although this scheme did come to fruition, Hatsuko failed to deliver a sufficient dose of the poison—perhaps because of her conflicted feelings—and Toturi survived, ultimately leading the counterattack to retake the capital from the Scorpion.) With Yaruma, the Scorpion decided there was simply too much danger that he might recognize something was amiss and disrupt the Coup before it could be carried out. Fortunately, they had a unique advantage in dealing with him: his son, who had disappeared as an infant, was a Scorpion officer named Bayushi Togai. Togai revealed

the truth to Yaruma, and to save his family's honor Yaruma took his own life. Or perhaps he was slain by the Scorpion and the seppuku ceremony staged, but regardless he was removed from the scene in a way which drew no suspicion.

These are merely the most prominent of the many individuals the Scorpion targeted during the lead-up to the Coup, and only a few of the dozens of ways their targets were eradicated. The watchful eyes of the Scorpion and the inventiveness of their agents are without limits. GMs can build entire adventures around the Scorpion efforts to dispose of key targets, with the PCs either assisting the Scorpion or opposing them depending on the composition of the group.

The events of the Coup itself take place over the course of five days, from the 14th day of the Rooster through the 19th day, in the year 1123. The actual events that make up the Coup take place in three locations, physically very close to one another but significantly different in terms of the control and execution needed in each. The most significant was obviously the Forbidden City and especially the interior of the Imperial Palace itself, where the murder of the Emperor was followed by immediate moves to seize absolute control of the entire building. This meant that representatives from many clans and families were captured and left at the mercy of the Scorpion; Shoju hoped to persuade the representatives of the other clans to accept his rule. Needless to say, access in and out of the palace was completely restricted. These events within the palace lack much in the way of physical action, since anyone who resists is instantly killed by the Scorpion bushi who have infiltrated the palace, but offer many opportunities for tense and foreboding political storytelling as the Scorpion attempt to cajole, threaten, and dominate their hostages into supporting the new Emperor Shoju.

Immediately outside of the Imperial Palace, the so-called Forbidden City comprises a small walled compound that is home to the palaces of the other Imperial families, as well as special guest houses for the Great Clans. This entire structure is walled off from the rest of Otosan Uchi, with only two entrances, and even in peaceful times unauthorized access is forbidden. Infiltrating this entire complex and seizing control of it quickly and efficiently was key to the success of the entire Coup, and the Scorpion carried it out flawlessly, although there is sporadic and often bitter resistance from particularly hardy and determined Imperial forces.

Beyond the Forbidden City is the much larger *ekihokei* or Inner City of Otosan Uchi, surrounded and protected by the city's famous Enchanted Walls. While the most elite of the Scorpion forces occupy the Forbidden City itself, the majority of those under the Clan Champion's banner seize the *ekihokei*. Even with their large numbers, however, the population of the Outer City dwarfs that of the Scorpion ranks. Fortunately for the clan, most are of the lower castes and long since conditioned to fear samurai and accept their commands regardless of their nature or clan affiliation. For weeks before the actual Coup, Scorpion agents hide themselves throughout the ekihokei and begin carefully observing and cataloging the presence of as many samurai as possible within the elite city. This is no simple task, given the size of the city and the number of its inhabitants, but as the evening of the 14th day of the Rooster closes and the Coup is enacted, the Scorpion spring into action and eliminate as many potential threats as possible throughout the entire region. Scores, perhaps hundreds of samurai die suddenly and without warning, never knowing the reason for the attacks that end their lives.

The situation is hardly ideal, however; while the Scorpion quickly seize control of the Enchanted Walls and secure the gates that allow entrance or exit from the Inner City, there are many who escape their attempts at assassination or who are simply not classified as significant threats before the Coup is initiated, only to subsequently prove the Scorpion foolish for failing to recognize the threat they pose.

Beyond the Enchanted Walls lies the far more sprawling and less densely populated Outer City, whose walls were incomplete and poorly maintained—and beyond that, the fields and roads that stretch for miles to the outer ring of Hub Villages. These areas are remarkably free of Scorpion influence, since the clan only has so many resources and judges these areas to be of low value. Moreover, the Scorpion believe the key to success is holding the Enchanted Walls, whose ancient spiritual protections make them highly resistant to any direct assault by enemy forces massing the Outer City. In fact, Scorpion shugenja use their magic to enhance the power of the Walls still further, making them so formidable that Lion historians later accuse the Scorpion of using maho.

The Course of the Coup

Once the Coup takes place and Shoju lays claim to the Throne, the atmosphere within the Imperial Palace becomes exceedingly tense. The members of the Imperial Court are the first to be taken captive by the Scorpion. Those who offer excessive resistance, or who refuse to let themselves be considered hostages, are killed outright. Most simply acquiesce to the situation, hoping for an opportunity to strike back at the Scorpion later for their temerity. The Scorpion immediately begin working to sow seeds of division among the hostages by showing obvious favor to the Crab delegation. In addition to preventing the hostages from joining together in resistance, this is intended to impress on the Crab the potential for an alliance between their clans. Bayushi Shoju is keenly aware of the distaste Hida Kisada has for the Hantei Dynasty and his philosophy of rule by the strong. The Scorpion continue offering the Crab favored status for several days, hoping to convince them to support Shoju's claim to the throne. Meanwhile numerous other difficulties arise, including unexpectedly heavy resistance from surviving Seppun guardsman and other saboteurs trying to undermine Scorpion's control of the palace. On the third day of the occupation, a frustrated and increasingly desperate Shoju demands the fealty of his Crab hostages. Almost to a man, the Crab delegation commits seppuku rather than accept any Emperor other than

Kisada. A few of them eventually convince Shoju they will deter a Crab attack on the outer city, and Shoju releases them in a final attempt to convince Hida Kisada to at least not side against him. The gambit fails.

Despite all the efforts of the Scorpion, the occupation of the palace does not fully control the building until the fourth day, when a fire breaks out and destroys a portion of the palace. In the aftermath of the fire, the remaining pockets of resistance from Seppun guardsmen are at last ferreted out and destroyed.

If the situation in the Forbidden City is frustrating for the Scorpion, the struggles in the Inner City are far more chaotic and challenging. As the Coup begins, Scorpion governors control three districts within the city, and Scorpion agents erupt from these regions to attack the other districts, kill vital targets, and seize the Enchanted Walls. Heavy fighting quickly engulfs the entire city. Some regions quickly fall under Scorpion control, such as the temple district—the monks there resist passively but do not fight. Other districts with more stubborn or capable governors offer substantially more resistance, especially the two governed by members of the Yotsu ronin family, and these remain hotbeds of conflict throughout the entirety of the Coup.

The Scorpion attempt to seal all the gates, preventing anyone from entering or leaving the Inner City. Preventing all escape proves difficult, however. The same night the Coup takes place, for instance, the celebrated Phoenix warrior Shiba Tsukune and her entourage successfully breach the wall and escape the city. Ultimately, the Scorpion never truly control the Inner City in its totality, and the Coup's ultimate failure finds it roots in this part of the city: this is where the Lion Champion Akodo Toturi hides after surviving his poisoning. Toturi wages a guerilla war against the Scorpion for three days until he is finally able to escape outside the Inner City and join the massed armies there, turning the tide against the Scorpion. In the meantime the dwindling Scorpion forces continue to try to keep control within the Enchanted Walls, fighting countless skirmishes and turning back a few minor incursions by the armies of the other clans.

Outside the Enchanted Walls, enemy armies quickly gather. Shiba Tsukune meets with shugenja from the Phoenix, and by means of difficult rituals they contact the Phoenix army and bring it swiftly to the capital, the lead unit reaching the outer walls that same night. No one outside the Phoenix Clan is aware of it, but Tsukune and her entourage have also successfully escorted the Imperial heir, Hantei Sotorii, out of the city. He is quickly and secretly taken to the Phoenix lands to be granted his gempukku, while the Phoenix surround the Imperial City to contain any Scorpion who attempt to escape. Unexpectedly, a sizable Unicorn force arrives the following morning, and with two Great Clans on the scene, the Scorpion offer to meet under a flag of peace. The Scorpion demand the clans accept Shoju as Emperor or all hostages within the Imperial City will be killed. The Unicorn are outraged and their Champion, Shinjo Yokatsu, wishes to simply kill the Scorpion and attack the city, but the Phoenix encourage moderation, secretly hoping to buy time to allow the new Emperor to undergo his coronation. The meeting ends without result. That night, Lion and Crane armies arrive, greatly swelling the forces outside the city. The atmosphere is no less tense, however, as frustration over the city's tough defenses quickly leads to a great deal of infighting and recrimination The uncertainty of the situation within the city is an exacerbating factor, along with the possibility that one or more clans might turn traitor and ally with the Scorpion. After all, with the Emperor and his heir presumably dead, there is no Dynasty to hold their fealty. Toturi's mysterious absence is also an especial source of bitterness, with Matsu Tsuko hurling dire accusations of dishonor and shame.

On the second day following the Coup, the Crane and Lion forces attempt to storm the city and manage to

briefly cross the Enchanted Walls. Doji Satsume faces the usurper Shoju near the perimeter of the city and is gravely wounded, ultimately dying soon after. That evening, however, the presumed dead Akodo Toturi emerges from the city and assumes control of the Lion armies, much to the anger of Matsu Tsuko. That night, the Lion under Toturi's guidance manage to scale the Enchanted Walls on the southern edge of the Inner City and push inside, beginning a period of intense fighting as the Great Clans push inward and the Scorpion slowly but steadily lose ground, falling back toward the Forbidden City and the Imperial Palace.

On the fourth day, the Crab armies finally arrive under the command of Hida Kisada, and the entire city holds its breath. There are many, including Shoju himself, who believe (or fear) the Great Bear will throw in his lot with the Scorpion. Because the Scorpion Champion requested his help, however, Hida Kisada considers him too weak to rule, and he marches his army to join the rest of the besieging clans, unleashing the mighty Kaiu siege engines against the city. Many Scorpion succumb to despair, believing their lord's gambit has failed, and a growing trend of seppuku begins to thin their ranks.

By the end of the fourth day, the clans have retaken most of Otosan Uchi and surrounded the walls of the Forbidden City. Bayushi Shoju attempts to sue for peace, offering to release the remaining hostages in exchange for concessions. Shoju hopes this will foster unrest among the attacking armies, causing them to succumb to infighting over the empty throne while he and those loyal to him escape. The gambit fails, for the clans will not be deterred from their siege, and on the morning of the fifth day they assault the Forbidden City itself, breaching its walls with the combined force of Crab engineering and the magic of the Phoenix Clan's Council of Elemental Masters. It takes half a day, but finally the walls give way and the inner city is breached. It is Akodo Toturi who reaches the throne room and duels Bayushi Shoju to the death, taking his life. In his last instants of life, Shoju hacks into the Imperial Throne with the Bloodsword Ambition, breaking off the blade,

In the aftermath of Shoju's death, Toturi attempts to prevent outright war between the clans by declaring himself Emperor. It is a noble gambit, but one that goes completely unappreciated when the newly crowned Hantei XXXIX strides into the Imperial Palace under the protection of the Phoenix. Toturi immediately cedes any claim to the throne, but his gesture angers the new Emperor deeply. When Toturi protests the new Emperor's treatment of the surviving Scorpion, the Emperor strips him of his status as a Clan Champion and dissolves his entire family, sparing only the honored sensei Akodo Kage.

Fallout from the Scorpion Clan Coup continues for months, years, and even decades following the conclusion of the actual event, and leads directly to the devastating Clan War that takes place only a few years later. Indeed, it can be argued the Coup's influence extends far beyond that, affecting everything that takes place in Rokugan even two Dynasties later.

Important Personages of the Pre-Coup Era

The following section lists a few of the more prominent NPCs from the Pre-Coup decade. Most of these individuals die during this time period, but the GM may choose to extend their lifespans or use them as templates for characters in other times.

Akodo Arasou

Lion Clan Champion

Well before Akodo Arasou becomes Clan Champion he is hailed as one of the finest young warriors the Lion have seen in generations. He is quite atypical for an Akodo, however, and many consider his fiery demeanor more appropriate for a member of the Matsu family (albeit a conservative Matsu). By the age of ten he is marked for great things by his family and his sensei, and it is obvious to all he will be a worthy successor to his father as Lion Clan Champion. He has but one sibling, a younger brother named Toturi, from whom he is as different as it was possible to be. Arasou and his brother are not close, and when the quieter Toturi is sent to study with the Unicorn and then to a distant monastery, Arasou scarcely notices.

Even as a youth, Arasou is keenly perceptive. He understands the schism that exists between the Lion Clan's leading families even as many of the elder Akodo choose to remain willfully ignorant of it. It is Arasou's suggestion to his father that he be wed to the fiery Matsu heiress, Matsu Tsuko, to help close the divide between the two families. His father recognizes the value of the plan, but in truth it is not entirely a political move. Arasou encountered Tsuko many times in the dojo and at the Topaz Championship, and he is quite smitten with her. Indeed the affection was mutual, and the proposal is well received both by Tsuko and her family.

Arasou and Tsuko's courtship, such as it is, lasts longer than tradition would normally dictate. Arasou ascends to the position of Clan Champion before they are wed, and on the day of his ascension he proclaims he will marry his bride within the walls of Toshi Ranbo after it has been reclaimed from the Crane. Tsuko agrees enthusiastically and serves as his second in command in planning and executing the assault. Every resource the clan possesses is brought to bear in preparing for the attack and Arasou and Tsuko ride in the forefront of the assault, symbols of courage to all who bear the Lion mon.

Sadly, the resistance offered by the Crane is far greater than anticipated. This is evident even in the earliest portion of the assault, but the Lion do not falter in their resolve. Arasou pushes forward, confident the Crane can be broken by shattering their command staff, and believing this will be but

the first victory of many over the hated sons of Doji. Perhaps it is arrogance, or perhaps simply fate, but Arasou and his guards are cut off inside the castle gates by a vigorous ambush of the Daidoji. Arasou falls in battle, screaming Tsuko's name. His betrothed escapes, but the blow dealt to the Lion Clan is one which will haunt them for almost a decade.

Akodo Arasou, Lion Clan Champion

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 4 Void: 3
Reflexes: 4 Stamina: 5

Honor: 6.3 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 6.8*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Combat) 6, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: History 3, Horsemanship 2, Sincerity 2, Spears 2, War Fans 3

Kata: Striking as Fire

Advantages: Bishamon's Blessing, Blissful Betrothal (Matsu Tsuko)

Disadvantages: Brash, Driven (reclaim Toshi Ranbo)

Bayushi Shoju

Scorpion Clan Champion

During most of his lifetime Bayushi Shoju is considered to be among the most powerful and most desirable men in all of Rokugan. He is the Scorpion Clan Champion, a beloved friend and trusted advisor of Emperor Hantei XXXVIII, and rumored to be one of the handsomest men ever born outside the confines of the Doji family. He is a gifted orator, able to command the attention even of the Imperial Court with a mere word or gesture. He is a peerless duelist and a brilliant tactician. Women swoon in his presence, and men long to earn his favor even as they resent him for his many blessings.

Many of the rumors and beliefs concerning Shoju are correct, but a surprising number of them are false. Shoju is indeed an incredible orator and a brilliant manipulator. He dominates the courts through the implied threat of retribution against any who oppose him, something very few are willing to even consider. He is certainly a talented tactician as well, although most of his victories have been against foes who were defeated before they ever took the field. His skill as a duelist is respectable, true, but nothing like the reputation he possesses. In fact, he keeps it carefully secret that one of his arms is a withered, nearly useless thing concealed beneath his robes, while his allegedly handsome face, always concealed beneath a full mask, is actually a twisted deformed nightmare. To the Scorpion, of course, these things would not matter even if they were known to more beyond his immediate family. To the rest of the Empire, however, they would be profound blows to his carefully cultivated repute.

Perhaps because of his tightly guarded secrets, Shoju is both greatly appreciative of all that he has and extremely frustrated by what he lacks. He feels, perhaps rightly so, that if he were not diminished in his physical capabilities there would be no end to what he could accomplish. Perhaps then his wife Kachiko would not have loved that Crane playboy Hoturi. Perhaps he could be more than merely the Emperor's advisor. Perhaps he could be a great hero, a great savior. The soft whispers of the dreaded Bloodsword Ambition, concealed in a vault beneath the hallowed halls of Kyuden Bayushi, resound in the deepest corners of his mind. For years Shoju brushes them aside without thought... but then he reads the prophecy that the last Hantei will doom Rokugan, and the call of Ambition becomes irresistible.

Bayushi Shoju, Scorpion Clan Champion

Air: 5 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 4 Void: 4
Awareness: 6 Peeception: 5

Honor: 2.3 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 8.9*

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 5

Skills: Battle 4, Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 6, Defense 4, Etiquette 5, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 2, Lore: Theology 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Stealth 3, Temptation (Control) 5

Kata: Striking as Air, Strength of the Scorpion

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many), Crafty, Inheritance (Ancestral Sword of the Scorpion, Bloodsword Ambition), Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Benten's Curse

Special: As the Scorpion Clan Champion, Shoju has access to blackmail and covert information on virtually anyone he might wish.

Doji Satsume

Crane Clan Champion, Emerald Champion

Doji Satsume was born to a life of privilege and power, and he took to it with enormous zeal at an early age. In his youth he was fortunate enough to study at the great Kakita Dueling Academy at the same time as the young man who would become Emperor Hantei XXXVIII, and the two became friends. At the age of sixteen, while fighting on the front line of the Daidoji armies against the clan's hated enemies among the Lion, Satsume took the life of the Ikoma family daimyo. Only a few years after that, he became the youngest man ever to claim the position of Emerald Champion, defeating his own father in the final duel of the Emerald Tournament. He was only twenty-one years old.

As the Emerald Champion, Satsume's service record was outstanding. He was known as both an amazingly skilled duelist and a terrifying commander who never accepted defeat on the field of battle. Satsume saved his friend the Emperor from at least one assassination attempt, receiving a terrible facial scar in the process. The scar gave him the nickname "the Grinning Crane," although he never acknowledged it and no one was brave enough to mention within his earshot.

As a man, however, Satsume was something of an oddity. He genuinely loved and doted on his wife, but his devotion to duty kept them apart much of the time. The separation and his general unavailability led to his wife's death, something that drove a wedge between Satsume and his eldest son Hoturi. The Champion instead focused on his relationship with his younger son Kuwanan, a man many found strikingly similar to Satsume in every regard. Satsume had little to say of his daughter Shizue; she was born with a withered leg and he found her very presence somewhat distasteful.

Doji Satsume was devastated by his inability to foresee the Scorpion Coup and protect the Emperor. Overwhelmed by grief and blinded by rage, he faced Bayushi Shoju on the battlefield and was defeated by a man who, by all accounts, was an inferior combatant. Some believe Satsume no longer had the will to live, but whatever the case may have been, Satsume did not survive the Coup.

Doji Satsume,
Crane Clan Champion, Emerald Champion

Air: 5	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 4
		Agility: 5	Perception: 5	

Honor: 4.8 *Status: 9.5* *Glory: 9.3*

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 5 / Kenshinzen 1

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 5, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 4, Defense 4, Etiquette 5, Iaijutsu (Focus) 7, Intimidation 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Bushido 4, Meditation 5, Sincerity 2, Tea Ceremony 2

Kata: Striking as Earth, Striking as Fire

Advantages: Allies (many, including the Emperor), Heart of Vengeance (Lion), Irreproachable, Large, Social Position (Clan Champion, Emerald Champion)

Disadvantages: Ebisu's Curse

Rujo

Ronin Shugenja

From the earliest days of his childhood it was obvious Isawa Rujo was a prideful man. He regarded every challenge as a test to be overcome, and threw himself into each contest with a zeal others found startling. His ascension through the ranks of the Phoenix shugenja orders was swift and decisive, and he became one of the youngest Acolytes of Earth in centuries. When the preceding Master of Earth chose to retire, none doubted his successor would be Rujo.

As the new Master of Earth, Rujo was as harsh and unforgiving as the mountains themselves. He expected nothing less from his acolytes than he himself was willing to give, and was perpetually disappointed so few were capable of giving it. One student caught his eye, however, and piqued his interest. This young man, Isawa Tadaka, had the makings of a true master if he could but control his own spirit. Rujo watched the younger man from afar, never letting on his interest. When Tadaka departed the Phoenix lands to study among the Kuni, however, Rujo was incensed. After some months he traveled to Crab lands and demanded the youth return. Tadaka complied, but not

swiftly enough and certainly not with the contrition and remorse Rujo expected. He petitioned the other Masters to have the youth cast out from the clan, and when they declined, he flew into a rage and challenged Tadaka to a duel, declaring the loser would have to leave the clan and become a wave-man.

Rujo's defeat was without question the most shocking thing that ever happened to him. At first he was convinced Tadaka had cheated in some way, but over time he came to realize it was his own hubris, his own overconfidence, that had led to his defeat. Now a ronin, he wandered the Empire quietly, searching for a better understanding of the world. Amid the emptiness between the clan provinces and among the simple people of the Empire, he rediscovered the simple truth of the Earth, and in time he came to secretly thank Tadaka for opening his eyes. As a wave man, Rujo quietly accomplished tremendous good in Rokugan, blessing crops and births, overseeing funerals, and praying for the good of all in the temples he visited. It was purely circumstance that he found himself within the Imperial City at the time of the Scorpion Coup. Although none ever knew it save perhaps the Elemental Masters, it was the work of Rujo within the boundaries of Otosan Uchi that managed to finally undo the Scorpion magic turning the city's Enchanted Walls against the assembled forces of the other clans. The Scorpion killed him for it, but Rujo died satisfied with his actions, a man at peace at last.

Rujo, Ronin Shugenja

Air: 3 Earth: 6 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 4
Awareness: 5 Intelligence: 6

Honor: 6.7 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 4.4*

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Earth) 4 / Isawa Tensai (Earth)

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Defense 4, Heavy Weapons 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Elements (Earth) 5, Lore: Maho 1, Lore: Theology 4, Medicine 2, Meditation 4, Spellcraft 6, Tea Ceremony 2

Spells: As a former Master of Earth, Rujo has access to an incredible number of spells which he memorized before leaving the Phoenix, along with a handful which he still carries with him. He prefers to use lower Mastery spells and make Raises to accomplish great things rather than cast flashy higher Mastery spells.

Advantages: Elemental Blessing (Earth), Quick Healer

Disadvantages: Black Sheep, Social Disadvantage (ronin), Unlucky

Moto Soro

Heir to the Moto Family

Moto Soro is the only son and heir of Moto Terumori, the daimyo of the infamous Moto family. Terumori's tenure as lord of the family has been nothing short of legendary, and many regard him as one of the greatest leaders the family has had since they were offered fealty to the Unicorn Clan. Terumori is dedicated, pious, and utterly ruthless, so much so that he has forbidden any member of his family to study with the pacifistic Ide, demanding instead all members of the Moto embrace their warrior heritage. The daimyo's passion for the destruction of the Dark Moto who serve the Shadowlands is without measure, and his ferocity has enflamed the hopes of an entire family that desperately longs to purge dishonor from their name.

Moto Soro looks to his father, the legendary Terumori, and privately despairs that he will ever be able to lead as he does. How can a simple man like himself hope to compare? He is talented in the ways of the bushi, but he is no prodigy. He understands and practices both tactics and strategy, but lacks the white-hot rage that drives his father to succeed against all odds. How will his people react with anything other than disappointment when Soro finally takes over after his father's reign? Despite his youth, Soro lives with the fear that his life will be remembered as nothing but a diminished shadow of his father's rule.

Soro spends much of his time traveling the Empire, acting as a representative of his family and clan in distant provinces. He holds clan magistrate status purely as a political appointment, but is actually rather skilled in that role, though he does not realize it himself. His humble point of view allows him to make friends and allies easily, and without really intending to Soro has created a network of allies across the Empire that will be of more value to him when he takes power than anything his father has at his disposal. For now, though, the need to prove himself, unencumbered by rage or hatred, pushes him to become great even as he despairs of ever escaping mediocrity.

Moto Soro, Heir to the Moto Family

Air: 3 Earth: 2 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 3
Stamina: 3 Perception: 4

Honor: 5.3 *Status: 5.5* *Glory: 4.6*

School/Rank: Moto Vindicator 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, Horsemanship 5, Hunting (Tracking) 5, Intimidation 2, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu (Scimitar) 4, Lore: Shadowlands 2

Kata: Strength of the Unicorn, Striking as Fire

Advantages: Allies (numerous), Social Position (clan magistrate, family daimyo's heir), Way of the Land (Unicorn provinces), Wealthy

Disadvantages: Dark Fate, Doubt (Battle)

New Game Mechanics

This section presents several mechanical options for L5R 4th Edition that are especially appropriate to the Pre-Coup era, although most of them can be used equally well in many other eras and settings within Rokugan.

New Basic School: The Hiruma Scouts

After the fall of Hiruma Castle, the Hiruma family had no sensei and was unable to preserve the knowledge of its ancient bushi school (the school listed in the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook as "Hiruma Bushi"). Most of the samurai who actually knew its advanced techniques had perished in battle with the Maw, and those who knew its more basic methods were too focused on fighting and surviving to pass on their wisdom. By the time the family realized their school was in danger of perishing, it was too late.

It was the Unicorn Clan which offered a solution, opening its scout dojo to the Hiruma. Training in the Shinjo methods and adapting them for their own use, the Hiruma developed a new school which placed a far stronger focus on stealth and scouting than their ancestral one. The Hiruma relied on this school for over 300 years, until ancient scrolls of the lost Hiruma Bushi school were finally recovered from the Shadowlands. Even after the Hiruma Bushi techniques were recovered, however, the Hiruma refused to abandon their well-tested Scout school, and thereafter their dojo taught both.

New Basic School: Hiruma Scout School [Bushi]

- **Benefit:** +1 Reflexes
- **Skills:** Athletics, Hunting, Kenjutsu, Kyujutsu, Lore: Shadowlands, Stealth (Sneaking), any one Bugei skill
- **Beginning Honor:** 4.5

Techniques

Rank 1: Dance the Razor's Edge

The Hiruma scouts learn the ways of the Shadowlands intimately, and are taught to rely on speed and stealth to survive, function, and escape in that most inhospitable of environments. You may add your Stealth Skill rank to the total of your Initiative rolls (unless caught by surprise or otherwise unaware). You can make all food, water, and jade rations last twice as long as normal for a number of people equal to your Hunting Skill Rank. While in the Shadowlands, you gain +1k0 to Stealth rolls and always know the direction of the Empire and roughly how far away it is.

Rank 2: Run Like the Wind

The Hiruma practice speed, evasion, and endurance in order to evade their enemies and deliver their scouting reports. You may make Free and Simple Move actions while in the Full Defense stance. You can run at high speed for a number of hours equal to your Stamina + School Rank, after which you are Exhausted until you have one hour's rest.

Rank 3: Veil of the Spirits

At this Rank, the Hiruma has perfected his skills with stealth to the point where they become almost supernatural. As long as you do not move and have some form of cover, concealment, or camouflage available (GM's discretion), you may spend a Void point to make yourself all but invisible—in mechanical terms, this adds a number of kept dice to your Stealth roll equal to your School Rank. This effect lasts until you move or make noise.

Rank 4: Harness the Wind

The Hiruma has now learned to strike as swiftly as he runs. You may make attacks as a Simple Action instead of a Complex Action when using any Samurai weapon, knife, or bow. You may also attack as a Simple Action regardless of weapon when fighting any Shadowlands creature or other known Tainted nonhuman (such as zombies or gaki).

Rank 5: Strike of the Stalker

The Hiruma Scouts strike their opponents from hiding, delivering vicious blows that get past all defenses. If you are striking a surprised or unaware foe, your Raises are not limited by your Void, and you can ignore 10 points of Reduction (from any source).

New Alternate Path: The Scorpion Loyalists

The long period of relative peace and tranquility the Empire enjoyed took its toll upon the Scorpion just as it did all the clans. When the whispering of Ambition began to take hold in Bayushi Shoju's mind, his demeanor changed, affecting those closest to him, then their vassals, and so on. When the Scorpion discovered the prophecy that foretold the return of Fu Leng through the last Hantei, this growing seed of dissent and paranoia blossomed into a loyal cadre who would do anything to make Shoju's vision a reality. These warriors, priests, and courtiers, conspirators one and all, formed the bulk of the forces in the Imperial City during the Clan Coup, commanding even senior officers and agents in the successful capture and security of the city as a whole.

The technique which these men and women employed was not wholly exclusive to their era, however. The Scorpion Clan has always had those willing to do anything at all to fulfill their lord's commands, and in truth the technique of the Scorpion Loyalists can probably be traced back to the internal split within the clan during the Gozoku era.

New Alternate Path: Scorpion Loyalist

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Scorpion School at Rank 2
- **Requirements:** Courtier 4 (courtiers), Spellcraft 4 (shugenja), one Weapon Skill at 4 (bushi or ninja)

Technique: No Matter the Cost

Those Scorpion agents who embrace their duties to the fullest strike viciously at the clan's many enemies without regard for the constraints of honor, custom, or propriety. You may sacrifice points of Honor up to a maximum number equal to your Scorpion School Rank to gain a bonus on one roll made against non-Scorpion opponents. Bushi and ninja gain a bonus of +1k0 per point of Honor on attack rolls, courtiers gain the same bonus on Contested Social Skill Rolls, and shugenja gain the bonus on spell-casting rolls made on Air spells (only) targeting those opponents.

New Alternate Path: The Kitsuki Justicar

The justicar tradition is an old one, one that has its roots in Imperial history that predates even the establishment of the magistrate system by the Emerald Champion and his associate, Soshi Saibankan. In Rokugan's earlier days, communication among the clans was less extensive and the lands between their holdings were wilder and more dangerous. This often resulted in criminals from one region fleeing to another and completely escaping prosecution. The lack of a strong Imperial network for the exchange of information only exacerbated this situation. However, Bushido demanded a solution to the problem, for a criminal fleeing the Lion lands might prey upon the Crane, bringing great dishonor to the Lion Clan (even though the Crane were hated enemies). The Dragon were thus not the first to establish a tradition of justicars, but they are the only ones to develop and maintain a fighting technique built on the tradition.

A justicar is essentially a magistrate trained in the art of dueling. The duty and purpose of a justicar is to travel in search of fugitives, sometimes hunting specific individuals and other times merely generally searching for anyone who may have escaped the justice of his clan. When he locates such an individual, the justicar challenges him to duel to the death. The death of the criminal retroactively proves his guilt and thus eliminates all problems. Of course, the possibility that the justicar may be killed (and thus the criminal exonerated) is somewhat of a problem, but even in this case the

clan is freed from any dishonor since the victor was clearly not a criminal before he arrived at his new home.

Since the Kitsuki family's founding, their strong emphasis on justice has led them to embrace the justicar tradition and they have developed a technique to support it. Kitsuki Justicars typically hold a post as a Dragon Clan magistrate, and the clan often goes to considerable effort to get them appointed as Emerald Magistrates as well, though success in this depends on the relationship between the Kitsuki family and the Emerald Champion of the time.

New Alternate Path: Kitsuki Justicar [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Kitsuki Investigator 3
- **Requirements:** Iaijutsu 4, Investigation 4

Technique: The Purity of Justice

A justicar is a master of both the hunt and the kill. You may add your Investigation Skill Rank to the total of any Assessment roll made as part of an iaijutsu duel. You also gain a bonus of +1k0 on all Focus and Strike rolls made against an opponent who has been decreed guilty of a crime by an Imperial or Dragon Clan authority higher than you. Finally, you gain a bonus of +1k0 to any Hunting or Investigation rolls made to hunt such guilty targets.

New Alternate Path: Soldiers of the Three Man Alliance

The formation of the Three Man Alliance is the first step in a process of twelfth-century consolidation and unification among the Minor Clans, leading to (among other things) the combination of the Mantis, Wasp, and Centipede clans into the Great Clan of the Mantis and, later in the century, the creation of the Minor Clan Alliance. It is the creation of the Three Man Alliance and their military victory over the Scorpion Clan that first inspires the Minor Clans to band together for greater benefit and effect, and many successful officers from that first military alliance eventually go on to achieve military and political prestige within the Minor Clan Alliance.

The fighting technique of the Three Man Alliance is formed by the combined efforts of several experienced soldiers from the Sparrow and Wasp. The warriors pool their life experience and develop a unified technique to carry back to their respective clans. Although the Three Man Alliance is superseded during the later Clan War by Yoritomo's Alliance, the technique it developed survives, and decades later it is still occasionally taught in Suzume and Tsuruchi dojo.

New Alternate Path: Three Man Alliance Soldier [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Tsuruchi Archer 2, Tsuruchi Bounty Hunter 2, or Suzume Bushi 2
- **Requirements:** Battle 2

Technique: Stand Against Oppression

The scions of the Minor Clans are not intimidated by their more influential detractors among the Great Clans. Far from it, they are inspired to greatness by their hardships. When facing an opponent with a higher Glory Rank than you, you may spend a Void Point to gain bonus unkept dice on your attack roll equal to the difference in your respective Glory Ranks.

You may not gain more bonus dice than your Minor Clan School Rank from this Technique.

THE CLAN WAR

The Hooded Ronin stood at the edge of the plains surrounding Otosan Uchi. He felt tears burn in his eyes and struggled to hold them back. The glorious capital of the Empire, where Hantei and his siblings had first touched the mortal realm, the center of a thousand years of civilization, a monument of beauty and power... now a place of corruption. The Ninth Kami sat on the throne in the body of Hantei's last descendent, and at his command a massive army of Shadowlands abominations gathered outside the city.

The Hooded Ronin turned away from that terrible sight, turned to the army gathered behind him. The remaining forces of the seven Great Clans, even the Scorpion who had emerged from hiding. But the Great Clans were only the start of it. There were the hodgepodge forces of the Minor Clans, gathered under the banner of Yoritomo. There was Toturi's Army, the largest force of ronin in the Empire's history, come to prove the honor of the wave-men. There were the ancient Naga people, awoken from their millennial slumber. Even the monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei had taken the field, desperate to purge Rokugan of the Taint.

He walked through the camp of the great army, looking at each face. So many lives would be lost today, so many tales would end. This army might be the greatest gathering of Rokugan's strength in centuries, but it felt desperate, hopeless. The Empire had torn itself asunder for the last five years, wrecked its honor and its strength in vain contests for power and influence. Now at last it had united, but perhaps it was already too late.

A thousand years ago, it also seemed hopeless, the Ronin thought. But my ancestor spoke with the Emperor then, and today I will also meet with the Emperor... with a different purpose in mind.

The Hooded Ronin took a deep breath and focused his mind on the seven unique souls who would go with him. Despite the distance, he could see and hear them on the battlefield, their destiny clear as water to him.

Struggling to contain the corruption of his own body, Isawa Tadaka fought his fallen comrades, bringing the purity of death to the Phoenix.

Laughing as she cut through the ranks of demons, Mirumoto Hitomi saw her nemesis on the horizon, but would refuse to kill him.

Leading his clan into the battle, Hida Yakamo cleansed his family's honor in demon blood, knowing his strongest enemy was himself.

Her trustworthy steed under her, Otaku Kamoko silently scoured the battlefield for the army's leader, determined to bring down the corrupt monster who had ravaged the Unicorn lands.

Weakened, betrayed and grieving, Doji Hoturi's gaze showed none of his usual mirth, only death. He and every Crane fought like three men, for so many of their brothers had already fallen.

In the shadows, Bayushi Kachiko watched as she always had. Shame engulfed her as she knew how much harm she had done, but remorse was not the Way of the Scorpion.

And with thousands of men following him and him alone, Toturi the Black showed all the Empire the power of redemption.

They were all so flawed. So weak, so vulnerable.

So human.

The Hooded Ronin smiled. There was still hope.

The History of the Clan War

The Clan War is one of the largest conflicts ever to engulf the Emerald Empire. For two years the clans battle each other and the forces of the Shadowlands, culminating in the Second Day of Thunder and a desperate struggle against the returned Fu Leng. Before this catastrophe struck, the Empire had grown fat with wealth and power, secure in itself and complacent about threats both external and internal. Afterward it would never be the same, the glories of the Thousand Years of Peace only a memory. The Hantei Dynasty came to an end, replaced by the short-lived Toturi Dynasty, and the chaos and damage caused by the Clan War gave rise to later threats and disasters such as the rise of the Lying Darkness and the return of the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban.

The timeline presented here describes the main events of this period, but many smaller details are left out for reasons of space. The Clan Wars is one of the most heavily detailed times in Rokugani history, with innumerable supplements, fictions, and supporting materials published over the last 15 years. GMs and players can and should seek out these older resources and materials to supplement the more limited information presented in this chapter.

The events of the Clan War take place immediately after the pre-Scorpion Clan Coup era, depicted in Chapter Five. GMs and players should consult that chapter for details on the events which set the stage for the Clan War: most notably the Coup itself, the disbanding of the Akodo and the Scorpion Clan in its aftermath, and the marriage of the new Emperor Hantei XXXIX to Bayushi Kachiko (widow of the Scorpion Clan Champion).

Year 1123

In the wake of the failed Scorpion Clan Coup, Yogo Junzo, the Yogo daimyo of the disbanded Scorpion Clan, betrays his duty and begins opening the Black Scrolls in his possession. He intends to use their power for vengeance against the Empire. The power of the First Scroll unleashes a plague called the Wasting Disease that scourges the northern Empire, causing especially heavy losses to the Imperial Capital. Much of the Otomo family dies, terminating the various side-branches of the Hantei bloodline.

Junzo's decision to betray his duty and open the Black Scrolls is in many ways the single most consequential event in the lead-up to the Clan War. Without Junzo's treason, Fu Leng's spirit would never have escaped its imprisonment, the Wasting Disease would never have scourged the Empire, and Emperor Hantei XXXIX would have reigned healthy and strong. GMs who wish to explore the possibilities of an ongoing Hantei Dynasty need not look farther than Junzo's actions.

Year 1124

Empress Kachiko takes advantage of the ongoing Wasting Disease to begin subtly poisoning the young Emperor, making it appear he is suffering the plague's effects. He grows steadily weaker over the next two years.

War erupts between the Lion and Crane after another violent clash at Toshi Ranbo. The initial fighting is bloody and inconclusive, partly due the subversive activities of a Shadow-contaminated Scorpion spy and a corrupted Kitsu shugenja.

Hida Kisada, disgusted at the Empire's weakness and the apparent impotence of the ailing Hantei XXXIX, orders his vassal Kuni Yori to find a way for the Crab to wage war and seize the throne. Yori proposes an alliance of convenience with the Shadowlands. Initially shocked by the idea, Kisada soon begins considering it seriously. He respects the strength of the Shadowlands and believes that once he takes the throne he can unite the entire Empire and crush the creatures of the Ninth Kami once and for all.

Year 1125

The ronin known as Toturi the Black—the former Lion Clan Champion, disgraced after the Clan Coup—begins gathering a ragtag army of his fellow wave-men. He plans to use them to protect the Empire from bandits and other threats, hoping in this way to redeem his earlier failures.

The Hare Clan, destroyed by the Scorpion prior to the Clan Coup, is restored by Imperial decree. The clan is only a shadow of its former self, but works hard to reclaim its lands and rebuild its strength.

Year 1126

The Crab march. Apart from a few members of the Hiruma family maintaining a token guard on the Kaiu Wall, all the armies of the Clan march north, strengthened and reinforced by their new Shadowlands "allies." They rampage through the Scorpion lands, destroying several Imperial Legions garrisoning the area and wrecking the famous city of Ryoko Owari. Fragmentary reports of the attack reach the other clans.

The Crab Clan's march is the first major campaign of the Clan War, and it represents something unseen in the Empire before. It is only the third time a clan has taken direct action against the Hantei Dynasty (the other two being the Scorpion Clan Coup and, centuries earlier, the Mantis Clan's attempt to kidnap the Emperor's son). But far worse is the Crab Clan's decision to openly ally with the Shadowlands, a wholly unprecedented action that grants the clan a strength and freedom of maneuver it has never possessed before. It also allows the Shadowlands to enter the Empire (albeit under Crab command), and for many Rokugani the Crab offensive is their first contact with the monsters of Fu Leng. Lack of knowledge and sheer terror makes the Crab attack even more deadly.

The initial Crab offensive overruns the Scorpion lands, destroying the Imperial troops who garrison those territories. Some forward Crab spearheads actually cross through Beiden Pass into the Crane lands, and a large raiding force led by Hida Sukune, Kisada's younger son, attacks Shiro Sano Kakita and burns it to the ground.

Alternate Paths: A Crab Civil War?

Hida Kisada's decision to form a temporary alliance with the Shadowlands was a profound violation of the Crab Clan's duty to the Empire, and was intensely controversial even among his own children and his closest followers. Ultimately, their loyalty to the line of Hida caused them to obey his orders, even when this led to later catastrophes such as the sacrifice of his younger son Hida Sukune. The Crab Clan would spend generations seeking to atone for its actions during the Clan War.

However, there is no reason why the GM cannot explore other possibilities. What if the daimyo of the Kaiu and Hiruma had refused to obey Kisada's commands? What if his trusted generals had reacted to his orders by requesting *kanshi* (protesting seppuku)? What if one or more of Kisada's three children had rebelled against him, calling on the rest of the clan to stand against the Great Bear's madness?

A Crab civil war would certainly have profoundly changed the course of the Clan War, though whether the net effects for the Empire would have been better or worse is debatable. For example, with the Crab wrecked by internal conflict, the Shadowlands horde would probably have been able to breach the Wall and invade the Empire directly. On the other hand, the Empire might have found it easier to unite in the face of such a direct Shadowlands threat without clan enmities getting in the way.

The Lion Clan attacks the Crane, escalating the war that began two years before. With the sickly Emperor only sporadically able to intervene on behalf of the Crane, Lion Clan Champion Matsu Tsuko quickly captures the city of Toshi Ranbo, avenging the death of her lover Akodo Arasou from the pre-Coup era. She plans to continue the attack until she can destroy Kyuden Doji itself, a final conclusion to the two clans' ancestral feud.

After several border skirmishes, the Phoenix army joins the Crane in battle against the aggressive Lion. The vast armies of the Lion open a second front and both the Crane and the Phoenix suffer several additional defeats.

The war between the Lion and the Crane is one of the main conflicts of the Clan War. The clans have been rivals for over a thousand years, but the events in the pre-Coup era (especially the repeated fighting over Toshi Ranbo) push tensions to a lethal peak. Without the Emperor's usual intervention the Lion are free to lash out like never before, unleashing thousands of troops with the clear goal of crushing the Crane Clan once and for all. With the Crane

also under attack by the Crab, even the help of their Phoenix allies is insufficient to avert a series of ugly defeats.

The enigmatic Togashi Yokuni (actually the Kami Togashi himself under his latest false name) emerges from his mountain stronghold to meet with Toturi the Black. The Dragon Clan Champion places his troops under the former Lion's command, telling him to use them to defend the Empire. Toturi gladly accepts and leads the combined armies toward Beiden Pass, hoping to stop the Crab before it is too late.

Yoritomo's Alliance: The Mantis Clan Champion, seeing opportunity in the wars erupting across the Empire, calls for an alliance of the Minor Clans to let them stand alongside the Great Clans as an equal power. The Centipede, Wasp, Tortoise and later the Fox join the Alliance, and the Falcon send several units while remaining independent. The Sparrow, Badger, and Dragonfly are only able (or willing) to send a few token samurai, but it is still more than enough for Yoritomo. He gathers them into a single large army and offers its services to the highest bidder, making the Minor Clans a force in the Clan War.

Mirumoto Daini, the younger brother of daimyo Mirumoto Hitomi and one of Toturi's closest Dragon allies, travels at Togashi Yokuni's command to the Shinomen Forest to learn more about the mysterious snake-people known as the Naga. He meets the female naga known as the Mara and soon becomes smitten with her, accompanying her back to her peoples' cities and learning much about their ancient civilization. He is known to them as "the Daini" and works tirelessly toward building an alliance between them and humanity.

Toturi's mixed army of Dragon and ronin reaches Beiden Pass and stands against a major Crab assault, the First Battle of Beiden Pass.

The two Battles of Beiden Pass, fought in autumn 1126 and spring 1127, each span several days and involve thousands of samurai on each side, making them the largest engagements in Rokugan since the battles against Iuchiban in the eighth century. The first battle pits Toturi, possibly the greatest military genius of the era, against Hida Sukune, younger son of Kisada and an extremely skilled general in his own right. This is the first time since the war began that the Crab face an enemy they cannot simply crush under the weight of their superior forces and Shadowlands allies. There are many days of skirmishes, feints, and surprise moves before the main clash. Hida Yakamo, Kisada's eldest son, encounters his nemesis Mirumoto Hitomi during the fighting, and Hitomi cuts off Yakamo's right hand. Casualties on both sides are heavy but ultimately Toturi's generalship proves superior; the Crab army is forced to pull back.

In the aftermath of the defeat at Beiden Pass, Kisada's Shadowlands allies grow restive. Kuni Yori tells Kisada the Shadowlands demands a strengthening of the alliance through blood sacrifices from the Hida bloodline. Unwilling to give up when he has come so far, Kisada reluctantly agrees to the dark bargain, handing over Sukune to be sacrificed and allowing Yakamo to give his name to an oni. Kuni Yori also grafts an oni's claw onto Yakamo's arm to replace his missing hand.

With winter coming on, the Crab armies are overextended and running short of food. Rather than retreat back to Crab lands, Kisada orders Yakamo to raid the southern Crane lands and loot them for food and other supplies. Yakamo obeys, ravaging the Asahina territories with an army composed mainly of Shadowlands forces (including the oni which bears his name).

Despite his apparent progressing illness, the Emperor holds his usual Winter Court, choosing to

Alternate Paths: Beiden Pass and the Sacrifice of Sukune

Toturi's victory at the first Battle of Beiden Pass was by no means assured—Hida Sukune was a skilled general and had a numerically superior army, not to mention the unique strength of his Shadowlands allies. Toturi's clever tactics and the advantages of defense allowed him to off-set these factors, but the battle was close-run and could easily have gone the other way. If Sukune had won, the Crab would have broken through the Pass and into the Lion and Crane lands, replenishing their supplies from the heart of the Empire's most productive farmlands. This would have forced the Lion to abandon their war against the Crane in order to defend their own heartland, profoundly altering the subsequent course of the Clan War era.

Conversely, the historical aftermath of the battle led to the sacrifice of Kisada's own son Sukune to the forces of the Shadowlands, arguably a turning point in the moral collapse of the Crab Clan. By this time, Kuni Yori was already badly Tainted and it seems likely he was at least partially controlled by the will of Jigoku. Even so, Hida Kisada's willingness to go along with Yori's actions represents a profound failure of honor and duty. Yakamo, weakened by the loss of his hand, was unable or unwilling to oppose his father's actions, while younger sister O-Ushi lacked the backing to stand against her father on her own.

However, it is entirely possible that Yori and Kisada's actions could have triggered a large-scale revolt among the soldiers themselves, shattering the Crab armies and leaving a vast force of leaderless Shadowlands creatures deep inside the Empire. Where that would have led is anyone's guess.

stay at Kyuden Asako in the Phoenix lands, far from the wars. The Winter Court is marked by increasing tensions between all the clans, partly due to the ongoing wars and partly through the machinations of Kuni Yori (who wants to pave the way for his Champion Kisada) and Empress Bayushi Kachiko (who wants to destroy the Empire which killed her husband and disbanded her clan). The Phoenix face internal tensions of their own when Yori exposes the secrets of the Asako *henshin* mystics. The Crane and Lion find myriad ways to continue their war even at court. Only the Unicorn seem to worry about the state of the land as a whole.

Year 1127

In late spring the Second Battle of Beiden Pass rages as the Crab launch a renewed effort to break through into the northern Empire. Toturi's forces are reinforced by large numbers of the fabled Naga, who arrive in the company of Mirumoto Daini to join the fight against 'the Foul.' Despite their help the battle is a desperate one, and the Dragon forces take especially heavy losses. Hida Yakamo fights a second duel with Mirumoto Hitomi and uses his demonic claw to overpower her and crush her sword-hand, leaving her for dead. However, the tide of battle turns against the Crab once again when a sizable Unicorn army arrives and joins with Toturi's forces. The Crab retreat once more and Toturi takes full control of the Pass.

Scorpion agents of Empress Kachiko retrieve the critically wounded Mirumoto Hitomi from the battlefield. Kachiko offers Hitomi a replacement for her lost hand: the sinister Obsidian Hand, an ancient and mysterious artifact which is actually the severed hand of Lord Moon himself. Hitomi, desperate for revenge against Yakamo, accepts the Hand eagerly but is forced to spend months mastering its power and malignance.

In the aftermath of Beiden Pass, many samurai come to respect the strange Naga snake-people, and their emissary the Dashmar is granted a brief audience in the Imperial Court. Toturi's army of ronin also wins respect for its courage and more wavemen flock to his banner.

The Naga are never truly accepted within Rokugan, but the outcome of Beiden wins them at least a grudging respect from some of the clans, notably the Unicorn. Daini, of course, does his best to promote the nobility and wisdom of the Naga to anyone who will listen, but due to his own long absence and the disappearance of his older sister after Beiden he has little political strength within the Dragon. With Hitomi missing, the rule of the Mirumoto family passes to her cousin Mirumoto Yukihera, an ambitious and dishonorable man.

The Crab armies retreat back to their home provinces, unable to maintain their hold on the Scorpion lands after the defeat at Beiden. Kisada begins laying new plans to resume his march on the Imperial Throne.

The Wasting Disease continues to ravage the Empire. By now several of the Black Scrolls have been opened by Yogo Junzo, Kuni Yori, and others. An array of horrible new oni known as the Elemental Terrors appears from the deep Shadowlands; they are creations of the sinister Dark Oracles. Yogo Junzo, now reduced to an undead abomination by the power of the Taint, begins to assemble his own army of undead abominations and Shadowlands creatures, planning to hunt down and destroy the reincarnation of Shinsei on behalf of his new master Fu Leng.

The former Scorpion named Bayushi Goshiu manipulates the Imperial courts to make sure the other clans stay at each others' throats, using the blackmail and influence he has accumulated over many prior years.

At the Empress Kachiko's demand, the Tournament of the Emerald Champion is finally held to fill the office left vacant by Doji Satsume's death in the Clan Coup years earlier. All are shocked when Mirumoto Hitomi appears wearing the Obsidian Hand. Kachiko hopes Hitomi will serve as her pawn after winning the tournament, but the victory instead goes to the legendary Kakita Toshimoko, sensei of the Kakita Dueling Academy. Hitomi, furious at her defeat, leaves the capital for the Dragon lands.

Shortly after the Emerald Tournament, Bayushi Kachiko kidnaps and imprisons her former lover Doji Hoturi. She blames him for the death of their son during the Clan Coup and tortures him for weeks before using the sinister nemuranai known as the Egg of P'an Ku to create a double of him. The "False Hoturi" is a Tainted madman who shames the Crane in the Imperial Court. By the time the real Hoturi manages to escape, his corrupt doppelganger has attacked the Crane lands with an army of undead and Lost.

The creation of the False Hoturi is another of the critical events of the Clan War era, resulting in huge damage to the Crane Clan and ravaging much of the southern Empire with war and destruction. It was also an example of how Empress Kachiko's quest for vengeance was driven by far more than mere duty to her ruined clan. Kachiko hated Hoturi personally for the death of their illegitimate son, and she was intent on causing him as much pain as possible. This was why she left him alive after she created the False Hoturi, so he could watch the full extent of her revenge.

It is not known who rescued Hoturi from Kachiko's clutches (he was far too weak to escape on his own). Some tales have credited the so-called Hooded Ronin, the mysterious figure who was actually Shinsei's reincarnation. Others have credited another ronin or even Akodo Toturi's former lover, the geisha Hatsuko. It is up to the GM which of these (if any) is true. A creative GM may also wish to explore what would happen if Hoturi was rescued by PCs.

Soshi Bantaro, the former daimyo of the Soshi, has been driven mad by his fury over the destruction of the Scorpion Clan. He uses one of the Black Scrolls to raise the late Clan Champion Bayushi Shoju from the dead. Unfortunately, this also transforms Shoju into an undead monstrosity. The horror is destroyed by other samurai almost immediately, sparing the Empire from its danger.

The Phoenix Elemental Council, recognizing that Fu Leng's power is growing and the Empire may face grave danger, makes a critical decision: to open the Black Scrolls in their possession, using the power and forbidden knowledge within to discover how to defeat the Dark Kami. Soon after, the Master of Earth, Isawa Tadaka, summons an oni; the Council begins torturing it for information.

The Elemental Council's decision to begin opening the Black Scrolls and conducting forbidden research into the darkest secrets of Jigoku constitutes one of the worst decisions in the Phoenix Clan's entire history, and ultimately nearly destroys them. Although the Council's ostensible motive is to protect the Empire from the growing threat of Fu Leng, in truth the Masters are motivated more by their own arrogance, obsessions, and overconfidence. Isawa Tadaka in particular is driven by his personal quest to find and destroy Oni no Akuma, and willingly gives his name to an oni in the hope that this can lead him to his goal.

The False Hoturi and his corrupt army ravage the Crane lands and destroy Kyuden Doji. The Crane forces, now under the leadership of family daimyo Daidoji Uji, retreat to Shiro Daidoji and endure a siege.

Toturi the Black leads his ronin army toward the Crane lands, hoping to stop the False Hoturi. Matsu Tsuko's cousin, the so-called "butcher" Matsu Gohei, attacks Toturi and blocks his forces from advancing. Empress Kachiko tricks the Unicorn army at Beiden Pass into taking a hostile stance against Toturi as well, and Toturi spends weeks fighting and maneuvering between two of Rokugan's strongest military forces.

Doji Hoturi confronts his false doppelganger on the field of battle. Despite weakness from months of captivity, Hoturi defeats the False Hoturi and reclaims leadership of the Crane Clan. Unfortunately, the Crane armies have been largely destroyed in the fighting, and the clan hires Yoritomo's Alliance to fill out its paltry ranks with mercenaries.

Otaku Komoko, the daimyo of her family, gathers an elite force of Unicorn samurai to investigate the undead and Shadowlands creatures who are appearing elsewhere in the Empire—especially in Phoenix lands, due to the corruption unleashed by the Black Scrolls. She fights several battles over

the course of a couple of months, with major engagements at Shiro Shiba and Kyuden Isawa.

The undead Yogo Junzo invades the Unicorn provinces at the head of a sizable Shadowlands army. (The Unicorn have been focusing much of their strength on suppressing bandits and protecting the peasantry, something which aligns both with the clan's compassion and the Clan Champion's secret Kolat agenda.) The Unicorn push them back but suffer severe losses, preventing them from taking a bigger part in the rest of the Empire's conflicts.

Matsu Gohei is caught in an ambush by Shadowlands creatures. Their numbers are vastly superior to the Lion's small force and his men are nearly overwhelmed. They are saved by unexpected assistance from a nezumi tribe, the Broken Shinbone. Impressed by their ferocity, Gohei asks the nezumi to remain with him in exchange for food and weapons, and they gladly agree.

The Unicorn abandon Beiden Pass to reinforce their home provinces against Junzo's attacks. Toturi takes advantage of the opening to move his ronin army through the Pass, escaping the Lion forces and wintering more safely in the relatively empty Scorpion lands.

The year 1127 ends without an official Imperial Winter Court. The sickly Emperor is increasingly isolated from the world around him, sometimes muttering strangely or speaking to empty air, and Kachiko effectively rules in his stead. The clans spend their own winter courts preparing for renewed conflict the following year. Hida Kisada meets secretly with Yoritomo, planning for a new and bolder strike for the throne of Rokugan.

Year 1128

During his research into the Taint and Fu Leng's plans, Master of Earth Isawa Tadaka manages to locate an ancient and deadly nemuranai, the Anvil of Despair. He dispatches the Inquisitor Asako Yurito to destroy it once and for all, but Yurito and the Anvil both disappear into the Shadowlands, their fate a mystery. Months later Yurito's notes are found in the newly built Izaku libraries, telling of faceless demons and Rokugan's dark future.

A force of Dark Moto sweep out of the Shadowlands, led by the legendary Moto Tsume, and ravage the southern Unicorn lands, killing the daimyo Moto Terumoru in the process. From there the corrupted Moto sweep east toward the capital, seeking to link up with Yogo Junzo. They are intercepted by Otaku Kamoko's forces, and the ferocious battle maiden nearly wipes them out. Tsume escapes back to the Shadowlands.

Shiba Tsukune, yojimbo to Isawa Tadaka, discovers the secret research of the Elemental Council and the true depths of Taint they have absorbed. She kills Tadaka's imprisoned oni, forcing the Council to confront the dire consequences of their own hubris.

Alternate Paths: Emperor Kisada

The outcome of Kisada's attack was not inevitable. If fewer of the Black Scrolls had been opened, Fu Leng's power would have been much weaker and Kisada could easily have slain the poisoned Emperor, claiming the Emerald Throne for himself. What would have happened then? Perhaps the Day of Thunder would have been delayed indefinitely, but it is just as possible that with so many Black Scrolls already opened Fu Leng's spirit would simply have sought another vessel. Perhaps even Kisada himself, related by blood to the Dark Kami and morally corrupted by his ambition and ruthlessness, might have been possessed!

Of course, even if Fu Leng's return was averted, the ascension of Emperor Kisada would hardly have ushered in an era of peace, nor would the other clans have been eager to join Kisada in a crusade to destroy the Shadowlands once and for all. Indeed, the Lion Clan would likely have fought against Kisada's rule until the bitter end, and the Crane and Unicorn would probably also have balked at his actions. The behavior of the Phoenix and Dragon is more difficult to predict, especially since in this alternate timeline Togashi would have remained alive.

Mirumoto Hitomi confronts her cousin Yukihera and challenges him for the rule of the Mirumoto family. Yukihera is defeated; some rumors claim he was exposed as Tainted as well.

The Attack on Otosan Uchi: Year 1128, Month of the Hare

Hida Kisada attacks Otosan Uchi by sea, using the Mantis fleet in conjunction with his own clan's more limited naval resources to transport a large portion of the Crab army and its Shadowlands allies. The Lion quickly assemble their forces to resist the Crab attack, but at a critical moment the Lion Champion Matsu Tsuko receives an order from the Emperor to step aside. (The order is actually from Empress Kachiko, who intends the Crab to win and finish the work of destroying the Hantei Dynasty.) Without Tsuko's leadership the Crab easily crush the Lion and capture the city.

Kisada and Yakamo storm into the throne room, but at that moment Hantei XXXIX is revealed to be possessed by the spirit of Fu Leng. He mortally wounds Kisada, and Yakamo carries his crippled father out of the palace. The Shadowlands creatures rebel against the Crab and rout them out of the city. Yakamo and Kisada flee to the south with the troops they are able to salvage from the debacle.

The Imperial city quickly becomes a haven for Tainted creatures, and its inhabitants flee, die, or become corrupted.

Kachiko tries to escape the Imperial palace, but Dragon Champion Togashi Yokuni convinces her to stay and continue poisoning the possessed Emperor. It is only the effects of the poison that are keeping him from rising up and conquering the rest of the Empire. Kachiko, finally realizing she has a higher duty than her own revenge, agrees to stay.

Bayushi Goshiu helps the Imperial Court to escape the city. They spread word of the terrible truth: the Emperor is possessed by Fu Leng.

The Truth Revealed: The revelation of the Emperor's condition is a tremendous shock to the entire Empire, and galvanizes the clans to action. Small and large forces from every clan converge on the Imperial capital, some on their own and some under the command of clan leaders. The Naga also travel toward the capital (sometimes fighting the samurai they encounter along the way) to confront "the Foul."

The Elemental council of the Phoenix recognize the true nature of the situation (helped, of course, through their dangerous study of the Black Scrolls). Although four of the Masters have become badly corrupted by their research, they begin to spread the news and prepare for confrontation with the possessed Emperor.

It is the Lion Clan that encounters the greatest crisis after the revelation of the Emperor's true nature. The clan is deeply divided between those who believe that loyalty to the Empire demands they turn on the possessed Hantei (led by Kitsu Motso), and those who believe their loyalty should be to the Emperor above all (led by Ikoma Ujiaki). The clash quickly escalates to the point of civil war.

Yogo Junzo's horde begins burning monasteries, seemingly searching for something or someone. In fact they are seeking out the Hooded Ronin, the heir of Shinsei, believing that to kill him will ensure there is no Second Day of Thunder. Togashi Yokuni knows the truth and redeploys the Dragon armies to protect the monasteries, where they fight valiantly alongside the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Shattered by her inability to resolve the internal conflict within the Lion Clan, Matsu Tsuko commits seppuku, asking Toturi to serve as her second. She presents him with her death-haiku and begs him to save the Empire.

Hida Yakamo, ashamed by the full impact of his clan's failure and corruption, rips off the demon claw from his arm. He passes out from the pain and awakens later to find the artifact known as the Jade Hand has been attached in the claw's place, purifying him from his Taint. (Some tales claim he got the Hand from Togashi Yokuni, while others credit the Hooded Ronin.) Taking the title of Clan Champion from his crippled father, Yakamo prepares to counterattack the forces of Fu Leng.

The Day of Thunder: 1128, Month of the Ox.

The Great Clans assemble their remaining strength outside the capital, joined by the Brotherhood of Shinsei and the inhuman Naga, all ready to fight against the corrupted armies of Fu Leng. Toturi confronts the rival factions of the Lion, reading out Tsuko's death-poem and calling on the clan to unite against Fu Leng; they answer with a roaring cheer. Even the Scorpion Clan reappears as thousands of ronin reveal their hidden Scorpion colors.

The one exception to this surge of unity is the bold gambit of the Mantis Clan Champion, Yoritomo. He demands the others recognize the Mantis as a Great Clan—otherwise he will take his soldiers and sail away to find a new home. Reluctantly the clans agree, since they need the strength of Yoritomo's Alliance if they are to have hope of success.

The ensuing battle is horrific. The clans have been weakened by two years of bitter warfare, and Fu Leng's horde of Shadowlands creatures vastly outnumbers them. Many deeds both great and terrible take place.

The Hooded Ronin

This mysterious figure appears throughout the Empire, intermittently before the Clan War and frequently once the conflict gets underway. Although he dresses as a samurai and carries a sword, the Hooded Ronin is actually the reincarnation of Shinsei, a direct linear descendent of the original Little Teacher who saved the Empire in the First War. The Hooded Ronin lives among the Brotherhood of Shinsei, who are aware of his true nature and destiny, but remains an obscure and largely anonymous figure to the samurai of Rokugan. His true nature is not revealed to the Empire at large until the Day of Thunder, and much like his ancestor he disappears soon afterward.

Otaku Kamoko triumphs over Yogo Junzo, trampling the undead sorcerer to death beneath her steed's hooves. The Lost warlord Moto Tsume also falls in the battle, although he will return within a few years.

Hida Yakamo fights the oni which bears his name, and barely defeats it. However, the battle leaves him so exhausted that he cannot withstand Mirumoto Hitomi when she confronts him once more. She defeats him but allows him to live, repeating the words he spoke to her fifteen years before: "I will not kill you, but you will remember that I could have."

Isawa Tsuke, the Phoenix Master of Fire, is driven mad by his Taint and runs amok on the battlefield, killing everyone around him. Two other Elemental Masters (Isawa Tomo of Water and Isawa Uona of Air) perish fighting him. Finally the Phoenix Champion, Shiba Ujimitsu, brings Tsuke down at the cost of his own life.

Ultimately, the massive battle is almost a distraction from the true struggle that takes place within the Imperial Palace. Togashi Yokuni and the Hooded Ronin gather the Thunders—Hida Yakamo, Doji Hoturi, Mirumoto Hitomi, Toturi, Isawa Tadaka, Empress Kachiko, and Otaku Kamoko—and Kachiko leads them into the palace through secret passages.

Confronting his brother at last, Togashi Yokuni reveals his true nature as a Kami and the two siblings briefly take the shape of dragons in a divine fight. Togashi is defeated, but as he lies dying he calls on Hitomi to rip open his heart—to complete the riddle of his life by ending it. When she tears open his chest it reveals the twelfth Black Scroll, which he has kept hidden within himself for centuries. Opening the scroll completely frees Fu Leng but also makes him mortal, binding him permanently into the body of Hantei XXXIX. The Thunders attack, and after an epic fight which sees the deaths of Doji Hoturi and Isawa Tadaka, Fu Leng is defeated by the simultaneous attacks of Toturi and the dying Crane Thunder.

The Second Day of Thunder is obviously the most important event in a thousand years of Imperial history. The final battle is the single largest conflict of the Clan War, taking the lives of thousands of samurai, but it ends in complete victory. The armies of the Shadowlands lose cohesion without their leader and the forces of Rokugan prevail, recapturing and cleansing the Imperial capital. The clans redeem their failures and tragedies of the last few years and prevail against the immense evil of Fu Leng. Otosan Uchi is rebuilt, and the Great Clans seem tired of fighting each other... at least for a while.

But the deepest change occurs due to the death of the last Hantei. Under other circumstances the young Hantei XXXIX might have become a great Emperor, but the youthful experience of the Scorpion Clan Coup left him weak and filled with fear, easy prey for Fu Leng's possessing spirit. His physical death at the Day of Thunder brings an end to the dynasty, for the distaff lines in the Otomo family have already died from the Wasting Disease.

In some circumstances, the death of the last Hantei Emperor could have led to full-scale civil war as the clans battled each other for control and territory. However, in this case Toturi provided the ideal candidate to step in as a new Emperor: an heir of Akodo, a hero who protected the Empire even as a ronin, and the Thunder who dealt the lethal blow to Fu Leng. Further, during the coronation ceremony the Sun shines for a full day over the capital, showing the support of the Celestial Heavens for Toturi's ascension.

Alternate Paths: The Battle With Fu Leng

Obviously, the most potent and compelling "what if" in this era is the possibility of victory for Fu Leng. There was no guarantee the Thunders would prevail, and if Fu Leng had won the Empire would have faced a dire future indeed. Chapter Ten, "A Thousand Years of Darkness," explores this possibility in detail.

Of course, even if the Thunders prevailed the battle need not have turned out exactly as it did in the canon timeline. The original Day of Thunder killed six of the seven Thunders, but the Second Day killed only two of those who fought. It could just as easily have killed six or even all seven. What would have happened to the Empire then? Fu Leng would have been defeated, but there would be no clear choice for a new Emperor and no surviving heroes to rally and lead the Great Clans in the years to come. (The death of Hitomi would have been especially significant given the role she played in the Hidden Emperor era a few years later.)

It is also possible for the Seven Thunders to be different from the canonical heroes. This could include other NPCs such as Yoritomo or Matsu Tsuko, but there is also no reason why the GM cannot present a campaign in which some or all of the Thunders are PCs, placing the future of the Empire directly into the players' hands.

Still, it is the first change of dynasty in Rokugan's history, and it takes time for the Empire to adapt. Many samurai, particularly among the Lion, are disturbed by the absence of the Hantei (a problem exploited by the returned Hantei XVI during the War of the Spirits a few years later). Toturi seeks to establish stability and continuity by restoring the Scorpion Clan, maintaining the status and roles of the Imperial Families, and otherwise minimizing the impact of the change in rulers. He also makes sure the Hantei family continues to be remembered and revered for the great accomplishments of previous centuries.

Overview of the Clans and Factions

As its name implies, the Clan War sees many of the Great Clans of Rokugan in direct conflict with each other, and even those who manage to largely stay out of the fighting suffer heavy losses from other disasters (such as the consequences of the Phoenix Elemental Council opening some of the Black Scrolls).

The Crab Clan

The Crab are led by the Great Bear, Hida Kisada, a man of great virtue but also great ambition. His fatal decision to ally with the Shadowlands causes the Crab to take on the role of an antagonist during this era. The alliance was engineered by Kuni Yori, the brilliant daimyo of his family. Sadly, Yori eventually falls prey to the Taint, and while his initial motive was only to serve his lord his actions later help Fu Leng gain a foothold in Rokugan. Many in the Kuni family also become corrupt, either through accident or intent.

Many other Crab samurai are ill at ease with the alliance, especially the Hiruma family who continue to pursue their vendetta against the Shadowlands. However, loyalty to Kisada keeps most Crab obedient, and Kisada wisely leaves the majority of the Hiruma to watch over the Wall under their daimyo Hiruma Kage. His daughter Hida O-Ushi, who traditionally commanded the Crab Clan's interior defenses, is likewise kept at home—a wise decision since she is close to her brother Sukune and outraged at his brutal sacrificial death. Despite such internal divisions, the Crab seem unstoppable for a time, allied with the terrible monsters they alone know how to fight and led by one of their greatest Champions of all time.

After the failed attack on Otosan Uchi, Kisada comes to his senses. Having relied too much on the forces of Jigoku, the Crab suffer a severe defeat when they are betrayed and Kisada himself is gruesomely wounded, stabbed through with the Ancestral Sword of the Hantei. Moreover, the clan's failure essentially hands the Imperial City to the forces of the Ninth Kami—a sin which is rarely talked about afterward but which weighs heavily on the Crab. Kisada survives his injury for an astonishing two years, but in the immediate aftermath he contemplates seppuku to purge his shame from the Crab. His son Yakamo convinces him to live and seek redemption, and Kisada helps plan the subsequent battle to retake the capital, saving countless lives. After the Day of Thunder, many call for Kisada to be executed as a traitor but Toturi chooses to let the Great Bear live and continue to serve the Empire. When the former Crab Champion dies two years later, he is declared the Fortune of Persistence, a gesture which further ensures the loyalty of the Crab to the Toturi Dynasty.

In a way, Kisada's eldest son Hida Yakamo is emblematic of the fall and redemption of the Crab as a whole. At first he gladly gives his name to an oni and accepts the demon claw to replace his lost hand, embracing greater power even as he is slowly corrupted by the Taint and the oni with his name grows ever stronger. He wins several victories against the Crane Clan and defeats his enemy Mirumoto Hitomi, but ultimately realizes he and his clan have been fooled all along by the forces of Jigoku. The Jade Hand allows him the opportunity to regain his honor and he becomes the new leader of the Crab, helping them remember their duty and return to their proper role in the Empire. Ultimately, Yakamo will go on to become the Lord Sun, helping save Rokugan from the Lying Darkness.

Kuni Yori, however, does not find redemption with the rest of his clan. By the time the Day of Thunder arrives, he has become Lost and joins forces with the armies of the Shadowlands. After the battle, he steals the severed head of Fu Leng and uses it to perform a *maho* ritual that grants him greater power at the cost of transforming him into an undead monstrosity. He flees into the Shadowlands, becoming the leader of a major force of undead, and the Crab swear to end this walking embodiment of their shame.

The Crane Clan

At the time of the Clan War, the Crane are faltering after a long period of political dominance. Their success is dependent on a strong and favorable Emperor, but after the Scorpion Clan Coup the Emperor is a weak young man married to a former Scorpion. Doji Satsume, who was both Clan Champion and Emerald Champion, dies during the Coup and the office of Emerald Champion remains vacant until the year 1127, further weakening the Crane Clan's position. To be sure, they are not without political resources—Satsume's eldest son Hoturi inherits the clan leadership and is a skilled politician, ably supported by the Imperial Chancellor Kakita Yoshi. Their combined efforts are still able to sometimes persuade the ailing Emperor to intercede on their behalf.

Once the Clan War gets fully underway it is without doubt a disaster for the Crane. The Lion attack their northern provinces with incredible ferocity, while the Crab burn Shiro Kakita to the ground and later pillage the southern Crane territories for supplies, leaving Shadowlands creatures in their wake. The Crane armies are stretched thin and their political power is unable to fully counter their military defeats. When the False Hoturi turns on them at the head of a Tainted army, it opens a third front inside the Crane lands and threatens to completely destroy the clan. With Hoturi absent, leadership falls on lesser figures within the clan: family daimyo Daidoji Uji and Hoturi's younger brother Doji Kuwanen lead the clan's military defenses as best they can, while the famed sensei Kakita Toshimoko puts aside his debauched lifestyle and rises to become the new Emerald Champion, ensuring the Crane retain some of their political power. Sadly in the absence of an active Emperor his success is limited, but he still manages to counter a few of Empress Kachiko's machinations.

Eventually, the true Doji Hoturi is freed from Empress Kachiko's clutches and leads the forces of the Crane to victory against his doppelganger and the Shadowlands. The Crane Clan's spirits revive, but their losses have been extreme and they are forced to hire Yoritomo's Alliance simply to field an army in their defense. Hoturi is now a stern, grim leader, forged by adversity, and gains a new respect from the other leaders of the Crane... a respect that becomes reverence after he dies as the Crane Clan Thunder, helping deal the lethal blows to Fu Leng.

After the war Hoturi's brother Kuwanan becomes the new Clan Champion. A tough man and veteran soldier, Kuwanan focuses on making sure the borders of his clan are secure, using the army's small numbers to best effect. Kakita Yoshi and the other diplomats of the clan work tirelessly to help it reassert its position in the courts and prevent any renewed conflict with their traditional enemies, the Scorpion and the Lion. They also are the first to welcome the Mantis into the ranks of the Great Clans, having come to appreciate their strength and help during the war. Still, the new Toturi Dynasty poses challenges; although Toturi was a lifelong friend of Doji Hoturi, he marries his childhood fiancé Isawa Kaede of the Phoenix Clan, eliminating one of the traditional Crane sources of power. Moreover, the new Emperor appoints one of his trusted ronin advisors, Takuan, to the office of Imperial Chancellor, reassigning Kakita Yoshi to be Imperial Advisor. Still, with the offices of the Emerald Champion and the Imperial Advisor both controlled by the Crane, they retain significant influence, and their economic power recovers quickly in the peace that follows the Clan War.

The Dragon Clan

The Day of the Thunder is the time for which the Dragon Clan has been preparing through its whole history, although few within the clan's ranks actually realize this is true. Many are surprised when Togashi Yokuni gives control of his armies to the ronin Toturi. Togashi offers no explanations for his actions, but most Dragon samurai are accustomed to obeying their lord's enigmatic commands without question. The troops of the Mirumoto are a powerful addition to Toturi's strength and play a key role in his victories at Beiden Pass. However, the

The Tale of Hitomi and Yakamo

Fifteen years before the Day of Thunder, the Empire witnesses a famous duel between Mirumoto Satsu, eldest son of the Mirumoto family daimyo, and Hida Yakamo, the youthful heir to the Crab Clan Champion. The exact cause of the duel is something of a mystery, but it appears that Satsu's wife accused Yakamo of improper behavior, and Yakamo in turn called the woman a liar. Satsu could not endure such an insult to his family and immediately challenged Yakamo to a duel to the death.

Most expected Yakamo to lose, for Satsu was known among the Dragon as one of the finest duelists in many generations. When Yakamo strode onto the dueling field with a tetsubo instead of a sword, the watching Dragon became even more certain of Satsu's victory—but to their shock, Yakamo prevailed, parrying Satsu's strike and then beating him gruesomely to death with the tetsubo. Shouts of outrage and horror filled the field at the grisly sight.

Mirumoto Hitomi was only a young girl of eight, but at the sight of her beloved older brother's death she ran onto the dueling ground, screaming, clutching a knife. Yakamo knocked her blade aside and then caught her by the throat. As the crowd watched in stunned silence, the Crab heir looked into the hate-darkened eyes of the young girl, and smiled. "I will not kill you, little girl," he said. "But you will remember that I could have."

From that day forward, Hitomi lived only to kill Hida Yakamo. She became family daimyo as soon as she passed her gempukku, for her father Mirumoto Shosan never recovered from his eldest son's death.

However, there is another side to this story. Some legends claim that Togashi Yokuni drew Satsu aside before the duel and spoke to him of the future. He did not try to convince Satsu what to do, but merely showed him what would happen if he won. What would happen in a world without the Crab Thunder.

Mirumoto suffer from internal problems of their own: their daimyo Mirumoto Hitomi is obsessed with her quest for vengeance against Hida Yakamo, while her brother Daini winds up becoming the main envoy to the Naga people. Their ambitious cousin Yukihera takes advantage of their distraction and absence to seize control of the family, ruling with ruthless cruelty until Hitomi finally kills him in a duel.

The Dragon are among the first to sense the chaos and rising tide of evil threatening the Empire. The Agasha notice the early imbalances in the Celestial Order almost as quickly as the Isawa, especially the retreat of the Elemental Dragons and the disappearance of their emissaries, the Oracles of Light. Togashi himself, gifted with foresight, knows the time is close for his brother Fu Leng to return, and sets out in search of the heir of Shinsei.

In the latter part of the war, while Hitomi struggles with the maddening power of the Obsidian Hand, the Dragon protect the monasteries of the Brotherhood against Yogo Junzo's Shadowlands forces. The Dragon suffer heavy losses in this fighting, but the clan's traditional devotion to enlightenment and the Tao serves it well, and Dragon morale remains higher than in most other factions. The Dragon interact more heavily with the Empire during the Clan War than at almost any time during the previous thousand years, albeit often with little explanation for their actions. The tattooed men in particular are far more active than before and gain a considerable reputation in Rokugan; one of them, Togashi Mitsu, becomes one of Toturi's closest allies.

Despite its casualties the Dragon Clan as a whole suffers less from the Clan War than many of the other clans. However, in the aftermath of the Day of Thunder they face a major new challenge: Hitomi herself. Having slain Togashi at the Day of Thunder, she becomes the Dragon Clan Champion—none are willing to contest her claim given both her status as one of the Thunders and her mystical absorption of much of Togashi's power. However, she soon begins behaving quite strangely, driven by the power of the Obsidian Hand. She casts off her own family name and begins using her blood to tattoo her own monks, creating the Hitomi order. Internal conflict wracks the clan, which all but cuts itself off from the rest of the Empire once more. Within a few years Hitomi's actions will play a central role in the War Against the Darkness.

The Lion Clan

The Lion at the start of the Clan War are a mixture of weakness and strength. The disbanding of the Akodo family after the Scorpion Clan Coup was a tremendous blow to the clan. Hundreds of samurai committed seppuku or became ronin; thousands more joined the three remaining Lion families but remained shocked and haunted by their loss. On the other hand, the clan's armies in this era are enormous, larger than at almost any time before or since, giving them tremendous military power. The new Champion, Matsu Tsuko, exults in the chance to avenge her fiancée Akodo Arasou, who fell against the Crane a few years earlier. As the Emperor's control slips, the armies of the Lion march, throwing aside the restraints of a thousand years of peace.

The Crane bear the strongest of the Lion assaults, but the Phoenix quickly become embroiled in the conflict as well. In fact, almost every clan faces a Lion attack at some point during the war, as they use the absence of Imperial leadership to unleash their wrath on anyone who offends them. Matsu Tsuko's cousin Matsu Gohei becomes especially notorious for his aggressive attacks on anyone who draws his anger, earning him the nickname "the Butcher." Toturi's Army also comes under Lion attack, since the clan views Toturi's continued existence as a shameful blight on itself. If the Crab Clan's aggression marks the beginning of the Clan War, it is the Lion who really turn it into an Empire-wide conflict.

The Lion Clan's crusade comes to an abrupt halt after the Crab attack on Otosan Uchi. Defeat at the hands of the Tainted Crab, followed by the revelation that the Emperor is possessed by Fu Leng, splits the clan in two. Those led by Ikoma Ujiaki, commander of the Imperial Legions, believe their vows to the Emperor have not changed and insist they must continue to serve him regardless. On the

other side are those led by Kitsu Motso, the estranged son of the Kitsu daimyo; they refuse to serve Fu Leng, seeing this as a corruption of Bushido's principles and a betrayal of their duty to Rokugan. Skirmishes erupt between the two factions as they each gather samurai to their side. Matsu Tsuko is unable to choose between the two positions, and feels herself trapped by her oaths and commitments to the Lion and the Empire. Ultimately the only answer she can find is to return to Toturi, the man she hated for so long, and ask him to save the Lion for her. She commits seppuku and it is Toturi, the Black Lion, who rallies the Lion to unity on the Day of Thunder.

After the Clan War, the Lion Clan finds itself in an odd position. Its thirst for battle has been quenched at bitter cost, yet it has not made any decisive gains of territory—its only permanent gain is recapturing the much-contested city of Toshi Ranbo. The new Emperor on the Jade Throne is a former Lion, Toturi, yet he carefully avoids showing favor to the Lion and does not reinstate the Akodo family. Many Lion have a hard time accepting that a new dynasty has begun, and a few even commit seppuku, unable to bring themselves to serve any but the Hantei. The clan must also face the problem of choosing a new Clan Champion, since Tsuko has no direct heir and the Akodo remain disbanded. After some debate the family daimyo agree to grant the position to Ikoma Tsanuri, Tsuko's protégé and a former student of Toturi. She serves the Emperor faithfully, confident in his ability to rule, and orders the clan to rest and rebuild its armies for the future.

The Phoenix Clan

The events of the Scorpion Clan Coup leave the Phoenix Clan deeply disturbed. The absence of both the Bayushi and Akodo lines creates an uncomfortable imbalance in both the spiritual and political structure of the Empire. The Phoenix are also the first to notice the spread of the sinister Wasting Disease, a terrible scourge to which the best of their healers cannot find a cure. The Elemental Council meets secretly to discuss the problems in the Empire and the ominous signs that the prophecies of Uikku—the so-called Eight Dooms—may be starting to come true.

At the time, the Council is dominated by the three children of the Nameless One (the former Isawa Ujina). The Master of Void is Isawa Kaede, Ujina's only child by his first wife Doji Ninube. She is a gentle young woman, deeply smitten with her former fiancé Toturi and refusing to consider a marriage to anyone else. The Masters of Earth, Isawa Tadaka, and of Water, Isawa Tomo, are her younger brothers by Ujina's second wife. Tadaka is by far the most outspoken and dominant of the three, and his determination to plumb the secrets of the Shadowlands is a major factor in the Council's near-fatal decision to open the Black Scrolls in their possession. Almost as influential, however, is Master of Fire Isawa Tsuke, an arrogant and aggressive man who carries his own katana and prides himself on his dueling skills. Only the modest and retiring Master of Air, Isawa Uona, truly hesitates at the idea of reading the Black Scrolls, but she allows the others to override her judgment.

Tragically, those in the Shiba who might have stopped the Council are distracted by the chaos of the Clan War. Clan Champion Shiba Ujimitsu leads the Phoenix army against the Lion, struggling to contain the rampage of Matsu Tsuko's vast legions. Tadaka's yojimbo, Shiba Tsukune, is smitten with him and hesitates for a long time to question his judgment.

The knowledge gained from the Black Scrolls is vast, but the associated Taint soon begins to corrupt the Elemental Masters, especially after Isawa Tadaka summons an oni to imprison and question. The Taint spreads from the Masters to many other shugenja within the family. The Phoenix do gain valuable insight, and are among the first to realize the return of Fu Leng is truly at hand, but the price is high indeed. Some shugenja are executed by their yojimbo when they become Lost, but many ultimately run amok or join the forces of Fu Leng—most catastrophically the Master of Fire Isawa Tsuke, who joins the Shadowlands forces on the Day of Thunder and kills Uona and Tomo before being killed in turn by Isawa Tadaka and Clan Champion Shiba Ujimitsu (who also dies). Tadaka himself goes on to die fighting Fu Leng in the Imperial Palace, atoning for his Taint with his life.

After the Day of Thunder, the mantle of Phoenix Clan Champion falls to Shiba Tsukune. She inherits a clan which is only a shadow of its former greatness. The combined effects of the Wasting Disease, the war against the Lion, and the rampant Taint and corruption unleashed by the Black Scrolls cost the Phoenix countless lives and the clan can barely maintain its territory with its diminished army. The Isawa have suffered especially heavily and the Elemental Council is incomplete. Some voices, particularly among the Mantis, question whether the Phoenix can

still be considered a Great Clan. Help comes from Naka Kuro, the mighty ronin shugenja known as the Grandmaster of the Elements, who decides to join the Phoenix and help the clan rebuild. Tsukune opens the clan to any shugenja in the Empire, drawing many other ronin to help rebuild their numbers, a process that takes over a generation. But at least the Phoenix are pure once again, and they rejoice at the news that the new Emperor will at last marry Isawa Kaede.

The Scorpion Clan

Officially, the Scorpion Clan does not exist. After the Clan Coup, the Scorpion are disbanded by the Emperor and the Imperial Legions storm their land, killing anyone wearing the mon of Bayushi. Most castles are burnt to the ground and their ruins occupied by Imperial forces.

Of course, the Scorpion are hardly a clan to be destroyed so easily. They use every trick in their very considerable arsenal to save as many of their people as possible. Some go into hiding in the clan's most remote and secure holdings, some masquerade as ronin, some fake their deaths or adopt new identities. The clan still suffers heavy losses, but it remains a functional organization and continues to influence the Empire from the shadows. Empress Bayushi Kachiko, forced to marry the Emperor to scorn the memory of her late husband Shoju, leads the hidden clan with the help of Shoju's brother Aramoro, a shinobi who loves her unreservedly.

The Clan War era is a dark time for the Scorpion, when their loyalty to the Empire is often forgotten in the name of vengeance. Kachiko has lost her clan, her husband, and her son Dairu in the Coup, and she has only one objective: vengeance. She watches all of Rokugan with the help of a nemuranai known as the Obsidian Mirror, and sets a thousand schemes loose to turn the clans against one another. The most devious of her plans is the slow poisoning of her husband, the young Emperor, creating the void in power that brings on the Clan War.

Kachiko's attitude is widespread within the Scorpion Clan. Most of the Scorpion are eager to strike back at the Empire out of revenge or simple spite, using their most devious techniques to make the other clans suffer and struggle, and more than a few of them cross the line into using truly heinous methods. While the example of Yogo Junzo is infamous, sadly he is not the only Scorpion who falls prey to the Taint. The Soshi daimyo Bantaro is another example, and while he does not himself become Lost, his actions—raising his past Champion Shoju as an undead abomination—are no less insane. Thankfully, some of the Scorpion keep a measure of reason and decency, and the undead Shoju is eventually killed by Scorpion warriors.

Kachiko finally realizes who the true enemy is after the exposure of Fu Leng during the Crab assault on Otosan Uchi. Accepting Togashi's demand that she remain in the capital and continue to poison the possessed Emperor, she orders her clan to cease its actions against Rokugan and turn against the Shadowlands instead. On the Day of Thunder, the remnants of the Scorpion army appear to fight alongside the other clans, sacrificing themselves as readily as the Lion and Crab to win the day for Rokugan.

After the Day of Thunder the Scorpion Clan is reinstated by Imperial edict of the new Emperor Toturi, with Kachiko as Clan Champion. The heirs of Bayushi prove to be some of the fastest in rebuilding their lands, having begun the process in hiding, and within a couple of years the major Scorpion holdings are restored. The Scorpion also help scour the Empire for bandits, Tainted samurai, and Shadowlands creatures left behind in the aftermath of the Clan War. Nevertheless, the rest of the Empire does not quickly forget the Clan Coup, and despite the new Emperor's protection the Scorpion find it difficult to rebuild their political networks in the face of barely-suppressed enmity. Moreover, the emotional trauma of the Coup and the Clan War has led many more Scorpion to succumb to the subtle corruption of the Lying Darkness. Soon the Shadow will make its own play for power against a weakened Empire, and the Scorpion will pay the price for their long alliance with it.

The Unicorn Clan

It can be argued the Unicorn are the Great Clan which suffers the least from the Clan War. Their lands are the most secure in mainland Rokugan, far from the major battles in the lands of the Scorpion and Crane, and as the war progresses they supplement their cavalry armies with legions of ashigaru. Indeed, the sons and daughters of Shinjo focus much of their efforts on protecting the common people rather than engaging the other clans in battle. However, the Unicorn do make an early alliance with Toturi's Army and contribute key forces to the battles in Beiden Pass. While this alliance is later disrupted by Empress Kachiko's manipulations, the Unicorn remain sympathetic to Toturi and are quick to embrace his leadership after the Day of Thunder. (Of course, the fact that Clan Champion Shinjo Yokatsu is secretly one of the ten Kolat Masters also contributes to this policy—the Kolat are delighted to see a mortal ascend to the throne of Rokugan.)

Ultimately, the Unicorn cannot wholly escape the conflict embroiling the rest of the Empire. Shadowlands forces under Yogo Junzo invade their lands to weaken the only clan not embroiled in other conflicts. The Unicorn are not well prepared to face the creatures of Fu Leng and suffer heavily from the attack, forcing them to scale back their actions elsewhere in the Empire. However, they are still able to send smaller groups on missions across Rokugan, suppressing lawlessness and battling the Shadowlands wherever possible.

The most famous group is led by Otaku Kamoko, the young daimyo of the Otaku family, assisted by the tormented shugenja Iuchi Karasu. The combination of Kamoko's ferocity and Karasu's deep knowledge of the Shadowlands makes them a very effective team, and the strike force they command inflicts a heavy defeat on the formerly unstoppable Lost general Moto Tsume. The two also fight against several outbreaks of Tainted madmen in the Phoenix lands and are instrumental in saving the Phoenix palace of Kyuden Isawa. On the Day of Thunder Kamoko destroys Yogo Junzo, riding him down and trampling him into ruin under her horse's hooves, before joining the other Seven Thunders to do battle against Fu Leng himself.

Although the Unicorn make it through the Clan War with less damage than the other clans, they are not without their problems. The Dark Moto and their leader Moto Tsume still exist despite their defeats and can boast of having killed the daimyo Moto Terumoru. And the chaos of the Clan War has allowed the Kolat conspiracy to further tighten its hold on the clan's leadership. Still, the Unicorn are hailed as heroes of the war and for a time they enjoy the favor of both the common people and the new Emperor Toturi.

The Minor Clans

The Clan War era is a time of both great danger and great opportunity for the Minor Clans. The collapse of Imperial authority strips away the protection of Imperial law, making it very easy for them to be destroyed by the vastly larger Great Clans. At the same time, however, the war offers them many opportunities to prove their worth and better their position within the Empire.

Each clan adapts differently and faces different challenges. The Hare, who have just begun rebuilding after their earlier destruction and disbanding in the pre-Coup era, are nonetheless very active in hunting for criminals, Bloodspeakers, and Kolat agents in the chaotic Empire. The Badger, on the other hand, are nearly destroyed by a rampaging oni and are forced to work as mercenaries to survive. They eventually join Toturi's Army, trusting the Black Lion's honor, a gesture which is not forgotten afterward.

The biggest event for the Minor Clans is of course the creation of Yoritomo's Alliance. The Mantis Champion, driven both by his own ambitions and by a genuine desire to protect the Empire, extends an invitation to all Minor Clans to join him in a unified force that can stand as an equal to the Great Clans. The Wasp, Centipede, and Tortoise almost immediately agree. The Fox are more hesitant, joining the Alliance but carefully maintaining their independence, while the Sparrow ultimately refuse, driving a wedge into the earlier Three Man Alliance between themselves, the Fox, and the Wasp. The Dragonfly, Falcon, and Hare also ultimately refuse to officially join the Alliance, although token troops from their clans often serve in it as a gesture of solidarity.

The Mantis, the richest and most battle-ready of the Minor Clans, organize the other members' forces into a powerful army and hire its services to whoever can afford

them. This sometimes leads to questionable choices, such as transporting the Crab army to attack Otosan Uchi, but it also wins the Alliance many friends among the Great Clans—most notably the Crane, since by the end of the war the clan of Doji is so depleted that the defense of its lands lies mainly in Alliance hands.

On the Day of Thunder Yoritomo forces the other clans to acknowledge the Mantis as a Great Clan, threatening to otherwise take the Alliance forces and sail away from Rokugan. The clans grudgingly accept his demand and the new Emperor Toturi affirms it afterward in an Imperial proclamation. Nevertheless, the elevation of the Mantis is a source of shock to many Rokugani; it is an unprecedented event, and some of the more traditional clans such as the Lion and the Phoenix have difficulty accepting it. The other Minor Clans also react with mixed feelings—the Wasp and Centipede are both approving (and will become part of the Mantis Clan within a few years), but the Fox and Tortoise are more dubious. Yoritomo works tirelessly to strengthen his newly promoted clan, arranging weddings and recruiting ronin to bolster its numbers and political influence. The fact that the Mantis lands are barely touched by the Clan War is an added strength, since they do not need to consume effort and resources with rebuilding.

The Imperial Families

The Scorpion Clan Coup was a serious blow to the Imperial Families, as Shoju's troops killed many Seppun defending the Imperial Palace along with many high-ranked Otomo who were closely related to the Hantei line. After the Coup many members of the Seppun Family commit seppuku to purge the shame of failing to protect Hantei XXXVIII. Both families also suffer heavily during the Wasting Disease, especially the Otomo—pretty much every remaining Otomo who can make a solid claim to Hantei blood dies in the plague.

The reign of the new Hantei Emperor is not helpful to the plight of the Imperial Families. His Scorpion Empress minimizes their power, and after he seemingly falls ill (actually poisoned by Kachiko) she completely ignores the Imperial families, leaving them in disarray. The Seppun suffer additional casualties when the Crab overrun the Scorpion lands and destroy several Imperial Legions.

The ascension of Kakita Toshimoko to the office of Emerald Champion does give some relief to the Imperials. Toshimoko is an active and dedicated Emerald Champion and offers them a figure to rally around. However, once the Emperor fully gives in to Fu Leng's possession he turns the capital of Otosan Uchi into a violent nightmare and many more Imperial samurai are killed or corrupted. Ironically it is a Scorpion courtier, Bayushi Goshiu, who rescues many of the surviving Otomo and Seppun from the madness of the capital.

The Miya family is much more active and effective during the Clan War than its larger and more influential cousins. The Miya Heralds work tirelessly to resolve as many conflicts as possible, protecting the population from the worst excesses of the War. While they are unable to stop the overall conflict, many smaller battles are avoided and Rokugan is reminded time and again of the selfless benevolence of the Miya. However, the family is not spared problems of its own. Miya Satoshi, the embittered and militant son of the family daimyo, falls under the influence of the corrupted nemuranai called Kenshin's Helm (see **Chapter Three: The White Stag Era** for more information on the Helm). Satoshi takes power from his father and rejects the peaceful heritage of his family; with the secret assistance of the Scorpion, he works to eliminate all internal opposition to his power and pursue a dream of building a Miya army. Thankfully his cousin Miya Yumi, assisted by a valiant Wasp bushi and the ronin shugenja called Koan, manages to thwart Satoshi's plans. Satoshi ultimately dies and Yumi becomes the family daimyo shortly after the end of the Clan War.

When Toturi becomes Emperor, he decides to keep the Imperial families in their traditional roles, much to their relief. They give their full loyalty to the new Emperor and the capital city is soon once again the center of the Empire's political activity. The Miya Heralds play a crucial role in returning Rokugan to its previous health and prosperity, coordinating the efforts to purge the lands of Tainted creatures, distribute food to those in need, and rebuild the immense war damage. This helps cement the Toturi Dynasty's initial popularity into lasting loyalty. The Otomo and Seppun, for their part, vow never to let their guard down again, and begin keeping much closer tabs on all the clans—particularly the Scorpion Clan.

The Shadowlands

The Clan War is arguably the closest the Shadowlands ever come to destroying the Empire once and for all (with the possible exception of the First War at the dawn of the Empire). The key factor in the success of Jigoku's forces

is the Scorpion traitor Yogo Junzo. Filled with rage and grief over the death of his Champion Bayushi Shoju, a man he admired above all others, Junzo fulfills his Yogo Curse and opens the first Black Scroll. The Taint quickly turns him into an undead abomination and he releases the Wasting Disease on the Empire, taking the lives of countless thousands. Now serving Fu Leng above all, Junzo uses the second Black Scroll to create a stronghold for himself in the Shadowlands and begins to gather the forces of the Horde around him. It is Junzo who creates a mon for the Shadowlands Horde, the first time in history that Fu Leng's forces have carried their own banners onto the battlefield. Rokugan quickly comes to fear the strange new symbol.

Of course, even with Junzo's sinister leadership the Shadowlands could never have entered the Empire so easily without the misguided alliance of the Crab Clan. By the time the Crab realize the magnitude of their error it is almost too late.

Over the course of the Clan War every single clan is forced to confront the terrible creatures of the Shadowlands. It is a dire experience, for in the thousand years since the First War the other clans have forgotten what it means to face ogres, zombies, oni, and other monstrosities. Moreover, many new creatures appear during the war, including the newly created Elemental Terrors and even some Tainted war machines. Moreover, Junzo (and later Fu Leng) give direction and order to the Shadowlands Horde, making it a more focused and organized enemy than at almost any other point in history.

The Day of Thunder, however, changes everything and marks one of the strongest decreases in Tainted activity in centuries. Fu Leng's defeat results in the destruction of tens of thousands of his minions, the rest of them retreating to their dark homeland. Kuni Yori, transformed into an undead monster by his own Taint, also flees into the Shadowlands and attempts to set himself up as a new ruler, a replacement for Yogo Junzo; however, his claim to power is contested by the Oni Lords, who vie with him and each other for control of the Horde. The Shadowlands is at the weakest the Empire has seen in half a millennium or more, and the Crab Clan looks forward to the opportunity for a counteroffensive.

Toturi's Army

It is impossible to discuss the Clan War era without mentioning the ronin force known as Toturi's Army, which had an influence on the war far out of proportion to its numbers.

Toturi the Black, the disgraced former Champion of the Lion Clan, wandered Rokugan alone after the Clan Coup. Seeing the rise of banditry and violence amid the Empire's disarray, however, he could not refuse to act. He gathered twelve honorable ronin to his side and led a decisive strike against an infamous crime lord called Yugoro. This first heroic act quickly drew the attention of other ronin and Toturi found himself surprised by the rapid growth of his band. Within a year he had hundreds of followers, even including a few monks and shugenja. In truth this should not have been surprising, for the aftermath of the Clan Coup—the disbanding of the Akodo family and the Scorpion Clan—meant the number of ronin in the Empire had never been higher.

Most of the Great Clans were wary of the fledgling ronin army—indeed the Lion, led by Toturi's old rival Matsu Tsuko, were downright hostile—but the Dragon offered them hospitality in their lands and encouraged them to recruit from the ronin settlement at Nanashi Mura. Toturi the Black Lion soon gathered the largest force of ronin ever seen, asking for nothing save honor and fealty, uniting them under the banner of the Wolf. His followers would include many of the greatest heroes of the age, such as the valiant young warrior Toku, the brilliant strategist Takuan, and the tormented wanderer Ginawa. Toturi seasoned his forces in several strikes against bandits, but he knew the worst was yet to come—the Emperor had fallen sick and the Great Clans were maneuvering for power.

When the Clan War was unleashed, Toturi was ready. It was his army, bolstered by Dragon and Unicorn and even Naga forces, that stopped the Crab march at Beiden Pass. His subsequent effort to aid the clan of his old friend Doji Hoturi drew him into conflict with the Lion, a painful struggle that nevertheless further transformed his ragtag band into an army of skilled and courageous veterans. By the time the final battle came on the Day of Thunder, the men of Toturi's Army were already regarded as heroes of the Empire. Only Toturi himself was surprised when he was declared the Lion Thunder, and few were

shocked that it was Toturi's blade that finally struck Fu Leng's head from his shoulders.

After the Clan War, Toturi becomes Emperor but his army does not cease to be. The banner of the Wolf inspires loyalty and respect all over Rokugan, and the Black Lion's loyal ronin become the new Imperial Guard, helping the weakened Seppun defend the new dynasty. Takuan becomes the Chancellor, while Toku—a peasant boy who picked up swords off a battlefield—is elevated to the joint positions of Captain of the Imperial Guard and Champion of the newly created Monkey Clan.

Not every ronin in the army joins the Imperial Guard or the Monkey Clan. Some remain ronin, traveling the Empire under the banner of the Wolf, carrying on the fight against bandits, Shadowlands creatures, and other threats to Rokugan's peace. The legacy of Toturi's Army endures for many years to come.

The Naga

Up until the Clan Coup era, the Naga are only a vague rumor to Rokugan, a legend of strange ruins in the Shinomen Forest. By the end of the Clan War, however, they are a reality accepted by the entire Empire. After hundreds, perhaps thousands of years asleep, the Naga awaken shortly before the Clan Coup, sensing the rising power of the Foul—what they call the Shadowlands and the Lying Darkness. At first only a few Naga wander the Shinomen, confused and bewildered by the world around them, but soon more and more awake, rebuilding their ruined cities and confirming what they feared: the Foul is on the rise again. What truly surprises the Naga, however, is the presence of humans, a race they never met before and which now apparently rules the land. Initial contacts with humans are limited and often hostile, especially since the Naga appear to human eyes to resemble snake-like oni. The Naga for their part find humans confusing and frequently disgusting.

Two individuals are instrumental in bridging the gap between the two races. One is a young female greensnake Naga called the Mara, daughter of the chief Naga diplomat called the Dashmar. While at first the Mara finds humans highly unpleasant company, her attitude changes after she meets the young samurai Mirumoto Daini, sent by his clan to investigate the Naga creatures. Both soon realize their races share some things in common, including their hate for the Foul (or as the humans call it, the Shadowlands). Daini and the Mara soon become friends, and eventually their friendship grows into love—the only known relationship between a Naga and a human. Daini is a friend of Toturi and arranges for the Naga to reinforce Toturi's Army during the critical fighting at Beiden Pass. He also helps promote the arrival of Naga emissaries in the Imperial capital. Their diplomats attempt to create an official alliance with the Emperor, but fail several times, partly because of Bayushi Kachiko's manipulations.

Despite these rebuffs, the Naga ultimately prove to be valuable allies to humanity during the closing months of the Clan War and the Day of Thunder. Their immunity to the Taint proves especially crucial, and on the Day of

Thunder their entire army—as large as a Great Clan force if not larger—takes the field alongside the forces of Rokugan. They suffer many losses, including their leader the Qamar.

After the Clan War, the Naga find themselves in an awkward position. Most of their surviving people have awakened and they are accepted as allies of Rokugan, but they remain strangers to most of humanity and have difficulty accepting the world in which they live. They sense the power of the Foul has not yet been wholly broken, and they are right—the Lying Darkness is on the move, and soon the Naga will have to face it alongside the humans. In the meantime, they offer a tentative alliance with the Crab, who are preparing a full-scale offensive against the Shadowlands.

Total War in Rokugan

One of the distinguishing features of the Clan War is that for the first time in eight centuries there is no restriction on the scale or conduct of war between the clans. Although the Imperial laws technically remain in place, the illness of the Emperor and the general decline in Imperial power causes many of the clans to ignore the laws—or at the least, to argue that the lack of Imperial reproof means they are allowed to carry on as they please. The Clan War is the largest conflict in Rokugan since the First War, and arguably is considerably worse than that primal conflict: the Empire has grown tremendously over the course of a thousand years, so there are vastly larger armies involved, with correspondingly greater casualties and destruction. And for much of the conflict the clans face each other rather than confronting the true enemy: the Shadowlands.

Although Rokugan is a country of warriors, many of its traditions are forged in times of relative peace, and are not well-suited to a condition of general warfare. Politics are the first to suffer. With the Emperor unable to rule his Court and the clans free to settle any disagreement through force of arms, courtiers and diplomats lose much of their influence and become early victims of the Clan War. The Lion in particular ignore diplomatic missives and often treat the other clans' diplomats as hostages rather than honored guests. At the other end of the spectrum, the Crane—a traditionally political clan—find their network of favors loses much of its value in a world of total warfare. Even the legendary Kakita Yoshi, who counts some Lion as allies, finds it difficult to create new opportunities in the courts. It is also a difficult time for artisans, who can do little save try to inspire their own soldiers.

However, the scope and destruction of the Clan War affects many others outside the courts of Rokugan. Emerald Magistrates, for example, are often ignored in the absence of an active Emerald Champion. (Kakita Toshimoko tries to rebuild the organization after he wins the Emerald Tournament, but meets with only limited success.) They tend to be judged based on their clan rather than their Imperial authority and treated accordingly. Travel is also badly disrupted. Travel papers are often ignored if they are not backed by the clan whose lands are traversed. Commerce becomes a true nightmare, as armies confiscate any caravans they meet and many trade routes simply disappear. Shugenja in every clan are called to support their armies, leaving religious rituals unfulfilled. Monks have to defend both themselves and the peasantry from bandits, Shadowlands creatures, and even clan samurai looting the land for supplies. The common people, of course, suffer the most of anyone, and in desperate circumstances they sometimes strike back at samurai.

GMs and players who wish to run a game set in the Clan War era should keep all this in mind. The Clan War is not the best setting for a campaign focused on intrigue and diplomacy, and courtier characters may find little to do in a world torn apart by war. On the other hand, those seeking a battle-heavy campaign may find this their perfect setting. It is also a versatile one inasmuch as forces from all clans and factions faced each other in battle at some point during the Clan War, allowing the GM to depict almost any sort of clan-on-clan conflict. While the more prominent and famous examples are described in the timeline earlier in this chapter, there were literally thousands of smaller battle and clashes during the Clan War and the GM should feel free to create whatever his story might require.

For example, consider a game in which the GM wishes to showcase conflict between the Unicorn and Yoritomo's Alliance. While these two factions did not clash in any major battles, it is entirely possible that they had smaller

"A Thousand Years of Peace"

The term "the thousand years of peace" is often used to describe the reign of the Hantei Dynasty. To GMs and players who have read Rokugan's history (and examined the other eras of play presented in this book) this may seem like a highly questionable label. In truth, the Hantei reign contains many wars, but very few of them are waged without constraint. The bloody First Yasuki War convinces the Emperor that the clans must not be allowed to face each other with their full strength lest they tear Rokugan asunder. Accordingly almost all wars during the Hantei Dynasty are fought under the tight constraints and close supervision of Imperial law, and when such principles are violated (as in the Great Famine, for example) the Empire always goes to considerable lengths to suppress and minimize the long-term consequences.

Moreover, it is important to realize that the nearly three centuries leading up to the Scorpion Coup and the Clan War are entirely free of major crises or inter-clan conflicts. This long stretch of relative stability creates a deep psychological impression on the Rokugani, leading them to assume that it represents the "normal" state of the Empire throughout its history. The immense violence and chaos of the Clan War thus seems even worse to those who live through it.

encounters over the course of the Clan War. Perhaps the Alliance decides to investigate the Badger Clan's fate and has no choice but to force a route through the Unicorn lands. Or perhaps a Unicorn commander is trying to acquire supplies which the Mantis initially promised but later decided to distribute to their allies in the Wasp Clan. (This latter plot idea also showcases that behavior which would seem brash and insulting in peaceful times becomes the norm after war engulfs the Empire, allowing the GM to create new and interesting conflict situations.) And of course personal alliances between samurai sometimes transcend faction bonds, allowing for colorful situations such as a Mantis volunteer fighting for the Lion against the Unicorn.

As a more extreme example, consider a conflict between the Dragon Clan and the Brotherhood of Shinsei. These two factions are allied through most of the Clan War and generally see eye-to-eye even in normal times, but a GM who thinks "outside the box" can still create a Clan War storyline that puts them into conflict. The Brotherhood of Shinsei contains several martial orders such as the *sohei* of Osano-Wo. How would such ferocious (and fanatically devoted) warrior monks react to the Dragon demanding to be given one of their holy relics? Of course the Dragon are an honorable clan and would not make such a demand without reason, but in the stresses and pressures of war they might not make their purposes clear. Perhaps they believe the relic is Tainted and needs to be put out of reach—which could in fact be true, or it could be a lie fed to them by Scorpion agents. Perhaps the Dragon commander believes the relic could help his clan win the war against Fu Leng and save thousands of lives, well worth the cost of offending a religious order. Or perhaps someone on one side or the other (or both) is Tainted, leading to rash decisions and aggressive violence. Once blood has been spilled, it can be hard to resolve the conflict otherwise, since honor demands retribution.

Of course, as these two examples suggest, the inherent problem with an L5R campaign set in the midst of an Empire-wide total war is that clan loyalties will become overwhelmingly important, making for a serious problem with the typical diverse mixed-clan group of characters. If the GM is not willing to impose a more limited character selection, there are still options. The Imperial Legions campaign structure (described on page 286 of the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook) is ideal for a game set in the Clan

War. In this era the Legions are smaller than the armies of the Great Clans, and are more or less left to their own devices once the Emperor stops issuing orders. Members of the Legions are usually united by a loyalty which goes beyond the bonds of clan loyalty. They are a wild card during the Clan War, as a small but elite force which usually acts in the best interests of the Empire. Many are stationed in Scorpion lands as the war begins, an already very dangerous assignment as the Clan of Secrets still operates from the shadows of its old territory. Then they are the first hit by the Crab army's march, displacing the survivors to various parts of Rokugan. When one considers the limited available resources and the decrease of the clans' trust in Imperial authority, the very survival of the Legions can become a powerful adventure.

GMs should keep in mind that in their games the war can be as little or big in scale and scope as they want. For example, the characters could be a small group of magistrates in a minor, isolated city, with only a few ashigaru around, when it is attacked by bandits. This is the classic *Seven Samurai* scenario—except that during the Clan War, threats never stop coming. The next time it could be Shadowlands creatures or an entirely different enemy. What happens if the Wasting Disease hits the city? Or a Great Clan could decide to send scouts to search for supplies, scouts the characters should eliminate quickly if they do not want the whole town to be plundered and suffer from famine. If a group of ronin passes by, it can be a great opportunity for the characters to hire them—if they are trustworthy, that is.

At the other end of the spectrum, imagine a campaign where the characters lead an entire army. Some Great Clans—mainly the Unicorn, Crab, Lion, and Crane—have more than one major army, so the PCs can take on this role even if the GM does not want to disrupt the stories of the major NPCs. For that matter, the PCs don't even have to be generals to begin with: so many samurai die quickly during the war that the PCs might simply be thrown into a position of leadership. The only authority left is their Clan Champion, and said Champion may not always be available or even alive—a problem faced by the Crane and Lion at different points. This leaves the characters with the complete freedom to decide when, where, and what to strike. Such a plotline can alter the course of the canon storyline quite a bit, which can make for interesting stories if the GM and players are comfortable with such bold departures. Conversely, if the players are uneasy with making such radical changes, the GM can—as already discussed—depict a forgotten conflict that had little to no impact on the main storyline. Regardless, this sort of storyline can remind the players that war is not just about battles: managing the logistics of thirty thousand samurai on the move can be a mind-boggling challenge. So can internal strife, such as fractious officers or superstitious soldiers. And there is the recruiting of ashigaru, and their training, the repair of damaged weapons and armors, the treatment of the wounded, negotiations with superior enemy forces, tactics and strategy, sieges... generals have no time to get bored.

Ultimately, while a Clan War campaign need not automatically restrict the characters to battle scenarios, it is extremely well suited to pushing such challenges to their outer limits and stretching the PCs' skills to the utmost. If played out well, such a campaign will leave even the most grizzled Hida berserker wishing for a nice period of rest and a cup of tea.

The Shadowlands Inside Rokugan

There are only a few instances in Rokugan's history in which the Empire finds itself facing the Shadowlands in strength inside its own borders. Arguably, similar dangers have appeared before, such as the rise of the Bloodspeaker Cult, and of course individual creatures have slipped past the Crab's vigilance. But in this era the Shadowlands directly entered Rokugan in great numbers, and its influence appeared with tremendous power even in those regions its armies did not strike directly.

First and most obvious of all, the Crab Clan's unholy alliance means an army of monsters walks into Rokugan at their side. Of course, these creatures are supposedly commanded and supervised by the Crab, but many individual creatures manage to escape and wander the countryside. After the assault on Otosan Uchi the Crab lose control of the alliance entirely, and the massive Shadowlands force occupies the Imperial Capital. Meanwhile, Yogo Junzo invades the Empire at the head of another massive Shadowlands force, assaulting the Unicorn lands and later ravaging many shrines and temples of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, while Moto Tsume raided across the northern Empire as well. Ultimately Junzo's forces and those of Tsume's who escaped Otaku Kamoko joined the rest of Fu Leng's army at Otosan Uchi for the final battle.

This massive influx of Shadowlands forces would itself have been a shocking event for the Empire, but at the same time as it was happening, the power of the Black Scrolls seduced a great many samurai, spreading the Taint far and wide. Junzo and the Phoenix Clan are the worst victims of this phenomena but many other individual samurai also succumb—for example, Kitsune Gohei used a Black Scroll to become the Walking Horror of Fu Leng, and Kuni Yori used at least one and possibly two Black Scrolls as well. The Taint is spread far and wide by the Scrolls, causing many samurai to become maddened or Lost—especially in Phoenix lands. And of course the first of the Black Scrolls unleashes the Wasting Disease, killing thousands across the Empire. Many of the victims become Tainted before they die and reanimate as zombies, spreading even more fear and corruption.

It is important to keep in mind that prior to the Clan War, only the Crab have any real knowledge of how to fight the Shadowlands. In game terms, this can lead to confusion between player knowledge and character knowledge; for

example, few samurai in Rokugan know to cut off a zombie's head to kill it. At the most basic level this means the GM must enforce the need for the Lore: Shadowlands Skill, but a clever and innovative GM can use lack of knowledge to enhance the power and impact of a Clan War storyline. If the PCs do not know to behead bodies lest they rise from the dead, imagine their horror when the body of their sick friend comes to life and attacks them, or they slowly discover they are actually Tainted. If they do not understand the nature and vulnerabilities of Shadowlands creatures, imagine their horror when their swords bounce off an Invulnerable demon, or the beautiful geisha strips away her false skin to reveal a bog hag.

Ironically, this very absence of knowledge drives many Rokugani to kill the Naga when they first appear, since they believe them to be demons. Likewise most Rokugani in this era regard the nezumi as vermin or possibly Shadowlands beasts, especially if they know the ratlings come from the Shadowlands or witness the power of Name magic. Once the PCs have fought the Shadowlands once or twice, creative GMs can mix in these creatures to disrupt their assumptions and certainties. Needless to say, the GM should never just say, "You see a Naga." Instead, describe the demonic half-serpent/half-man with its glaring yellow eyes and terrifying size and speed. PCs who do not have appropriate Lore skills will have no reason to think such a creature is anything other than a demon.

Ultimately, though, the Taint is the most potent and the cruelest weapon Jigoku unleashes on the clans in this era. Most samurai will not even be able to recognize the first signs: a bloody cough or discolored skin could just be a disease, and vocalization of thoughts could just be a sign of ordinary mental trauma or spiritual visitation. Also, because the Shadowlands and the Taint are considered inappropriate topics in polite company, even the more obvious signs of the Taint may be ignored or politely dismissed by non-Crab samurai. Consider the case of Ikoma Ryozo, a Lion Clan samurai who was born Tainted due to his mother having been a maho-tsukai. Ryozo had obviously abnormal dark skin and exhibited near-superhuman speed and strength in combat, but his oddities were never investigated despite Crab demands.

Even once it becomes obvious that people have become Lost or succumbed to madness, shame and incomprehension will often stay the hand of many non-Crab Rokugani. It is one thing to kill a monstrous ogre rampaging through your village, but when your trusted sensei begins demanding you submit to the Ninth Kami, fighting back may take a great deal more mental fortitude. And the cleverest servants of Fu Leng know how to use the rules and beliefs of Rokugani society to their advantage, manipulating and torturing innocent minds.

All of this is of course made much worse by the misguided Crab alliance with the Shadowlands, denying the rest of the Empire the advice and guidance of the one clan that truly knows how to oppose the forces of Jigoku. Kuni Yori and Hida Kisada delude themselves into thinking their knowledge will allow them to control the foul creatures and restrict their ability to Taint or damage the Empire, reducing them to nothing more than useful (and expendable) shock troops. In a way, this too is an example of a lack of true understanding of the Shadowlands—the relatively peaceful era leading up to the Clan War allows the Crab to grow complacent, to imagine they know everything there is to know about the Shadowlands and thus to underestimate the dangers in their new policy. Unsurprisingly, they pay a bitter price for their arrogance. Yori and many others within the Kuni family become maho-tsukai, countless Crab are Tainted, and when the alliance collapses thousands more Crab perish at the hands and claws of their Shadowlands "comrades." However, this painful lesson allows the Crab to at last purge their ranks and rededicate themselves to their proper role as the enemies of the Shadowlands.

Of course, by the end of the Clan War, many Rokugani have finally gained a much better understanding of how the Taint works—out of sheer necessity. In later decades the Empire is much better prepared to face threats from the Shadowlands.

The Twelve Black Scrolls

The Black Scrolls are the twelve scrolls which Isawa used on the first Day of Thunder to capture and imprison the soul of Fu Leng. It is not known exactly what the original powers of the Black Scrolls were, but after twelve centuries of holding fragments of the Dark Kami's power they had become deeply Tainted and sources of incredible dark power. The spells within had been warped by the Taint into evil, twisted mockeries of their original form. Presenting actual rules for such spells is mechanically meaningless—not only is each of them unique and incredibly powerful, but it appears the spells could be cast by anyone who read the Scroll and made the required sacrifice. (These sacrifices typically involved the death of innocents and the intense Tainting of the person casting the spell.) As a general rule, any character who casts a spell from a Black Scroll should gain 1-10 points of Shadowlands Taint each time, over and above any effects of the spell itself.

Of course, in order to use the forbidden magic within the Black Scrolls, they must first be opened; Isawa sealed all twelve of them with incredibly potent magic. Opening a Black Scroll requires a roll of Spellcraft (Maho)/Willpower at TN 30. Failure means the Scroll remains sealed despite all efforts. Once a Black Scroll is opened, the portion of Fu Leng's power kept within it is released, and the Scroll's spell can be used—repeatedly if desired, although this will quickly reduce the caster to Lost.

The First Black Scroll unleashes the supernatural plague known as the Wasting Disease, which killed thousands and reanimated many of the corpses as Tainted zombies.

The Second Black Scroll creates the *Iron Citadel*, a vast castle of Tainted iron, rising from the ground in a matter of seconds. During the Clan War, Yogo Junzo uses this Scroll to build a great stronghold in the Shadowlands. Decades later, the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban uses the same Scroll to erect the Iron Citadel in the ruins of Otosan Uchi.

The Third Black Scroll unleashes the *Black Wind From the Soul*, a vast wave of Tainted black fire that roars out and destroys everything around it for a thousand feet—including the unfortunate fools who cast the spell. This is one of the Scrolls the Phoenix open, and its spell is never used.

The Fourth Black Scroll is a ghastly ritual that uses twelve dead bodies to grant the caster a twisted form of immortality, turning him or her into a grotesque undead monster, the *Walking Horror of Fu Leng*. The Scroll is used by Kitsune Gohei, the Fox Clan Champion.

The Fifth Black Scroll shows visions of the future to the caster, but the nature of this Dark Divination varies depending on whether the caster is a servant of Fu Leng (in which case it shows the plans of the caster's enemies) or is an enemy of the Dark Kami (in which case the Scroll shows visions of doom and despair).

The Sixth Black Scroll inflicts a strange *Shapeshifting* effect, transforming the target into one of the creatures of the Shadowlands.

The Seventh Black Scroll instantly bestows vast amounts of the Taint on all those around it. The *Touch of Despair* is so potent that most victims instantly become either Lost or madmen. This was one of the Scrolls opened by the Phoenix.

The Eighth Black Scroll bestows the *Touch of Fu Leng*, granting the victim extra limbs, appendages, and supernatural abilities along with a great deal of Taint. In return, the target submits to the will of the caster.

The Ninth Black Scroll tempts casters with the *Return of the Fallen Lord*, bringing a soul back from the dead to inhabit its body. Unfortunately this merely turns the person into an extremely powerful Tainted undead revenant with twisted, hateful knowledge of its past life. Soshi Bantaro used this Scroll to try to revive his lord Bayushi Shoju.

The Tenth Black Scroll uses the sacrifice of a single intelligent being to empower many others to perform a *Terrible Oath*, greatly increasing their physical power in return for the Taint. Kuni Yori performed this ritual during the sacrifice of Hida Sukune, using it to enhance the power of hundreds of Crab warriors.

The Eleventh Black Scroll is known as the *Doom of Fu Leng*. The Scroll's peculiarly double-meaning title comes from the differing effects it has on the pure and the corrupted. Those who are Tainted find much of their Taint stripped away from them, but those who are pure find themselves cut off from the Elements, unable to touch the Void.

The Twelfth Black Scroll was not truly a spell at all, but a magical trap—the culmination of Isawa's plans from the first Day of Thunder. It was held for a thousand years in Togashi's heart. When it opened, it triggered the final element of Isawa's original spell, trapping Fu Leng's soul within the mortal body he had possessed.

Destiny and Heroism

As the Introduction to this book discussed, any game set in a canonical era of Rokugan's history faces a persistent problem for players and GMs alike: the sense that the story has already been written. This is especially a problem for games set in epic time periods like the Clan War, where great heroes arise to protect Rokugan from danger. The Scorpion Clan Coup seeks to avoid a prophecy and instead brings it to pass; the twelve Black Scrolls are opened one by one; the Thunders are chosen and they defeat Fu Leng once again; Toturi, the hero who fell and rose again, becomes Emperor. It's a compelling story, but one in which the players seem to have no role save, perhaps, as minor supporting actors.

Obviously, some types of RPG campaigns will work just as well in this setting as any other. But for many players, their own role as the "heroes" of their campaign seems to conflict with the established narrative. And of course in role-playing games the players are supposed to be free in their actions, masters of their own fate. Why shouldn't they be able to change the storyline from its "canon" course? Why can't the players replace the great heroes and Thunders of the era with their own characters—or at least have the chance to do so?

If the GM does choose to run a game where player characters can become Thunders, there are a few considerations to keep in mind. Thunders should be of the appropriate bloodline, and preferably of the correct clan as well. Some modification is possible on the basis of marriages and other blood connections—for example in the canon timeline, Bayushi Kachiko was born a Shosuro, and Akodo Toturi had a Matsu mother. But the GM should not allow such machinations to strain credulity too much. A Mantis bushi might credibly have the potential to be a Crab or Lion Thunder (since the Mantis ruling line is originally descended from both the Hida and the Matsu) but a Sparrow being the Crane Thunder may be pushing things too far. The GM may also want to suggest the PCs should have the original Thunders as ancestors (whether or not the optional Ancestor game mechanic is in use) to enhance their connection to the original heroes. Thunder PCs should, if possible, be icons for their clans—they need not be idealized flawless paragons, but they should be suitable characters to take on the task of representing their bloodline and the burden of the Empire's salvation. For example, a Lion PC who is trained in the Lion's Shadow School and spends his time blackmailing rivals and spying on Crane generals may not be an appropriate choice for Lion Thunder, unless he goes through some kind of moral transformation that leads him to the path of Honor and selfless dedication.

It should also be noted that if some of the Thunders become PCs but others do not, certain story dynamics may be disrupted. Things like Kachiko and Hoturi's star-crossed romance or Yakamo and Hitomi's eternal rivalry are great parts of the original story. Of course, nothing says the PCs cannot develop similar connections to NPC Thunders—indeed in a proper L5R campaign the possibilities for such things should be limitless—but the GM should be wary of "forcing" storylines on players who are not interested.

It should also be remembered that the PCs do not have to be Thunders in order to have a deep and lasting impact on the canon storyline and the fate of the Empire. The L5R 1st Edition supplement *Time of the Void* presented the story of the Helm of Kenshin, a cursed nemuranai which turned daimyo Miya Satoshi against his family and friends, threatening to wreck the Empire no matter what happened in the Seven Thunders' fight. The adventure allowed the PCs to interact with famous canonical figures, save an Imperial family from destruction, and counter a terrible Tainted artifact. GMs can use similar adventures to make the PCs the heroes of their story without forcing them into the straightjacket of being Thunders.

For example, Uikku's prophecies—the so-called Eight Dooms, described on page 194 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*—could be the focus of a compelling and epic L5R campaign in the Clan War era. Prophecies can potentially be averted (the Scorpion came close to doing so with the Coup) but some Rokugani scholars believe they take on a life of their own and will return to plague Rokugan over and over again so long as they remain unfulfilled. It is entirely possible the Dooms have threatened the Empire before and will do so again. And while some of the Dooms seem

to reflect obvious elements of the Clan War canon story (such as the False Hoturi) they are vague enough for creative GMs and players to push them in all sorts of directions. A whole campaign could be built around the PCs studying Uikku's prophecies and trying to counter them. In the end, while the PCs might not become glorious public heroes like the Seven Thunders, they could still save the clans and the Empire from terrible fates.

Important Personages of the Clan War

The following section lists several notable heroes of the Clan War. Other heroes of this time appear in the preceding chapter (the Pre-Coup Era) and the next chapter (the Hidden Emperor Era) as well as in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*. Of course, GMs are free to use these NPCs as they see fit, in this era or any other where they might fit.

Toturi the Black

Lion Clan Thunder

Akodo Toturi. The Black Lion. The Lion Clan Thunder. Emperor Toturi I. All these names were the same man, the same hero, yet each carries different meaning.

He was born Akodo Toturi, his father the Lion Clan Champion and his mother a Matsu daimyo's daughter. However, he was the younger son, and none expected him to rule the clan. When he began to show a scholarly attitude deemed unfit for a Lion warrior, his family sent him to a monastery in Phoenix lands. The young Toturi flourished as he explored the Tao and studied strategy with the monk Suana; he did not neglect martial training either, and received frequest visits from the Lion sensei Akodo Kage, who saw potential in the boy.

Toturi's life changed for the first time when his older brother Arasou died in battle at Toshi Ranbo. Toturi was suddenly recalled from the monastery and made Clan Champion, a destiny he did not feel prepared for. Many in the clan doubted his fitness, especially Matsu Tsuko, the daimyo of the Matsu, who was left embittered by her fiancé Arasou's death. Nevertheless, Toturi accepted the challenge and sought to fulfill his duties as best he could.

Toturi's life changed for the second time during the Clan Coup. At the time he was involved in a love affair with a geisha named Hatsuko, but the Scorpion tricked Hatsuko into drugging him, and he was absent when the Scorpion seized the Imperial city and murdered the Emperor. Recovering from the drug, Toturi returned to lead the clan armies to victory against the Scorpion and personally defeated Baysuhi Shoju in a duel. However, in the aftermath of his victory, it appeared the Imperial Line had been terminated, so Toturi declared himself Emperor to protect Rokugan from civil war. No sooner did he do so than the young Hantei XXXIX entered the throne room, having been saved by the Phoenix. The new Emperor's judgment was terrible: Toturi was cast out as a ronin and the whole Akodo family was disbanded.

Thus did Toturi become the Black Lion, the ronin warrior who wandered the Empire and eventually assembled a great army of fellow wave-men. His charisma and tactical genius made the army a force to be reckoned with, and during the Clan War they proved themselves many times. Toturi also found himself tasked by his old rival Matsu Tsuko to reunite the Lion against Fu Leng, a task he performed on the Day of Thunder. However, when the Hooded Ronin revealed that Toturi was the Lion Clan Thunder, none were more surprised than he. In the end Toturi triumphed over Fu Leng, and all agreed there would be no better choice to become the new Emperor and restore Rokugan.

Toturi went on to reign as Emperor for over twenty years, enduring corruption by the Shadow during the War Against the Darkness and then guiding the Empire through the War of the Spirits. He finally died fighting a demonic servant of Daigotsu, perishing as he had lived: a warrior of honor, defending the Empire. He lived and died as an implacable warrior, but also a man of great intellect and calm nature. Each time Rokugan needed him, he stepped up and did what was needed whatever the consequences. In the end, it is this dedication to duty which made Toturi the hero he was—a normal man, but one who never settled for less than Honor demanded.

The stats here depict Toturi at the end of the Clan War, when he became the Lion Clan Thunder.

Toturi the Black, Lion Clan Thunder

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 5 Water: 4 Void: 5
Awareness: 5 Intelligence: 6 Perception: 6

Honor: 6.2 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 9.4*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 3/Wolf Legion (Insight Rank 6)

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle (Mass Combat, Skirmish) 9, Calligraphy 3, Courtier 5, Defense 5, Etiquette 5, Games: Go 5, Horsemanship 3, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: History 6, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Lore: Theology 5, Meditation 4, Perform: Oratory 4, Sincerity (Honesty) 4, War Fan 5

Kata: Striking as Void

Advantages: Allies (many), Great Destiny (Seven Thunders), Leadership, Paragon (Duty), Tactician

Disadvantages: Lost Love (Hatsuko the Geisha), Social Disadvantage (Ronin)

Matsu Tsuko

Lion Clan Champion

Long before she became the Lion Clan Champion, Matsu Tsuko was seen in many people's eyes as the reincarnation of Lady Matsu. Her ferocity and skill were unmatched, and her devotion to the Lion and the Matsu family was absolute. Tsuko's childhood was filled only with training for war, and she killed her first foes at the age of ten, using her *bokken* to crush the throat of a Phoenix warrior who attacked her mother in her command tent.

When she became an adult, Tsuko was a beautiful woman, but she was never seen to smile and she always dressed for war. She demanded absolute perfection of those around her, and many failed to meet her standards. One who did, however, was Akodo Arasou, the Clan Champion, and a few years after her gempukku Tsuko was betrothed to marry him. This was a controversial decision which would have united the two great families of the Lion for the first time in history. In truth, Tsuko and Arasou were perfect soulmates, and beneath her fierce exterior Tsuko loved Arasou as passionately as any woman in Rokugan's history ever loved. But their relationship was doomed. Arasou died in a Daidoji ambush while fighting to retake Toshi Ranbo from the Crane, leaving Tsuko alone and filled with fury and bitterness. Her rage was only made worse by the realization that she now must obey Toturi, Arasou's younger brother, who she saw as weak and bookish, not a true Lion at all.

After the Scorpion Clan Coup, Tsuko was pleased by Toturi's fall but at the same time horrified at the disbandment of the entire Akodo family. As the senior leader in the clan she became Clan Champion, and despite the loss of the Akodo she forged ahead with plans for war. The moment she had justification she unleashed the might of her armies against the Crane and anyone who sought to protect them. Tsuko was no hilltop general; she often fought on the front lines, a nightmare for her enemies as she killed without mercy. Blinded by fury and grief, she paid little attention to events elsewhere in the Empire, much less the changes in the Emperor's behavior. Only after the Battle of Otosan Uchi, when Kachiko's manipulations led to Crab victory, did Tsuko realize how badly the Empire was fraying around her.

The revelations about the Emperor split the Lion Clan and threatened to plunge them into civil war. Tsuko, stricken with remorse, knew she could not save her clan and was forced to turn to her old rival Toturi, begging him to do what she could not. Unrivaled on the battlefield, it is perhaps fitting that she committed seppuku and died from her own hand—only her own errors caused her fall, and remorse was her last and more difficult adversary.

Matsu Tsuko, Lady of Lions, Clan Champion

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 5 Water: 4 Void: 4
Reflexes: 6 Agility: 6 Strength: 5

Honor: 8.6 *Status: 8.1* *Glory: 8.5*

School/Rank: Matsu Berserker 5/Lion's Pride 2

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 6, Defense 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Intimidation (Bullying) 5, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu (Katana, No-Dachi) 7, Knives 3, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: History 3, Polearms 3, Sincerity 3, Spears 4

Kata: Striking as Fire, Reckless Abandon Style

Advantages: Bishamon's Blessing, Heart of Vengeance (Crane), Paragon (Courage), Leadership

Disadvantages: Brash, Lost Love (Akodo Arasou)

Toku

Hero of the Clan War

The boy who became Toku was just a farmer's son. His small isolated village had little to offer, and he had only the vaguest idea of what the rest of the Empire was like. He knew samurai were heroes, great warriors who carried swords and defeated terrible villains, and he innocently believed he might become one himself. When a group of brave samurai fell defending his village from bandits, the boy took up a set of swords, a horse, and a scroll of Akodo's Leadership from the battlefield and set out to become a samurai himself. He called himself Toku, which meant "virtue."

While uneducated, Toku was both enthusiastic and genuinely honorable, two characteristics which won him favor and help from many samurai. Through extraordinary circumstances he managed to attend the Topaz Championship, where he performed well despite not winning any single event. He also first met a number of young men who would become famous samurai themselves, such as Akodo Toturi and Doji Kuwanan.

After the Clan Coup, Toku encountered the wandering Toturi the Black and the two became friends. There is a popular story which claims the two men spent a whole night discussing Bushido and the role of the samurai, a discussion which supposedly inspired Toturi to gather followers and confront the bandit lord Yugoro. Whether this is true or not, it is indisputable that Toku was one of the first members of what would eventually be known as Toturi's Army, fighting under the banner of the Wolf.

Toku was a symbol of hope and courage for the entire army; his spirits never faltered, even during the most horrible times of the Clan War. He made friends with many famous ronin warriors such as Morito, Ginawa, and Takuan, and by the time of the Day of Thunder he was a trusted commander and Toturi's right-hand man.

After the Day of Thunder, Emperor Toturi I tried to reward his vassal. Toku had finally come to realize he was not truly a samurai; he confessed to Toturi that in truth he was only a peasant, and asked for the right to commit seppuku as a last action as a samurai. Impressed once again by his friend's simple virtue, Toturi declared Toku was more a samurai than most who bore the name. He proclaimed Toku to have been samurai all along, and appointed him not only as Captain of the Imperial Guard but also Champion of the newly formed Monkey Clan. Toku would go on to serve the Emperor and lead the Monkey for many more years, finally dying heroically against the Bloodspeakers in the year 1165. After his death, he was elevated to the Heavens as the Fortune of Virtue.

The stats here depict Toku at the end of the Clan War, when he had begun to create the Techniques of the Toku Bushi school.

Toku, Hero of the Clan War

Air: 2	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 4
Reflexes: 4		Agility: 4		

Honor: 5.2 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 6.1*

School/Rank: Toku Bushi 1/Wolf Legion (Insight Rank 4)

Skills: Athletics 3, Animal Handling 3, Artisan: Poetry 1, Battle 3, Craft: Farming 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 4, Investigation (Search) 3, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: History 1, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Theology 2, Spears (Yari) 3

Advantages: Great Destiny, Kharmic Tie (Toturi—5), Luck (9)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Heimin), Idealistic

Shiba Ujimitsu

Phoenix Clan Champion

Like many of the Phoenix Clan Champions, Ujimitsu was not prepared to lead. Born and raised as a simple soldier, he was a quiet man of decent skill but no great reputation. His sensei never had cause to complain about him, and when he passed his gempukku he was assigned as part of a military unit patrolling the borders of his clan's territory. He fulfilled his duties scrupulously, pursuing his personal tastes for drawing and singing in his limited spare time.

All that changed when the previous Clan Champion, Shiba Burisagi, died in a duel at the Imperial Winter Court. Ujimitsu suddenly found himself beset by strange and terrible visions, hearing so many voices in his head he nearly went mad. Thankfully, his superior officer sent him to the care of the Isawa, and they quickly recognized the telltale signs of the Soul of Shiba. The Elemental Masters helped him adapt to his new position, teaching him meditation practices that made it easier to harmonize with the voices of previous Clan Champions who echoed within his own soul.

Ujimitsu threw himself into his new duties as Champion for his clan. He had a knack for observation and organization, and he made a number of reforms to the structure of the Phoenix army, which had become slightly neglected in recent years. He also developed an almost preternatural ability to be wherever he was needed, though whether this was due to the guidance of the Soul of Shiba or merely his own organizational skills is unknown. He seems to have enjoyed the aura of mystery which his timely appearances created.

Sadly, Ujimitsu's personal life was filled with tragedy. Soon after he became Clan Champion his wife was forced to commit seppuku when her Seppun father was revealed to be a traitor to the Imperial throne. Their little daughter cursed the Emperor in her grief, and Ujimitsu had no choice but to kill her instantly. He never spoke of either of them afterwards, and all Phoenix samurai carefully avoided the topic. However, some of his closest friends later noticed that he seemed to look at the young bushi Shiba Tsukune as though she was his daughter. In truth, he had used the power of the Ancestral Sword of the Phoenix to transfer his daughter's soul into the ailing young Tsukune, saving both.

During the Clan War, Ujimitsu was one of the first to feel the rising power of the Shadowlands. Sadly, he was forced to focus on defending the Phoenix lands against Lion aggression, leaving the Elemental Council free to conduct their forbidden experiments with the Black Scrolls. Bound as he was by oath to obey the Isawa, Ujimitsu was powerless to stop the corruption of the Isawa family, but his performance on the battlefield remained a beacon of purity and hope for the clan. He managed to save his people from the worst, and died on the Day of Thunder killing the maddened Isawa Tsuke. He passed along peacefully, knowing his soul would now watch over Tsukune, the new Champion of the Clan.

Shiba Ujimitsu, Phoenix Clan Champion

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 5

Awareness: 5

Honor: 8.6 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 6.3*

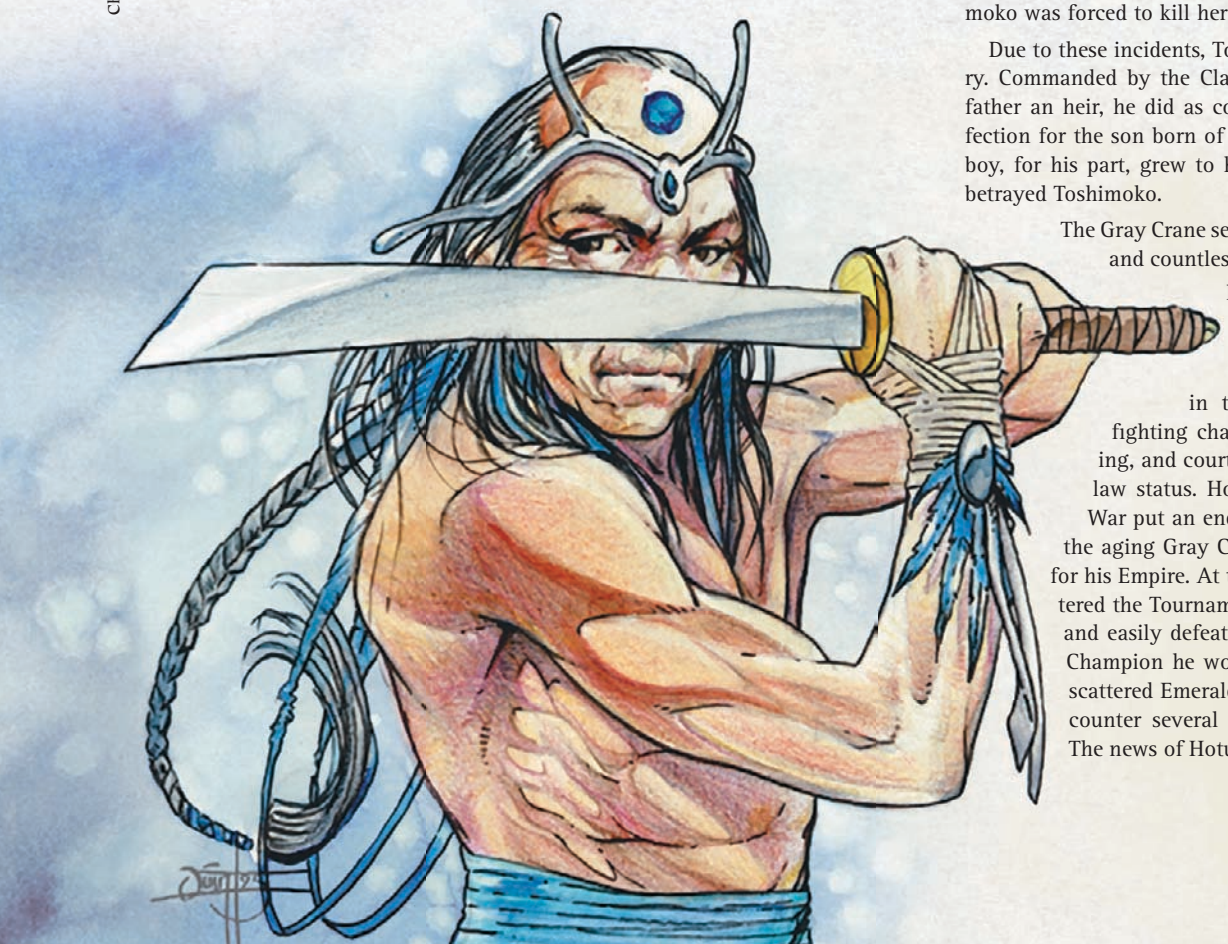
School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 5 (Insight Rank 6)

Skills: Artisan: Drawing 2, Athletics 2, Battle 5, Calligraphy 3, Courtier 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 4, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: Theology 4, Meditation (Void Recovery) 4, Perform: Singing 2, Polearms (Naginata) 4, Sincerity 2, Spears 3, Tea Ceremony 2

Kata: Striking as Air, Iron Forest Style

Advantages: Allies (many), Inheritance (Phoenix Ancestral Sword), Inner Gift (Shiba's Soul), Irreproachable, Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret, Small



Kakita Toshimoko

Emerald Champion

When the Clan War began Kakita Toshimoko was already an old man who had been famous for some time. The heir of the Kakita daimyo, he relinquished his position to let the younger Kakita Yoshi lead, for he felt little interest in politics. A gifted swordsman and duelist even among the Kakita, the fiery and hot-headed young Toshimoko (his name came from his father's, Toshimo) traveled the Empire in search of challenges, defeating many opponents with ease. (In the process he fought a fateful duel with a ronin named Dairya—the man who would kill him many years later.) He was known for his hedonistic lifestyle, living as though there was no tomorrow, never turning down a chance to love a woman, drink a cup of sake, or enjoy a festival. It was during these years that he fathered the boy who would become Seppun Toshiken, though at the time he had no idea this had happened. As he grew older and his hair became gray, Toshimoko began to calm his temper, but he did not abandon his way of life.

Despite his joyous lifestyle, Toshimoko was no stranger to tragedy. At one time he was stationed in the Fox lands as an Imperial envoy to supervise negotiations between the Fox and the Hare (who had recently clashed). Toshimoko became enamored of the Fox Champion's daughter and courted her. But when the peace negotiations failed badly, the Fox Champion blamed Toshimoko, saying the Crane's love for his daughter had blinded him to his duty. A duel inevitably resulted. Toshimoko easily killed the older man, but this brought an end to the relationship with the daughter; in fact, some years later she challenged Toshimoko in vengeance for her father's death, and Toshimoko was forced to kill her as well.

Due to these incidents, Toshimoko refused to ever marry. Commanded by the Clan Champion Doji Satsume to father an heir, he did as commanded—but he felt no affection for the son born of that union, Kakita Ichiro. The boy, for his part, grew to hate his father and ultimately betrayed Toshimoko.

The Gray Crane served as sensei to two Emperors and countless Kakita bushi, but his favorite pupil was certainly Doji Hoturi, his sister's son. In Hoturi's youth the two men were one of the most scandalous pairs in the Empire's modern history, fighting challenges, drinking and carousing, and courting many women of high and law status. However, the onset of the Clan War put an end to this carefree attitude, and the aging Gray Crane had to step up and fight for his Empire. At the command of Hoturi he entered the Tournament of the Emerald Champion and easily defeated his opponents. As Emerald Champion he worked to rebuild the weak and scattered Emerald Magistrates and managed to counter several of Bayushi Kachioko's plans. The news of Hoturi's death at the Day of Thun-

der saddened him, but he took comfort that his pupil died a hero. Toshimoko's own final redemption lay in the future, at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate.

The following stats depict Toshimoko midway through the Clan War, when he entered the Emerald Tournament.

Kakita Toshimoko, the Gray Crane, Emerald Champion

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 5 Water: 4 Void: 8
Reflexes: 6 Agility: 7

Honor: 5.2 *Status: 6.0* *Glory: 7.0*

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 5/Kenshinzen 3

Skills: Artisan: Poetry 3, Athletics 4, Courtier 4, Defense 3, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Iaijutsu (Assessment, Focus) 9, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: Heraldry 3, Meditation 5, Polearms 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation 5

Kata: Striking as Void, Breath of Wind Style, Disappearing World Style

Advantages: Ally (Doji Hoturi), Ancestor: Kakita, Quick, Sacred Weapon (Kakita Blade), Social Position (Master Sensei)

Disadvantages: Lechery, Sworn Enemy (Dairya)

New Game Mechanics

The following sections provides new game mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition RPG. These mechanics are not specific to the Clan War era, although they were prominent then, and GMs may use them in their campaigns as they see fit.

New Advanced School: The Scorpion Saboteurs

The Saboteurs are the military elite of the Scorpion shinobi forces. While the clan's other shinobi focus on spying and assassination, the Saboteurs undertake the military defense of the Scorpion lands, using every sort of tactic (including the forbidden gaijin pepper) to weaken, distract, and cripple enemy armies. Although they prefer to operate by stealth, they are more than capable of defending themselves should the need arise.

During the Clan War era, with most of the Scorpion Clan dead or scattered, the Saboteurs bear the burden of protecting their lands and punishing those who occupy them. Both the Imperial Legions and the later Crab invaders suffer heavily at the Saboteurs' hands.

New Advanced School: Scorpion Saboteurs [Ninja]

Requirements

Rings/Traits: Fire 4, Reflexes 4

Skills: Craft: Explosives 3, Stealth 5, Knives 4, Ninjutsu 4

Other: Must be trained in one of the Scorpion basic schools with the [Ninja] tag.

Techniques

Rank One: Follow the Pincers

The Saboteurs are trained to an extreme degree of focus and alertness, assuring they can slip through enemy lines and silence anyone who spots them. You gain a +1k1 bonus to all Stealth rolls and suffer no Initiative penalties for being surprised, Dazed, or Fatigued.

Rank Two: No Mistakes

The Saboteur specializes in using demolitions to destroy vital targets such as walls, bridges, supply dumps, and castles. When you spend a Void Point on a roll with Craft: Explosives, you gain a +2k2 bonus instead of the normal +1k1. Due to your extensive training with gaijin pepper, you suffer no ill effects from low rolls with Craft: Explosives and if the optional "fizzle" rule is in effect you are immune to it as well.

Rank Three: Seeking Weakness

The Saboteurs are trained to strike at their opponents' weak points with lethal and shocking speed. When fighting with a Small weapon (melee or ranged) you may make a single attack as a Free Action each Round in addition to any other Simple Action or Complex Action attacks you might make. Also, when fighting with a Small weapon (melee or ranged), you may ignore the effects of your opponent's armor on his Armor TN and Reduction.

New Advanced School: The Daidoji Harriers

The exact origins of the Daidoji Harriers are obscure and mysterious. The Crane established a covert training site for unconventional tactics in the ruins of Shiro Giji in the year 330, but for many generations that facility was used merely to train selected Daidoji Scouts in the more ruthless and pragmatic sort of fighting methods. However, at some point the training at Shiro Giji took on a darker and less honorable tone, focusing on the use of truly heinous methods such as sabotage and assassination. The final turning point seems to have been the decision to covertly manufacture and use gaijin pepper, whose secrets were discovered after the defeat of the gaijin in the Battle of White Stag.

The students of Shiro Giji took to calling themselves 'Harriers' to distinguish their methods from the somewhat more honorable tactics of other Daidoji Scouts. With time, the rulers of the family came to see the Harriers as a separate organization, a hand-picked band of men and women

who would do anything and sacrifice any amount of their own honor for the greater good of the Crane. They carefully concealed the Harriers' existence and methods from the rest of the clan, ensuring the leadership of the Crane could maintain honor and propriety. In this way the Harriers covertly served the Crane Clan for many generations.

The organization was finally exposed during the so-called War of Silk and Steel between the Dragon and Crane in the late twelfth century. Crane Champion Doji Domotai was outraged by the Harriers' activities and ordered the entire group disbanded, an order reluctantly obeyed by the Daidoji daimyo.

New Advanced School: Daidoji Harriers [Ninja]

Requirements

Rings/Traits: Agility 4, Air 4

Skills: Craft: Explosives 3, Hunting (Traps) 3, Stealth 5, Knives 4.

Other: Must be a Daidoji and recruited for membership in the Harriers.

Techniques

Rank One: Move Like Shadows

The Harriers are taught to sacrifice their own Honor for the sake of the greater good of the Crane Clan (as they perceive it). They train to blend into the shadows and to defeat their foes with traps and ambushes. You lose only half the normal amount of Honor (rounded down) for any dishonorable actions taken on behalf of the Crane Clan. You gain a +1k1 bonus to the DR of any rural traps you create (this stacks with the Daidoji Scout techniques, if applicable).

Rank Two: Iron Feather

The lightning reflexes of a Harrier allows him to dodge his opponent's attacks easily. When wearing light armor, ashigaru armor, or no armor, you may add your Stealth Skill Rank to your Armor TN.

Rank Three: Unforgiving Steel

The Harrier is taught to disable his foes with a single deadly strike. If you successfully attack a surprised or unaware opponent, or if an opponent takes damage from a rural trap you created, he is Dazed in addition to any other effects of your attack. He may not attempt to recover from the Daze until after the next Reactions stage, and the TN to recover from the Daze is increased by +5.

Ninja Options: Explosives and Nageteppo

Although Rokugan rejected the sinister lure of firearms after the Battle of White Stag, the secrets of gaijin pepper were not completely purged from the Empire. The knowledge of how to make and use the substance was covertly preserved by certain hidden groups, mainly the Scorpion shinobi and the Daidoji Harriers. Both of these organizations built secret powder mills in order to manufacture gaijin pepper for use in demolitions, traps, ambushes, and distractions. Smoke grenades to cover ambushes or retreats, demolition charges to destroy supply dumps or to ambush enemy soldiers... gaijin pepper has been used in all of these ways since it first came to Rokugan.

Explosives of the sort depicted here are normally restricted to members of the Scorpion shinobi organizations (the Infiltrators, Actors, and Saboteurs) and the Daidoji Harriers, and only in games set subsequent to the White Stag Era. After White Stag but prior to the War Against the Darkness, the covert connection between the Shosuro family and the Lying Darkness means that Goju and Ninube Shadowspawn can also have access to explosives. (It is up to the GM whether the Goju and Ninube can still gain access to this material after the defeat of the Lying Darkness. It is possible the Shadow Dragon might be able to steal the knowledge of manufacturing gaijin pepper in order to let his minions continue to use explosives.)

In game terms, explosives take two basic forms: nageteppo (egg grenades) and demolition charges. Nageteppo are widely and readily used by ninja of all sorts and the GM should not hesitate to allow "ninja" PCs to make or use them. Demolition charges, however, are used much more sparingly, since their effects are far more blatant and the connection to forbidden gunpowder is quite obvious. The GM should consider carefully whether to allow PCs to gain access to them.

Nageteppo (Smoke)

Keywords: Ninja, Small

Range: 30'

Damage: 1k1

Craft: Craft: Explosives / Intelligence at TN 25, and requires access to gaijin pepper and alchemical supplies. Making nageteppo is a touchy business; failing to hit TN 10 when doing so results in a small explosion, inflicting 2k1 damage for smoke nageteppo.

Standard smoke nageteppo are used to confuse enemies during an ambush or to cover a retreat. They are small and relatively fragile egg-shaped devices containing a mixture of gunpowder and alchemical substances.

Throwing a nageteppo is a Simple Action. When they are broken (either by accident, crushing, or most commonly by being thrown against a hard surface) the contents ignite and emit a thick cloud of choking white smoke. The smoke covers an area roughly 15' diameter and obscures all vision within (those inside the smoke are considered to be Blind). The smoke normally lasts five Rounds before it disperses, although it can be blown away in a single Round by a strong wind.

If a smoke nageteppo directly strikes a person, the burning smoke charge inflicts 1k1 damage per Round for two Rounds (or until extinguished with dousing, smothering, etc).

Nageteppo (Incendiary)

Keywords: Ninja, Small

Range: 25'

Damage: 3k2 (ignores 3 points of Reduction)

Craft: Craft: Explosives / Intelligence at TN 25, and requires access to gaijin pepper and alchemical supplies. Making nageteppo is a touchy business; failing to hit TN 10 when doing so results in a small explosion, inflicting 3k2 damage for incendiary nageteppo.

Incendiary nageteppo are somewhat larger and more awkward to throw than their smoke-making counterparts. They are usually used to ignite fires during surprise attacks or raids—for example, shinobi who are targeting an enemy supply dump will bring incendiary nageteppo. They are similar in design to smoke nageteppo, but are larger and the gunpowder/alchemical mixture inside is designed to explode and burn fiercely rather than merely emitting smoke.

Throwing a nageteppo is a Simple Action. When an incendiary nageteppo is broken the contents ignite violently and spray outward, igniting everything within 5'. Someone who is directly hit by an incendiary nageteppo will take 3k2 damage per Round for three Rounds (or until the fire is doused/smothered). Someone who is caught in the spray radius takes 1k1 damage per Round instead. The fire from an incendiary nageteppo is hot enough to ignore 3 points of Reduction.

Demolition Charge

Skill to Craft: Craft: Explosives / Intelligence at TN 30, plus access to gaijin pepper. Failure to hit TN 10 when crafting a demolition charge results in an explosion, inflicting normal damage for the charge.

Skill to Set: Engineering: Siege /Intelligence at TN 30, or Craft: Explosives / Intelligence at TN 20. Either way, setting a demolition charge requires fifteen minutes per charge. Missing the roll by 15 or more results in immediate detonation.

GM Options: Making Explosives More Risky

The manufacture of explosives and the planting of demolition charges are hazardous activities which may result in premature detonation. Some GMs may wish to emphasize the strange, unpredictable nature of gaijin explosives by also making them more finicky and unreliable—which was in fact a real limitation of premodern explosives. This adds depth to the explosives rules but will also complicate their use slightly.

As a basic rule, any time a nageteppo is thrown there is a 1-in-10 chance that it is a "fizzle" that produces only a small useless puff of smoke or a brief, inconsequential flame. Likewise, any time a demolition charge is detonated, there is a 1-in-10 chance that it fails to explode. A demolition charge that does not detonate can be re-set for another attempt; this requires a repeat of the earlier Engineering or Craft roll at +5 to the TN (thus also increasing the risk of accidental discharge).

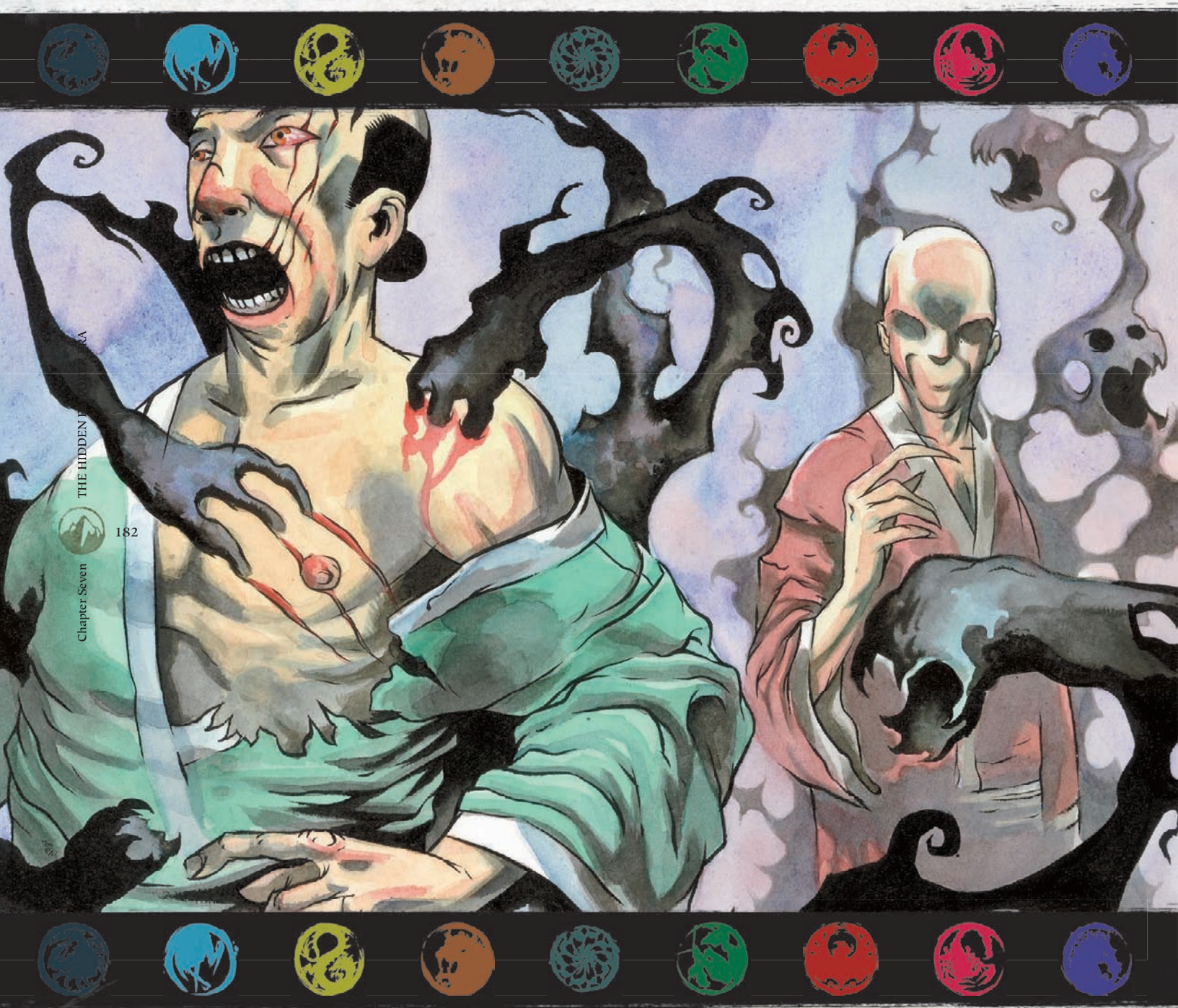
Damage: 9k6 to all within a 10' radius

Area: 7k5 damage out to a 30' radius, 4k3 out to a 50' radius.

Demolition charges are most commonly used to destroy bridges or buildings, breach walls or castles, or otherwise destroy large and resilient targets. More rarely, they may be used as mines, placing them on a battlefield and igniting them when enemy troops march over the position. (This latter usage is extremely risky, since if any of the enemy troops escape alive they will be able to report the use of forbidden gunpowder on the battlefield.)

Once a demolition charge is set, it must be detonated. This is normally done by introducing flame to the charge—such as by firing a flaming arrow at it, or leaving a burning piece of rope or cloth which will reach the charge after a certain amount of time. Clever shinobi have also devised ways to detonate demolition charges by means of physical mechanisms and incendiaries (such as placing a nageteppo which will crack at the right moment). After the Agasha invent hanabi (fireworks), Rokugani ninja use hanabi fuses to ignore demolition charges, a much more reliable method.

Damage from demolition charges is gunpowder damage, which means it ignores Reduction on living targets. It also ignores 20 points of Reduction on inanimate targets (buildings, castles, etc). Shinobi sometimes use smaller charges for more limited targets—GMs may represent this by reducing the damage dice and explosive radius.



The Hidden Emperor Era

The War Against the Darkness

The Emperor stalked forward without warning, cutting off the sentence mid-query. His hand fell to his sword and he struck with Akodo precision.

Isawa Osugi's headless corpse slumped to the ground.

"Kolat," Toturi the First whispered. The word reverberated around the silent court chamber with the force of an Imperial decree. He sheathed his blade with slow deliberate motions. A hundred courtiers watched in stunned silence as the Emperor of Rokugan gave his victim a disinterested glance. Without another word, he turned and sauntered out of the room.

Silence reigned in the Imperial Court long after the Emperor's last steps faded into oblivion. Every samurai in the room was trained from childhood to navigate the treacherous waves of political intrigue, but their training had not prepared them for this.

"I had always heard of the Kolat as a myth," Kitsu Sanetori said slowly.

"The Kolat is a myth," Yasuki Tansa quickly interjected. "They are peasant tales, myths of boogeymen and phantoms creeping in the night..." His voice trailed off into an embarrassed silence. No one stated the obvious: when the Emperor of Rokugan publicly named them, the Kolat were no longer a myth.

"We are fortunate the Glorious Emperor is ever vigilant," Kakita Aihara murmured. His small voice was barely audible in the quiet room. "He has only just returned to us from his difficult ordeal, and he is already protecting the Empire from those who would threaten it."

Sanetori smiled and his foot stamped the floor in approval. "The Emperor is a true warrior who will not hesitate to act! True Lion blood courses in his veins! Our enemies stand no chance, and no Kolat could ever stand his might."

Shinjo Tanimuro smiled, but it did not reach his eyes. "You cannot defeat every enemy with your katana, Kitsu-san. The Emperor's disappearance was not solved with brute force but by the cleverness of our Otaku Battle Maidens. No one knows how much this... Kolat infestation... has spread. We should proceed with caution."

Yoritomo Hogosha raised his wrinkled hands into the air with a theatrical flourish. Despite his advanced age, his voice rang clearly through the court. "You ignore the obvious! The Emperor has spoken clearly with his actions. The young Isawa was the pearl of the Phoenix Clan and she was a treacherous whelp. Their entire clan is suspect and they cannot be trusted. Surely now no one can protest the Mantis Clan's rightful claim of our Imperial Charter. We will continue our venture into unaligned lands as per our mandate from the Emperor."

The room silenced once more as all heads turned toward the Phoenix detachment. They shared quick glances, struggling to ignore Osugi's cooling body. Finally, a young girl stepped forward and cleared her throat.

"Your armies march into Phoenix lands, Hogosha-san. They are Phoenix lands, and Phoenix ancestors tended to those lands. You cannot confuse the issue. We will not stand idly by while your tyrannical Champion attacks us."

Hogosha snorted. "Your brightest was a traitor, and the rest of your—"

"Enough," Bayushi Muraisan shouted. "Your petty insults can continue soon enough, Hogosha-san. You cannot ignore the threat of the Kolat. We have heard the tales. We have heard of their strengths. They are our true enemies. The Scorpion stand ready to face them. Do you?"

Within the Imperial Palace, the Emperor heard their words and a strange smile twisted his face, shadows swirling in his eyes. And in the darkness around him, faceless things watched and laughed.

The time period known variously as the Hidden Emperor or the War Against the Darkness follows swiftly after the Clan Wars and is in some ways an even more chaotic and dangerous time for Rokugan. The Empire's past and present, indeed the very existence of the world, are at stake. Due to the extensive interference and deception practiced by the Lying Darkness, many events from this era seem paradoxical if not outright contradictory, making it a somewhat confusing setting and one not suitable for GMs and players who prefer a straightforward story. On the other hand, GMs who like challenging their players with mysterious conspiracies will find this era very appropriate, as will those who enjoy themes of subtle and paranoid horror. It is also worth noting that the canonical heroes of this era are not chosen by destiny in the manner of the Seven Thunders, so PC heroes can step into dominant roles in the story much more easily than in the Clan War era.

The Origins of the Story

The crisis of the Hidden Emperor era has its origins in far more ancient events—specifically, the creation of the Lying Darkness in the most ancient times and the Darkness' infiltration of the Empire at the end of the First War. Details on the nature, origin, and plans of the Lying Darkness and its minions (including its main champion in this era, the creature called Goju Adorai) are found in Chapter Seven of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*; it is strongly recommended that GMs review that chapter thoroughly in order to better understand the Hidden Emperor storyline. The Lying Darkness spent over a thousand years infiltrating the Empire to prepare for the moment when it could unmake creation, and the Hidden Emperor era is merely the culmination of this plot.

The tale of the Hidden Emperor is generally considered to begin in the year 1130, two years after the Second Day of Thunder (described in the previous chapter). Emperor Toturi I has presided over two years of peaceful recovery and reconstruction from the Clan Wars, and many Rokugani have begun to hope for a sustained era of harmony and prosperity. However, in the spring of that year the Empire is thrown into turmoil after the Emperor disappears at the end of Winter Court in Otosan Uchi. In fact, Toturi has been abducted by the Lying Darkness, but the Darkness' minions use their shapeshifting

abilities to plant evidence and create witnesses implicating the Scorpion Clan. Emerald Champion Kakita Toshimoko initially concludes the Scorpion are to blame, but a secondary investigation by Kitsuki Yasu, the daimyo of the Kitsuki family, demonstrates the physical evidence of Scorpion involvement is faked. Toshimoko cannot avoid condemning the Scorpion—the testimony of so many witnesses cannot be ignored—but Yasu's evidence persuades him that there is more afoot than initially appears. At Toshimoko's urging the Imperial Chancellor Takuan, a former general in Toturi's ronin army, orders the Scorpion Clan exiled from the Empire rather than simply exterminated. All Scorpion children under the age of twelve are fostered to the Crane, seemingly as hostages but in truth to protect the Scorpion Clan's future. A few weeks later the adult Scorpion are escorted into the Burning Sands by Lion general Matsu Gohei, disappearing from Rokugan. A few elite shinobi remain behind, mostly in the guise of ronin; they are led by Bayushi Aramoro, the younger brother of the late Clan Champion Bayushi Shoju.

With the Emperor missing, much power passes to Takuan; he encourages the clans to remain at peace but recognizes it is only a matter of time before the Emperor's absence allows old feuds to be re-ignited. The Empire quickly begins to slide toward chaos, helped along by the machinations of the Lying Darkness and its Shadowspawn.

Year 1130

- **The Crab March for Shiro Hiruma.** The Crab and their Naga allies have already planned a massive offensive against the Shadowlands with the goal of finally retaking the ancestral Hiruma lands. Despite the Emperor's disappearance they push ahead with the attack and succeed in retaking the long-lost Hiruma castle, a great moral victory for the clan.
- **The Gray Crane.** In the wake of the Scorpion exile, the Empire's uncertainty is made worse when Kakita Toshimoko apparently commits suicide, leaving a death haiku on a seaside cliff. In fact he has faked his death in order to search the Empire for the one truly responsible for the Emperor's disappearance. Rokugan soon begins to hear rumors of a formidable ronin duelist calling himself the Gray Crane.
- Two other former soldiers in Toturi's army, Hiroru and Ginawa, decide to set out in search of their old master. They are an unlikely pair who share only a former clan (the Lion) and a personal enmity for the Lying Darkness. Hiroru left the Lion after his master Akodo Kage trained him to be a Kolat assassin; Ginawa is a former Akodo who was disgraced by a Goju plot and carries the Bloodsword Revenge.
- Hida O-Ushi, the younger sister of Clan Champion Hida Yakamo, is ordered to marry in order to secure the future of the Hida family line. A violent tournament to choose her husband leads to an unexpected marriage to Shinjo Yasamura, the youngest son of the Unicorn Champion.
- In the absence of Imperial authority, veteran magistrate Shinjo Shirasu takes control of the Emerald Magistrates. Attempting to avert chaos in the now-vacant Scorpion lands, the Unicorn move their southern troops to take control of the major Scorpion urban center of Ryoko Owari. The few remaining Scorpion agents in Rokugan are angered by the move but recognize the Unicorn as a lesser evil than whoever framed them.
- **Aramoro Allies with the Mantis.** Hoping for his clan to one day return to its lands, Bayushi Aramoro secretly bargains with the Mantis Champion Yoritomo. He asks Yoritomo to use his troops and an Imperial edict granting him rule over "unaligned lands" to take control of the remaining Scorpion territories while the clan is gone. To cement the bargain, he fosters his son Aramasu into Yoritomo's care.

The saga of Aramasu is told in detail on page 158 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*. He is secretly a Kolat, but eventually betrays both his birth-clan and the Kolat conspiracy to become Yoritomo's adopted son and a loyal Mantis. He later serves as Mantis Clan Champion for over fifteen years before he is finally betrayed to the Scorpion by a ruthless subordinate, Yoritomo Kitao.

- **Darkness in the High House of Light.** The new Dragon Champion Hitomi, driven near-mad by the combined influence of the Obsidian Hand and Togashi's stolen power, falls under the influence of the corrupt ise zumi Kokujin. She demands all the Togashi change their names to Hitomi and exiles those who refuse. She also begins to research into the nature of the Lying Darkness and questions the Shadow-corrupted Thunder Shosuro, who is held in a crystal prison deep beneath the Dragon Clan's ruling palace.

Alternate Paths: The Passage of Time

In the official L5R timeline, the Hidden Emperor era begins only two years after the Day of Thunder and lasts a total of only four years (1130-1134). However, some GMs may wish to allow a longer period of build-up or a slower development of the main storyline, especially if they are placing PCs into important roles in the tale. The Lying Darkness is a patient adversary which has spent over a thousand years gathering the strength to overturn creation—there is no reason why it cannot wait a few more years to bring its plans to fruition if that better suits the pace of the GM's campaign.

Year 1131

- The Naga armies inexplicably abandon the Crab, offering no explanation for their actions. The undead sorcerer Kuni Yori, a former Crab utterly corrupted by the Taint, seizes this opportunity to unleash a horde of undead against the Crab troops at Shiro Hiruma. The Crab hold strong initially but the loss of their main ally leaves them in desperate straits.
- **A New Jade Champion.** Attempting to show his authority, Chancellor Takuan decides to hold the Tournament of the Jade Champion for the first time in centuries. A relatively unknown Lion shugenja named Kitsu Okura emerges as the victor. However, unknown to anyone, his power comes from a dark source: he discovered the imprisoned spirit of the Oni Lord Akuma, gave in to temptation and freed the demon in exchange for the power to win the tournament. The new Jade Champion slowly slips into madness, ignoring his duties.
- **The Agasha Defection.** Hitomi's abuse of the Togashi grows worse, resulting in the execution of all who cling to the Togashi name, even the old tattoo master Togashi Gaijutsu. Disgusted and horrified by Hitomi's actions, the majority of the Agasha family leave the clan under the leadership of Agasha Gennai. They are ultimately invited to join the Phoenix Clan, leaving only a few dozen behind under their daimyo Tamori.
- Yoritomo's forces occupy Beiden Pass and begin to claim the Scorpion lands, but Crane Champion Doji Kuwanan comes to mistrust the Mantis intentions, due in part to advisers under the control of the Lying Darkness. The Crane army lashes out and the Mantis withdraw back to Beiden Pass, where they stand off the Crane for several weeks.
- **The Siege of Sleeping Mountain.** The Naga arrive at the foot of the Dragon Mountains, drawn to the looming threat of the Foul within the Dragon lands. They send one of their own, the Naga called the Kazaq, to investigate; he is tattooed by Hitomi and severed from the Akasha. Fearing for the future, the armies of the snake-men storm the Dragon lands, trying to stop Hitomi before she goes too far.
- Hoshi, the half-mortal son of Togashi, asks the Brotherhood of Shinsei for help against Hitomi's madness. He begins tattooing monks of his own, forming the order of *tsurui zumi*, and joins with the Naga to try to stop Hitomi.
- Kitsu Okura, falling every day more deeply under the Taint, begins to corrupt his fellow Lion, especially the Kitsu family. Under the pretense of restoring traditions, Okura leads many Kitsu to begin using *maho* to further their goals. Okura himself summons an oni and gives it his name.
- Kuni Yori uses a powerful *maho* ritual and the skull of Fu Leng to resurrect the Lost warlord Moto Tsume, who perished along with countless other Shadowlands creatures during the Day of Thunder. Tsume immediately resumes leadership of the Dark Moto and swears alliance with Yori, dramatically increasing the strength of the Shadowlands forces assembled against the Crab.
- Winter Court without the Emperor is confused and uncertain, with the clans clearly maneuvering for the possibility of a second Clan War. The agents of the Lying Darkness sow discord and mistrust everywhere, and rumors also spread of strange incidents in the Lion lands and a looming Crab defeat against the Shadowlands. Hitomi's ambassadors from the Dragon Clan offer food and declarations of peace in exchange for help against the Naga.

Year 1132

- **The Lion March.** Lion Champion Ikoma Tsanuri, knowing the plight of the Crab and unaware of Kitsu Okura's corruption, leads a large portion of the Lion armies south to help the Crab fight the Shadowlands. However, the Lying Darkness intercepts and disrupts communications; the rest of the Lion Clan is left unaware of her plans, leading many to follow the lead of Kitsu Okura. The Crab do not receive any of Tsanuri's messages and begin to fear a possible invasion of their lands by the Lion; Hida O-Ushi, left in command of Crab defenses while her brother Yakamo fights at Shiro Hiruma, readies the Crab for a hopeless battle.
- In the light of growing rumors about *maho* in the Lion lands, a group of Unicorn magistrates led by Shinjo Shirasu investigates. They fight off an attack by a band of Tainted bushi and shugenja, but before they can look into the matter further they are confronted by the Jade Champion Kitsu Okura, who asserts jurisdiction over the matter and orders them to leave. Shirasu retreats but warn his Champion, Shinjo Yokatsu, who begins to gather his forces for a stronger move against the Lion.
- Unwilling to let the Mantis continue to control the most critical mountain pass in Rokugan, Doji Kuwanan marches his army to confront the lord of the Mantis at Beiden Pass. After a bitter fight Yoritomo retreats north, spreading their fight into Lion lands. Yoritomo withdraws slowly northward toward the Phoenix lands, pursued by Kuwanan.
- The Crab forces in Hiruma lands continue to endure siege by Kuni Yori's vastly superior army. They send messages to the Kaiu Wall asking for support, but all are intercepted by the Lying Darkness before reaching their destinations. Cut off from their lines of support, Hida Yakamo and his men survive only due to unexpected help from the Third Whisker tribe of the Nezumi.
- **Toturi I is Rescued.** A hodgepodge group of samurai led by a troop of Otaku Battle Maidens arrive by chance and fate at the long-abandoned Phoenix castle of Mori Kage Toshi. After a battle against the minions of the Lying Darkness they discover and rescue the weak but living Emperor Toturi. They carry him back to Otosan Uchi, unaware that Toturi has been corrupted by the Lying Darkness and is not the man he once was. The Empire, however, celebrates the victory of his return.
- Ginawa and Hiroru rescue the magistrate Kitsuki Kaagi from imprisonment by the forces of the Darkness. Kaagi recovers some of his sense of identity and returns to the Dragon lands, but not before telling the two heroes much about the true nature of their enemy. Hearing word of Toturi's rescue, Ginawa and Hiroru return to Otosan Uchi.

Toturi's Return and the Growing Darkness

When the Emperor returns many in Rokugan are relieved, but not for long. Toturi is now Shadow-corrupted and his actions after his return mark a major step forward in the plans of the Lying Darkness. Still, a spark of honor and sanity remains in the Black Lion and he often manages to twist the Darkness' wishes, trying to make it obvious something is wrong with him.

The Emperor's new orders, known as the Three Edicts, only aggravate the troubles within the Empire. He officially dissolves the Empire's truce with the Naga, dispatching the Imperial Legions to support the Dragon Clan against the snake-men. He also proclaims the Unicorn as the new Right Hand of the Empire, asking them to destroy the corrupted Kitsu family. Finally he appoints a new Emerald Champion by decree instead of the traditional tournament: Seppun Toshiken, who is actually the illegitimate son of Kakita Toshimoko. Toturi's erratic and increasingly temperamental behavior baffles most Rokugani, but a few begin to guess the truth—notably Ginawa, who remembers Toturi from their life together as ronin.

Alternate Paths: The Rescue of Toturi

Historically, the rather improbable group who rescued Toturi from Mori Kage Toshi included Otaku Kamoko (the Unicorn Thunder) and the Wasp daimyo Tsuruchi. In truth, almost any group of samurai could have been the rescuers, and GMs can easily work a group of PCs into this role in order to give them a more prominent role in the storyline.

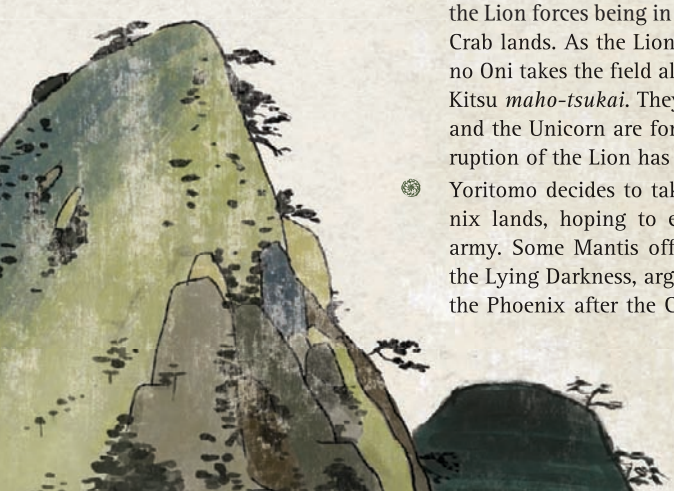
At the Darkness' behest Toturi begins to take action against the Kolat, which it sees as the greatest threat to its own survival. He exposes the young Phoenix prodigy Isawa Osugi as a Kolat and executes her personally, then commands that all agents of the conspiracy be rooted out and destroyed. However, he soon begins accusing innocent victims as well, driven by the Darkness' desire to sow more chaos. The Kolat, fearing exposure, removes most of its agents from the capital city. Within a few weeks Toturi's madness grows to the point that he orders Seppun Toshiken to personally execute the entire Imperial Court. Toshiken obeys the order but is sickened by his own actions and soon leaves the city; his last act before departing is to serve as the second for the seppuku of Chancellor Takuan, who cannot bear to continue serving the madman who was once his trusted leader.

With Takuan and the Imperial Court dead and Toshiken missing, the capital city's spirit is broken and it soon becomes a bastion for the forces of darkness. Shadowspawn stalk the streets at night and the population lives in terror.

- **Fall of a Hero.** As the siege of Hiruma Castle tightens, Crab Champion Hida Yakamo takes a few men and attempts to reach the Kaiu Wall and fetch help. They are intercepted by Moto Tsume's troops. The other Crab perish and Yakamo is captured and delivered to Kuni Yori. The undead sorcerer begins torturing him, hoping to force him to give in to the Taint.
- The Unicorn invade the Lion lands, acting on Toturi's orders and their own suspicions. They win several early engagements due to the majority of the Lion forces being in the south marching toward Crab lands. As the Lion seem about to lose, Okura no Oni takes the field alongside Tainted troops and Kitsu *maho-tsukai*. They turn the tide of the battle and the Unicorn are forced to retreat, but the corruption of the Lion has been revealed.
- Yoritomo decides to take his army into the Phoenix lands, hoping to escape the pursuing Crane army. Some Mantis officers, partly influenced by the Lying Darkness, argue that the low numbers of the Phoenix after the Clan Wars make their lands technically "unaligned," falling under Mantis authority by the terms of their Imperial charter. The Crane refuse to pursue Yoritomo into the lands of their frequent ally, but the Phoenix are not willing to surrender their territory to the Mantis and soon there is war between the two clans.
- **The Emperor's Gift.** Toturi organizes a grand tournament for his amusement, asking the clans to send their heroes to compete for the right to ask him for a single boon. The Dragon and Scorpion plot together and arrange for the tournament to be won by Bayushi Aramoro, disguised as a ronin. He asks the Emperor to give him the lands of the Scorpion Clan to rule, and as soon as Toturi agrees Aramoro reveals his true identity.
- Ikoma Tsanuri's forces reach the Crab lands and are surprised to come under attack from O-Ushi's troops. The superior Lion forces repel the assault, albeit not without losses. Due to continuing interference by the Lying Darkness it is almost impossible to clear the misunderstanding, and the Crab and Lion fight several more times in the next few weeks.
- **The Crane Civil War.** When Doji Kuwanan sends messages asking Daidoji Uji to bring help against the Mantis, the Lying Darkness intercepts the messages and instead leads the Daidoji daimyo to believe his ancestors want him to retake Shiro no Yogin from the Lion. Kuwanan sees only direct disobedience of his orders and marches home to punish the Daidoji for treason. A group of Asahina shugenja is sent to mediate, but are all killed by Shadowspawn; Uji and Kuwanan each blame the other for the atrocity. Within weeks the Crane Clan is in a state of civil war for the first and only time in its history.
- After weeks of torture, Hida Yakamo continues to defy Kuni Yori, who finally kills him in frustration. Yori disposes of the Jade Hand and boasts of Yakamo's death to the Crab at Shiro Hiruma, hoping to break their morale. Instead the Crab resist more fiercely than ever. Hida O-Ushi assumes the role of Clan Champion.

Hitomi's Change of Heart

Despite intervention by the Imperial Legions, the Naga armies continue to attack the Dragon lands, even managing to besiege Shiro Mirumoto. Hoshi fights alongside them, preparing to challenge Hitomi for rule of the Dragon. However, even as her clan crumbles around her Hitomi begins to realize the truth about the Lying Darkness, its connection to the mad Lord Moon, and her own dangerous madness. She frees Shosuro from her crystal prison, releasing the original Scorpion Thunder to face her destiny. The mad monk Kokujin, realizing Hitomi will no longer heed his words, steals Togashi's daisho and flees the Dragon lands.



When Hoshi finally storms in to confront Hitomi, she at first seems to accept his challenge, but then abruptly announces her departure and hands rule of the clan over to him. A somewhat bewildered Hoshi takes control of the Dragon lands while Hitomi sets out on a quest to correct her errors and defeat the Lying Darkness.

Of course, clever GMs will realize this resolution of the crisis in Dragon lands was by no means inevitable. Hitomi might easily have succumbed to the madness of the Obsidian Hand and become a powerful champion of the Lying Darkness, waging war against the rest of Rokugan with her legions of corrupted tattooed men.

The Return of Shinjo

Even as Hitomi relinquishes her hold on the Dragon Clan, all Rokugan is shocked when an army appears from the Burning Sands. Returning from their exile, the Scorpion are accompanied by the Kami Shinjo herself, along with legions of the Desert Moto who have remained in the Burning Sands for centuries. The reappearance of one of the Empire's founding Kami proves to not be quite the glorious event expected, however. Shinjo exposes and purges the Kolat who have infiltrated her clan, including many senior lords and daimyo. Champion Shinjo Yokatsu flees to the Kolat temple and countless other Kolat agents perish. Shinjo appoints the Moto family to lead her clan and names Moto Gaheris, the Khan of the Desert Moto, to the office of Clan Champion.

Shinjo's return to the Empire is a fulfillment of her ancient promise to always return to her descendents. It is also an event that shakes the Unicorn Clan to its foundation. The removal of Shinjo's own descendents from control of the clan, the purge of hundreds of Kolat agents, and the appointment of the barbaric Moto Gaheris to Clan Champion all result in a rapid and shocking transformation that affects the clan from top to bottom. Unicorn and non-Unicorn PCs alike may find themselves caught in the midst of this event, forced to grapple with the sudden revelation of Kolat treason.

However, if the GM is recreating Shinjo's return for a home game there is no requirement for it to follow the historical script. For example, Shinjo's long absence was due to her falling into slumber after an epic battle with the Lying Darkness centuries earlier. What if the Darkness had managed to corrupt Shinjo? What if the "Shinjo" who returned to Rokugan in the twelfth century was actually an agent of the Shadow, attacking the Kolat for its own reasons? A clever GM can use this sort of plot twist to surprise the players and make them reassess any prior as-

Alternate Paths: The Moon Spared

In the canonical history of Rokugan, Onnotangu is a deity driven mad by jealousy of the mortal world and the whispers of the Lying Darkness. He chooses to strengthen and support the Darkness, forcing mortals to confront and ultimately overthrow him.

However, GMs need not follow this storyline in their own version of Rokugan. Perhaps Lord Moon is ignorant of the Darkness or simply uninterested in its plots rather than actively supporting then. In such a case the confrontations with the Darkness may remain almost entirely within the mortal world, or perhaps the Rokugani will have to enter Tengoku and plead with the Sun and Moon to name the Shadow and break its power. Barring such a heroic event, the Kolat may be forced to take action, calling on secret rituals to pull the Sun and Moon down to earth and hopefully name the Shadow (see "The Kolat Versus the Darkness" later in this chapter for more details of this alternative path).

sumptions about the timeline, as well as forcing the PCs to step up and become heroes in place of the canonical figures.

- **Lion and Crab on the Wall.** Ikoma Tsanuri's Lion armies finally reach the Kaiu Wall and Hida O-Ushi prepares for a final hopeless battle, reinforced only by a few cavalry squadrons supplied by her husband Yasamura's Unicorn connections. When Tsanuri and O-Ushi meet face to face on the field, however, they finally realize they have been misled and quickly put their differences aside. Joining together as allies, they march to the rescue of Shiro Hiruma and shatter Kuni Yori's undead army.
- The Scorpion Clan, having returned to Rokugan alongside Shinjo, reclaims its territory and holdings. Scorpion Champion Bayushi Kachiko has learned the truth about the Lying Darkness from Shinjo; she purges the corrupted elements of the Shosuro family and sets out to warn the other clans of the truth. The Dragon and Unicorn Clans pay particular attention, since both have had their own encounters with the Lying Darkness. Slowly the Empire begins to realize what is truly afoot.
- Hitomi travels across the Empire, acquiring powerful relics made from the blood of Lord Moon. She eventually reaches the remote Shrine of the Three Sisters, where the enigmatic oracles who inhabit the shrine explain her destiny: she must challenge Lord Moon, whose madness has driven him to secretly assist the Lying Darkness.
- Shinjo leads the armies of several clans to attack Otosan Uchi and drive out the forces of the Lying Darkness from the capital. After a brief confrontation with Shinjo, Emperor Toturi disappears, spirited away from the city by his bride Isawa Kaede (who believes there is still hope for him). Samurai storm the Imperial palace and briefly wage battle with an avatar of Lord Moon, even as Hitomi uses her three obsidian artifacts to challenge Onnotangu to a duel. Hitomi and the mortals triumph simultaneously and Lord Moon is slain.

Shinjo's attack on Otosan Uchi is sometimes compared to the battle in the Imperial Capital on the Day of Thunder, but in fact the two events are not really in the same scale. Shinjo's army is considerably smaller than that which gathered to confront Fu Leng, and the forces of the Darkness prefer to rely on fear rather than brute force. On the other hand, previous experience from the Day of Thunder makes it easier for Shinjo to persuade the clans to join together against a corrupted Emperor. Not even the Lion are willing to risk a repeat of Hantei XXXIX's reign.

The appearance of Lord Moon's avatar in the Imperial Palace comes as a shock even to Shinjo, who did not realize her Celestial father was supporting the Lying Darkness. (At this point, only Hitomi knew the truth.) The avatar is a formidable foe but is ultimately defeated by Takeo, a *sohei* monk of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

- The Naga *jakla* (pearl sorcerer) known as the Shashakar recovers the Jade Hand and the corpse of Hida Yakamo from the Shadowlands. He uses a powerful ritual to bring Yakamo back to life, sacrificing his own place in the Akasha to merge Yakamo's soul with the soul of the ancient Naga hero known as the Qatol. The resurrected Crab Champion makes peace between his clan and the Naga, leading both to confront the Lying Darkness.
- With Toturi missing, the Kami Shinjo offers the throne of Rokugan to Yoritomo, who impresses her as the strongest leader in Rokugan. Although he is tempted, Yoritomo ultimately refuses, stating he will not accept a prize he has not earned.

Year 1133

- **Twenty-Seven Days of Darkness.** Spiritual upheavals strike both the Heavens and the world of mortals as the Celestial Order grapples with the death of Lord Moon. Stunned and enraged at her husband's death, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu deserts Tengoku and walks across the surface of the earth for twenty-seven days, plunging all the mortal world into darkness. This increases the power of the Lying Darkness many-fold, and the Goju begin acting far more openly.
- **The New Moon.** After visiting all the Great Clans and instructing them to fight the Darkness, Hitomi completes her destiny by committing ritual seppuku and ascending to the Heavens, becoming the new Moon.

- At the command of Akodo Kage, one of the ten Kolat Masters, Kolat agents emerge from hiding all across the Empire, striking out at the minions of the Lying Darkness with crystal weapons.
- **Shiro Shiba falls.** Yoritomo's Mantis armies capture the seat of the Shiba family, as the remaining strength of the Phoenix concentrates to defend Kyuden Isawa. Soon after, however, Yoritomo discovers that many of his close advisers are pawns of the Lying Darkness.
- **Yakamo Ascends.** The reborn Hida Yakamo encounters Lady Sun, drawn by her grief and despair. He acts as her second when she commits jigai, following her husband into death. Yakamo ascends to the Heavens as Lord Sun, restoring the Celestial balance alongside his old enemy Hitomi.

Mortal Gods

The ascension of two mortal heroes, Hitomi and Yakamo, to take over the rule of the Heavens is a major turning point in the history and cosmology of Rokugan, and it is one that has many consequences. The term 'the Age of Man' is often used to describe the period of mortal rule over the Heavens, and the era sees continual disruption of the Celestial Order and extensive theological debate within Rokugan itself. Even the Kolat conspiracy is affected by these events, as many of the Kolat leaders wonder if they have actually attained their goal of mortal dominance over the form of creation.

In the canonical history, the ascension of mortals to Heavenly power is ultimately not something which the Celestial Order can endure. Several decades later the Heavens reassert their primacy, expelling Hitomi and Yakamo and replacing them with the Jade and Obsidian Dragons. GMs who find the idea of mortals ruling the Heavens contrary to the Rokugani cosmology may choose to skip over this step and simply ignore the sub-plot involving the Sun and Moon, keeping the story of the Hidden Emperor era focused on the core battle against the Lying Darkness.

- The Crane civil war ends as Daidoji Uji realizes his errors and attempts seppuku. Doji Kuwanan arrives at Shiro Daidoji before the ritual can take place; he orders Uji to live and use his sword in defense of the Empire, and the breach within the clan is healed.
- The Goju attack the Ikoma histories en masse, burning and destroying. The damage to Rokugan's past is terrible, as part of the Empire's very identity is wiped out. At the same time, however, the remaining pure Kitsu begin to investigate the rumors of ancestors appearing in Rokugan and discover something terrible: the Spirit Realms themselves are under assault by the Lying Darkness, threatening not just Rokugan but all of creation.
- After almost three years of fruitless wandering, the Gray Crane—Kakita Toshimoko—is con-

Alternate Paths: Yakamo's Rebirth

The rebirth of Yakamo is one of the most remarkable and unique events in Rokugan's history. The Rokugani believe in kharmic reincarnation with the goal of eventually reaching the blessed realm of Yomi; the idea of coming "back from the dead" is bizarre and horrifying to them, and they associate the concept with the undead and *maho*. The Shashakar is able to get around both the rules of kharmic reincarnation and Rokugani beliefs by merging Yakamo's soul with the Akasha, sacrificing his own place in the Naga collective soul to reincarnate the ancient soul of the Qatol within Yakamo's body and merging it with Yakamo's own mortal soul. It is a radical act and one which shocks both races, but it does work—and infuses Yakamo with the supernatural power which will soon make him Lord Sun.

However, not all GMs may be comfortable with the idea of letting an NPC hero "break the rules" and return from the dead. And there is certainly no requirement that Yakamo had to be the one who became the new Sun. Potentially any mortal hero with Great Destiny (such as a PC) could have served as Amaterasu's second and inherited her position in the Celestial Order.

Conversely, if the GM does want a great hero to be reborn with the soul of the Qatol, there is no rule saying it has to be Yakamo! A player character hero could just as easily fill this role, although the GM should be cautious about awarding such power to a single character—jealousy and inter-party bickering could easily result.

fronted by his sons Seppun Toshiken and Kakita Ichiro. Toshimoko admits his many failures and asks his sons' forgiveness. The embittered Ichiro betrays his father and tries to murder him, only to be immediately cut down by Toshiken. Toshiken and his father return together to the Imperial Capital to fulfill the duties of the Emerald Champion.

- **Death of Toturi I.** In a moment of lucidity, Toturi realizes the Darkness' hold on him must be broken at all costs. He marries Isawa Kaede, since her status as Oracle of Void protects her from corruption and ensures Rokugan will at least have an Empress. Then he commits seppuku, freeing his soul and leaving Kaede to lead the Empire. Matsu Hiroru serves as Toturi's second, fulfilling a prophecy that he would kill his master. As one of her first acts, Empress Kaede dispatches Ginawa and Hiroru to seek out the ancient relic known as Oblivion's Gate, which she senses will hold the key to the Darkness' assault on the spirit realms.
- **Otaku Kamoko defeats the Dark Moto.** The Unicorn Thunder lures the Dark Moto into an all-out attack on the Unicorn Clan, then turns on them and leads them to their final defeat. (More information on Kamoko's deeds may be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*, pages 247-248.) Shinjo bears Kamoko's soul into the Heavens, and the family name is changed to Utaku in recognition of her great deeds.
- Yoritomo leaves the Phoenix lands and retreats to his homelands with his remaining strength, having lost many of his men in futile conflicts manipulated by the Darkness. His bitter spirits are further diminished when the Fox Clan abandons the Yoritomo Alliance. However, Moshi Wakiza of the Centipede agrees to marry him and merge her clan with the Mantis, restoring his spirits somewhat.
- The Dragon Clan, now led by Hoshi, emerges from its mountains to fight the Darkness and help restore order to the Empire.
- **The Tenth Kami appears.** Ginawa and Hiroru reach a strange ruined city in the Shadowlands: Volturnum, an ancient relic of the long-dead troll empire. Here they find Oblivion's Gate, an artificial portal to the Spirit Realms. The Goju are trying to pass through the gate to assault the spirit realms, but it is guarded by Ryoshun, the tenth Kami who died in Onnotangu's belly. Ginawa agrees to stay with Ryoshun to delay the Lying Darkness, while Hiroru uses the gate to travel back to Rokugan.
- **The Fate of Shosuro.** Bayushi Kachiko is drawn by kharmic dreams to the legendary Sleeping Lake beneath Kyuden Bayushi. There she encounters her ancestor Shosuro. The soul of Bayushi appears and draws them both into the lake to drown, taking their souls to the afterlife and thus finally saving Shosuro from the Lying Darkness.

The March to Volturnum

Warned by Hiroru, Empress Kaede commands the Great Clans to gather their armies and race through the Shadowlands to reach Oblivion's Gate. The march to Volturnum is a very difficult challenge for the armies of the Great Clans, not least because after the recent Clan War and the chaos caused by the Darkness their forces are only a pale shadow of what they were a decade before. Despite the dire situation only a few thousand samurai are available to send to the ruined city, and many of them have never experienced the horror of the Shadowlands. The Crab lend all their stockpiles of jade to the effort, but even this is not enough to prevent many samurai from falling to the effects of the Taint, including renowned warriors and leaders such as Mirumoto Taki and Iuchi Katta. Within a few years, the Dark Lord Daigotsu will forge a new army out of these countless Lost samurai.

The forces of both Kuni Yori and the Oni Lord Akuma oppose Rokugan's armies. Kuni Yori is defeated when the Doomseeker Iuchi Karasu traps them both in a Naga pearl. More unexpectedly, Akuma no Oni is slain by none other than Okura no Oni, for the demon with Okura's name carries the honor of the Lion Clan within itself and seeks redemption by confronting the forces of Jigoku. It dies, but its efforts help Rokugan's armies to reach Volturnum.

Despite their heroic efforts the clan army is seriously diminished by the time it reaches Oblivion's Gate. With creation itself hanging in the balance, the Elemental Dragons choose to intervene in the mortal world and offer assistance, delivering some of the Empire's greatest heroes

to the scene—including Yoritomo of the Mantis and Isawa Hochiu of the Phoenix.

Battle of Oblivion's Gate

The Great Clan army manages to fight its way into Volturnum, wielding crystal weapons to oppose the power of Nothing. Despite their efforts the forces of the Darkness, led by their champion Goju Adorai, appear unbeatable. Many heroes die, including Yoritomo, who is defeated by Adorai in personal combat. The armies of Rokugan seem doomed to defeat until a war cry comes from the Gate itself. The forces of Yomi have come through to support the living, led by Toturi, Doji Hoturi, and Isawa Tadaka along with many other heroes. In a moment of brilliant improvisation, Bayushi Aramoro and a large team of Scorpion shinobi commit seppuku, then immediately return through the Gate to flank the enemy.

The arrival of the ancestors shifts the balance of the fight, but it is not enough to overcome the power of the Darkness. At the critical moment the Dragon of Air flies directly into the battle, accepting the Taint in return for delivering Master of Fire Isawa Hochiu to confront Goju Adorai. The avatar of the Darkness is distracted by a Shosuro actress at a critical moment, buying time for Hochiu to strike him down with a crystal sword. The Master of Fire destroys Oblivion's Gate, stopping the Darkness' invasion of the spirit realms.

Without its champion the power of the Darkness falters. Hitomi has watched the battle from the Heavens, and at this critical moment she intervenes and gives a name to the Lying Darkness, breaking its power. She calls it Akodo, a name of honor and purity, and countless minions of the Nothing are returned to mortal form as new-made Lion samurai. Their enemy at last defeated, the weary forces of Rokugan retreat away from the Shadowlands, bringing with them thousands of re-embodied ancestral spirits. Among these spirits is Toturi himself, who reclaims the throne and sets about rebuilding the Empire.

- Unknown to most, the Tainted Air Dragon witnesses the last scrap of the Nothing slipping away from its defeat. The Dragon consumes the Nothing, transforming itself into the Shadow Dragon but limiting and containing the power of Nothing. The surviving remnants of the Goju and Ninube become its minions.
- Amidst the chaos of the battle, the Gray Crane is confronted by an old foe: the ronin Dairya, who has spent a decade seeking a rematch against Kakita Toshimoko after losing an eye to him in a roadside duel. Toshimoko reluctantly accepts the duel but refuses to draw his sword; Dairya cuts him in half, but feels robbed of his victory by the Gray Crane's refusal to fight. Dairya is never seen again, but many years later his Tainted soul possesses a Shadowlands artifact and forces a corrupted Crane to murder Seppun Toshiken.

The Clans and Factions During the Hidden Emperor Era

This era is one of the most confusing and chaotic in Rokugan's history. The Lying Darkness works through misdirection and deceit, and the clans find themselves fighting each other—or even themselves—with little understanding of how or why. Only at the end of the struggle does the truth become clear.

The Crab Clan

At the beginning of the War Against the Shadow the Crab Clan enjoys relatively high morale. They have purged their ranks of those who fell to the Taint during the Clan War and their Clan Champion, Hida Yakamo, bears the Jade Hand, making him a living symbol of purity. With the help of their Naga allies—who do not need jade to protect themselves from the Taint—they launch a vast offensive against the Shadowlands with the goal of reclaiming the Hiruma provinces and ancestral castle. The Kuni cleanse the Taint from the land, assisted by jakla of the Cobra Bloodline. Although the process leaves the Hiruma lands bleak and lifeless, it is nonetheless the first time in centuries that the border of the Shadowlands is pushed back. Many believe this has cleansed the honor of the Crab Clan from the disgrace of the late Hida Kisada's misguided alliance with the forces of Jigoku.

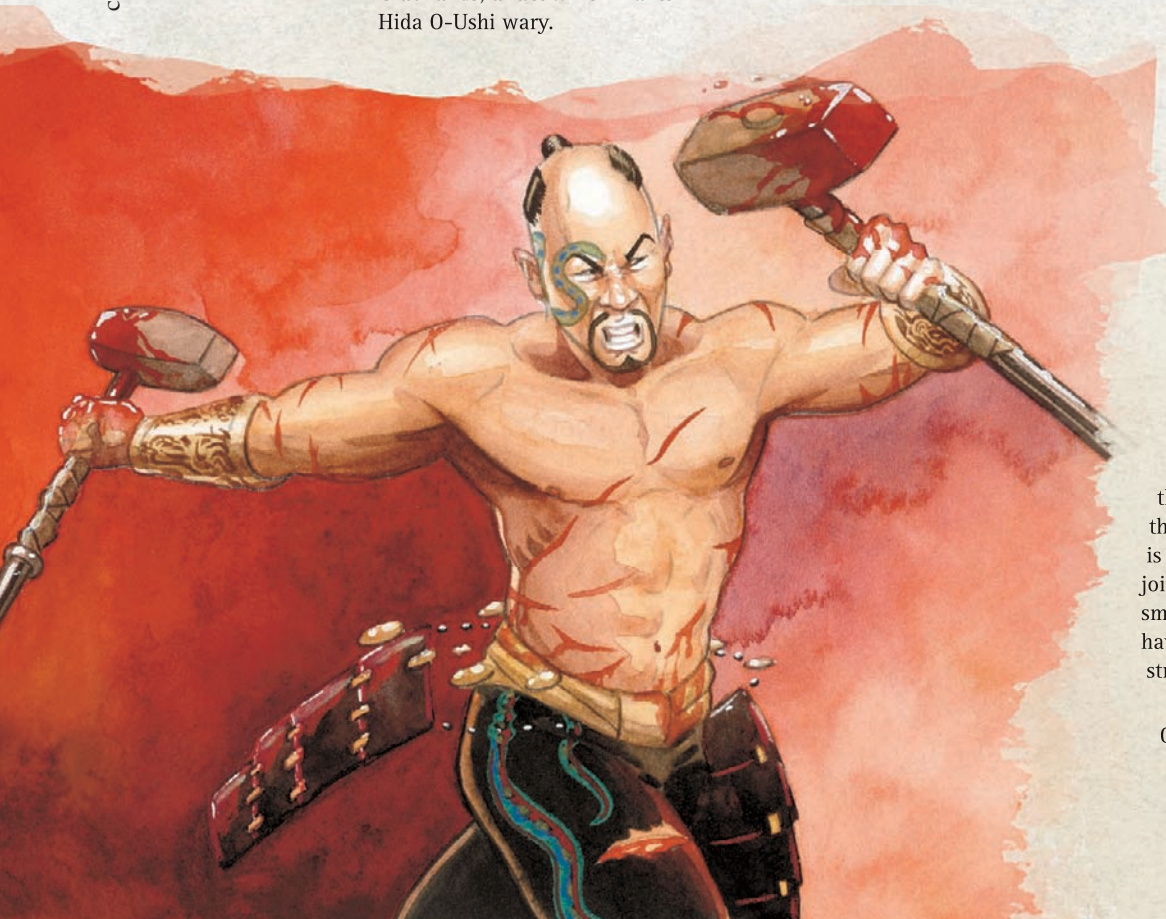
However, the situation quickly changes when the Naga suddenly depart to confront Hitomi. Shiro Hiruma is cut off from the Wall by Kuni Yori's undead horde. Hida Yakamo, Hiruma Kage, and their men endure a long and difficult siege. Meanwhile, Yakamo's younger sister Hida O-Ushi—newly married to Shinjo Yasamura—is left to command the rest of the clan, uncertain of her brother's

fate. The situation is made worse by what at first appears to be a Lion invasion; due to interference by the Lying Darkness, several blows are exchanged between the clans and the Crab fight on two fronts. Many within the clan believe they are doomed and their entire clan will be destroyed when the Lion armies reach the Wall.

Although the confusion is eventually cleared up and the Crab are able to ally with the Lion, the price is high. O-Ushi and her husband finally relieve the siege of Shiro Hiruma, but it is too late for Hiruma Kage and Hida Yakamo, both of whom are killed. O-Ushi, the only surviving child of Hida Kisada, grimly accepts her place as Clan Champion.

The resurrection of Hida Yakamo and his subsequent ascendance to the post of Lord Sun changes the situation once more, restoring hope and determination to the clan and leading them to join eagerly in the struggle against the Lying Darkness. The Crab are one of the few clans with any kind of crystal weapons, since such are also efficient against the Shadowlands, and they are accustomed to fighting monsters and shapeshifters. Indeed, the march to Volturnum would have been impossible without the sons of Hida and their nezumi allies, who have trod the dangerous grounds to the south of the Empire for centuries.

After the war and the defeat of the Lying Darkness, the Crab situation is mixed. On one hand, their clan remains pure, they have reclaimed Shiro Hiruma, and one of their greatest enemies and traitors, Kuni Yori, is no more. The fact that the new Sun is one of their own also boosts morale. On the other hand, their Naga allies return to the Great Sleep soon afterward and their jade stocks are depleted, while the ranks of the Lost have swollen from the aftereffects of the march to Volturnum. In addition, many of the returned spirits in Rokugan settle in Crab lands, a fact which makes Hida O-Ushi wary.



The Crane Clan

The Crane were one of the clans hit the worst by the Clan War, and they are still recovering when the Emperor disappears. Two years of peace have allowed them to regain part of their political influence and wealth but not nearly all of it. For the first time in history the Emperor is not betrothed to a Crane, and this removes one key advantage from the sons of Doji. They do still control the offices of Imperial Advisor (Kakita Yoshi) and Emerald Champion (Kakita Toshimoko), allowing them to retain significant political influence. Ironically, the Crane military is one of their key assets during this time, under the command of the Clan Champion Doji Kuwanan and the veteran warrior Daidoji Uji.

The exile of the Scorpion and the fostering of Scorpion children to the Crane Clan are good developments from the Crane viewpoint, despite the uncertainty created by the Emperor's disappearance. The Crane remember how the sons of Bayushi struck back during the Clan War, and hostages are one of the best ways to prevent a recurrence of such events.

The first major military involvement of the Crane during this era is their attack against the Mantis. Kuwanan is worried at the prospect of the Scorpion lands falling into the hands of the ambitious and untrustworthy Mantis, and the Scorpion lands could bring the Crane needed extra wealth, not to mention the Crane are already guardians of the Scorpion children. Of course, as with many conflicts in this era, Goju shapeshifters infiltrate the Crane ranks and encourage Kuwanan to launch the conflict.

The Crane civil war comes as a much harder blow to the clan. The conflict, while brief, is bitter and bloody, with the Doji and Kakita standing together against the Daidoji while the Asahina are sidelined after their initial group of mediators is slaughtered by the Goju. The Crane are not used to fighting themselves, and the sheer unexpected nature of the conflict makes it far more harsh. It also badly disrupts their harvest that year, resulting in famine that undermines the clan's economic strength. Hundreds of samurai die before the folly stops and Kuwanan restores unity to the clan. The realization that they have been manipulated by the Shadow prompts the Crane to swear vengeance against the forces of the Lying Darkness, and it is a fiercely reunited Crane Clan which joins the march to Volturnum—albeit in small numbers, since the past two years have greatly diminished their army's strength.

In the aftermath of the battle of Oblivion's Gate, the clan must once

again rebuild—now without Kuwanan, who dies in the final conflict with the Shadow. The death of Kakita Toshimoko is another blow to the clan's power base, but fortunately it happens after he makes peace with his illegitimate son Toshiken, effectively ensuring the Crane keep control of the office of Emerald Champion. The return of the Scorpion Clan is also worrisome, and this time Crane hostages are taken as a show of good will between the rivals. This at least ensures an uneasy peace between them, and the clan moves forward under the leadership of regent Kakita Kaiten, hoping for a better future.

The Dragon Clan

The years after the Clan War represent a major transition for the Dragon Clan, which had been led for 1100 years by the Kami Togashi under a succession of false names. In the immediate aftermath of the Day of Thunder, rule of the Dragon passes to Hitomi, who absorbed some of the power of Togashi and who bears the Obsidian Hand—the severed hand of Lord Moon himself—on her arm. The hand is touched by both Lord Moon's madness and the taint of the Shadow, while Togashi's power changes her perceptions and makes her less human. Much of her behavior is erratic and tyrannical, sometimes cruel, and increasingly distorted by the influence of the Lying Darkness. She invites the tattooed madman Kokujin back into the clan and begins using her blood to tattoo a new order of monks who take her name. The sinister Kokujin urges her to accept only total loyalty to her rule, and she commands all the tattooed monks to swear fealty to her; those who cling to the Togashi name are executed or expelled, the first obvious sign of the growing darkness in her mind and heart. At the same time, the Obsidian Hand itself begins to physically transform her. By the time the Emperor disappears, she is already half-obsidian and something else than human.

Hitomi is aware of the Lying Darkness due to the presence of Shosuro in the crystal prison below the High House of Light, and she begins questioning the imprisoned Thunder and experimenting with the Darkness' power. The Naga sense the growing strength of the Foul within Dragon lands and send one of their own, the Kazaq, to investigate; Hitomi captures the Kazaq and tattoos him, severing him from the Akasha, the Naga collective soul. While this is not a unique event—indeed Hitomi "converts" many samurai to her service in the same way, such as Doji Reju and Shinjo Tashima—it confirms to the Naga that the Foul is on the loose, triggering a war between the ancient race and the Dragon Clan. Hitomi orders ruthless actions to defeat the Naga, particularly after she discovers that several tattooed men—including the hero Togashi Mitsu and Togashi's half-mortal son Hoshi—have joined the fight alongside the Dragon Clan shows its most dark and violent side during these times, as many Dragon samurai simply accept Hitomi's orders without question. However, the priests of the Agasha family are disgusted by her actions and almost all of them leave the clan to join the Phoenix—an event which has not occurred since the Yasuki break almost seven hundred years before.

Ultimately, Hitomi pulls back from the madness which threatens to consume her and her clan, thanks in part to meeting the magistrate Kitsuki Kaagi after he is freed from the grip of the Darkness. She sets Shosuro free and ceases her experiments, instead embarking on the personal quest which eventually leads to her becoming Lady Moon. Kokujin flees with the swords of Togashi (which he coveted from the beginning) and the rule of the Dragon Clan passes to Hoshi.

After the Hidden Emperor era, the Dragon Clan enters a time of reconciliation. The knowledge of the Shadow gained from the writing of Kitsuki Kaagi and Hitomi's insights allowed the clan to offer great help to Rokugan, but their own ranks are left in disorder by the Agasha break and the split within the tattooed order. Hoshi, trying to find balance within the clan, formalizes the existence of three orders of tattooed monks: the Togashi, Hitomi, and Hoshi. The lack of a proper shugenja family is sorely felt; the few remaining Agasha—led by their daimyo Agasha Tamori—are filled with bitterness toward their "traitor" relatives, while many in the Mirumoto and Kitsuki resent the Phoenix for accepting the defecting Agasha. However, in the aftermath of war and chaos the clan is not ready for war with the Phoenix, at least for now.

The Lion Clan

The intensely traditionalist Lion Clan finds it difficult to adapt to the new Empire after the Clan War. Many remain instinctively loyal to the Hantei dynasty despite the corruption of the last Hantei by Fu Leng and are reluctant to accept the rule of Toturi. Their armies were greatly weakened by the Clan Wars and have not yet fully recovered, while their old enemy the Crane remain unbowed and dangerous. The Akodo family is still disbanded, for Emperor Toturi is unwilling to show excessive favoritism to his old clan by restoring them. The new Clan Champion, Ikoma Tsanuri, is also a controversial choice—although she is talented and fiercely loyal to the clan and Empire, many have difficulty accepting Tsanuri as a legitimate ruler despite her close association with their former Champion, Matsu Tsuko. In sum, the Lion Clan is suffused with bitterness and negative emotions, creating openings for the Lying Darkness and, more surprisingly, the Shadowlands to exploit.

Kitsu Okura is the man primarily to blame for what happens to the Lion Clan in this era. Seduced by the power of the Oni Lord Akuma, he easily wins the Jade Championship despite suspicion from the Crab. Instead of redeeming the long-vacant position, he uses his status to convince more samurai to join him in following the path of *maho* and the Taint. He lures many followers down a dark path of corruption. When Ikoma Tsanuri chooses to march south and save the Crab Clan, Okura fills the void of power she leaves behind. All those Lion who despise the changes of modern times are easy victims for his machinations. When the Unicorn demand explanations for the disturbing reports of their magistrates, Okura and his followers retaliate with the full scope of their *maho* powers, triggering a war that rages all the way to the gates of the Matsu castle. The Lion are victorious for a time, but their shame become obvious to all, and many pure Lion turn against Okura or commit seppuku in protest of his abominable actions.

Okura meets his end when Akuma no Oni demands he give his name to an oni. The power of the summoned oni is more than Okura can withstand and he soon dies, freeing the female Okura no Oni to rampage through Rokugan. However, before his death Okura—in an impulse, perhaps, of guilt or lingering honor—manages to infuse a Lion ancestral spirit into the oni. Okura no Oni is changed by this and grows to admire the very Lion Clan which she was summoned to destroy; during the subsequent march to Volturnum she fights a suicidal battle against Akuma no Oni and actually manages to slay the Oni Lord at the cost of her own life. The Fortunes cleanse her of the Taint and allow her to become the guardian of Tengoku, the only oni ever so redeemed.

Notwithstanding the redemption of Okura's name, the purging of the Taint from the Lion is not a swift or easy process. Kitsu Motso becomes the new Lion Clan Champion after Tsanuri's death during the march to Volturnum. He begins a long process of atonement and purges, resulting in the seppuku of many Tainted Lion. The return of the Akodo family at the end of the War Against the Darkness is a great blessing, restoring a sense of hope to the clan, although many of the new Akodo have difficulty adapting to their new identities after countless years as servants of the Lying Darkness. The return of the Akodo ronin to the clan is also a difficult transition, but the painful process is helped along by the appointment of the legendary hero Ginawa as the new daimyo of the family. During the War of the Spirits a decade later the Lion will prove they have finally restored their honor and loyalty.

The Mantis Clan

As the Hidden Emperor era begins, Yoritomo's Alliance is shaky. Many Minor Clans begin to doubt the purpose of the Alliance, since the Clan War is over and Fu Leng is defeated. Moreover, the Mantis Clan are now a Great Clan headed by the Yoritomo family, a reality unsettling and disturbing to many in the Empire. The traditional Great Clans do not wish to afford the Mantis the same respect they give to each other, and the other Minor Clans feel the Mantis are dominating them and using the Alliance as a means of control. However, none can deny the Mantis now have numbers and resources to make them a real player in the Empire's political and military scene, especially in light of the weakness of some of the Great Clans (especially the Phoenix). The Mantis lands were spared from the ravages of the Clan Wars and their food and resources quickly win them friends and favors across the Empire. Proof of their growing influence is seen in the secret pact made between Bayushi Aramoro and Yoritomo to administrate the lands of the Scorpion, an act which offers the Mantis a chance at a major foothold on mainland Rokugan.

Sadly, the conflict with the Crane prevents that from happening. Doji Kuwanan is a skilled general at the head of a powerful Clan, and Yoritomo is forced to wage a

defensive struggle, retreating across Lion lands and eventually to the Phoenix territories. Yoritomo hopes to rest there, as the Crane hesitate crossing into their ally's territory, but the manipulations of the Darkness soon trigger a further war with the Phoenix.

The Mantis do manage to win several battles against the Phoenix and occupy most of their southern provinces. Indeed, the Mantis are not the only ones to question the right of the Phoenix to exist as a Great Clan, given their extremely low numbers after the catastrophes of the Clan Wars. Eventually, however, Yoritomo discovers he has been manipulated into a far larger and uglier conflict than he ever wanted.

The failed wars on the mainland have a political cost as well: the Fox abandon the Alliance and their leader Ryosei spurns Yoritomo's offer of marriage. He eventually marries Moshi Wakiza instead, merging the Centipede Clan into the Mantis, but before their first child can even be born the impending Battle of Oblivion's Gate draws them into the Shadowlands. Yoritomo dies there, while Wakiza is Tainted and is forced to bear her daughter Kumiko secretly at a remote temple on the Mantis Isles. The aftermath of the War Against the Darkness is thus a harsh time for the fledgling Great Clan. Yoritomo Aramasu, the new Champion, successfully petitions the Emperor for the right to officially absorb the Centipede and the Wasp into the Mantis Clan as the Moshi and Tsuruchi families, but the Tortoise politely refuse the offer to do the same, and the apparent termination of Yoritomo's bloodline casts the future of the entire clan in doubt. The Mantis focus on rebuilding their numbers and trying to integrate three different cultures into one. It will be many years before they play a significant role in Rokugan's public scene once more.

The Scorpion Clan

The Hidden Emperor period is a bitter time for the Scorpion as they are forced into the role of scapegoats by the Lying Darkness. For the second time in less than ten years they are stripped of their status and lands... and this time they are innocent. While the Emerald Champion suspects as much, he is forced to act by public pressure and the Scorpion are exiled into the Burning Sands. What little rebuilding and improvement of relationships they accomplished after the Day of Thunder is lost. Bayushi Kachiko leads her clan into the desert, leaving Bayushi Aramoro behind to run the few Scorpion agents staying in Rokugan.

In the Burning Sands the Scorpion are quickly assaulted and enslaved by the gaijin empire known as the Senpet. Of course, the Clan of Secrets is not easily defeated and they quickly adapt to their new circumstances, constantly working to subvert their masters and find a way to escape. Kachiko and others—including several non-Scorpion who accompanied or escorted the clan into the desert—become embroiled in complex plots and schemes between the many factions of the Burning Sands. They meet a mysterious race of creatures called the Ashalan who craft weapons of magical crystal, and Kachiko even manages to convince the Senpet she is the reincarnation of Selqet, one of their gaijin deities. Ultimately, events in the Burning Sands culminate in something known as the Awakening in which the Kami Shinjo is released from her centuries-long slumber. With Shinjo's help the Scorpion are freed and travel back to the Empire, bringing a handful of Senpet and Ashalan with them.

At nearly the same time, Bayushi Aramoro wins the tournament of the Emperor's Gift in the guise of a ronin, regaining the Scorpion lands. The clan returns with Shinjo and quickly reclaims its homeland—with the exception of the city of Ryoko Owari, which remains in the hands of the Unicorn. Thanks to their contacts with the Kami Shinjo and the Ashalan, the Scorpion now know the truth about the Lying Darkness and Kachiko works to purge its influence from the clan. While the Scorpion have the greatest knowledge of the Shadow, they are also its first victim, with countless Shosuro lost to its power over the years. Now, armed with Ashalan crystal weapons, they destroy the Darkness wherever they can find it and join hands with old rivals like the Dragon to wage war against the Goju. Ultimately the Scorpion are hailed as heroes during the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, while Kachiko dies as she redeems Shosuro's soul in the caves beneath Kyuden Bayushi.

After Oblivion's Gate the Scorpion are finally officially reinstated as a Great Clan by Emperor Toturi. Their new Champion is Bayushi Yojiro, a *junshin* but also a highly skilled and experienced man; he capitalizes on the shame the other clans feel for the unjust banishment of the Scorpion Clan, and their network of allies and influence quickly recovers. The Soshi and Shosuro hunt all remnants of the Darkness out of the clan, trying to make sure Rokugan never has to face the same horror again.

The Unicorn Clan

The Clan War left the Unicorn Clan in relatively good shape, especially compared to its rivals. Shinjo Yokatsu, an experienced and skilled man, led his clan well and won several key engagements while avoiding the massive internal conflicts and destruction which afflicted so many other clans. After the war, Otaku Kamoko and Iuchi Karasu are hailed as heroes of the Empire and the clan overall receives a great deal of respect. The new Emperor issues a new Imperial Charter naming the Unicorn as protectors of the Empire's laws, and the Unicorn take advantage of this to secure many postings for their samurai as Emerald Magistrates. More than ever the Unicorn are reputed and admired for their swift armies and their sense of justice.

When both the Emperor and the Emerald Champion disappear, the Unicorn mobilize their magistrates to fill the gap, ensuring the law does not become forgotten. But with all the strange events in the Empire they are soon led into conflict with several other clans. The most notable result is a war with the Lion: the discovery of Tainted samurai in Lion lands leads to a more extensive investigation and ultimately a full-scale military invasion. At first the war is a success, as the bulk of the Lion forces are marching toward Crab lands and the clan is disorganized. When the Unicorn reach Shiro Matsu, however, Kitsu Okura and his followers unleash an array of foul *maho*, including several summoned oni. The Unicorn are badly defeated and forced to retreat, although border skirmishes continue for months afterward.

The most significant event of this era, of course, is the return of Shinjo—indeed this is arguably the single most important event in Unicorn history. At first the clan greets her return with unadulterated joy, but this soon changes when she unleashes her wrath on the Kolat who have infiltrated her clan. She kills hundreds of Kolat samurai, the greatest numbers coming from the family which bears her own name. Among those killed are numerous individuals held in very high esteem, including the Otaku daimyo and a high proportion of the clan's magistrates. The Clan Champion Yokatsu is revealed to be one of the ten Masters of the Kolat and flees into hiding (he is hunted down and killed years later by his own son Shono). The clan is deeply traumatized by this event, especially when Shinjo appoints the Moto as its new rulers. Although the arrival of many Moto from the Burning Sands bolsters the clan's numbers, it also brings dramatic social changes which will affect the clan for years to come.

With the Kolat driven out, Shinjo leads her clan into conflict with the Lying Darkness. The Unicorn are actually among the best-equipped to fight the Shadow, since they have encountered the entity more than once during their journeys outside Rokugan and many of them remember its nature and weaknesses. Their help proves invaluable, both in driving the Shadow out of Otosan Uchi and later confronting it at Volturnum.

Although the Battle of Oblivion's Gate is the climax of this era for Rokugan as a whole, for the Unicorn it is almost secondary to another battle which takes place in their own lands: the final confrontation with the Dark Moto and the defeat of Moto Tsume, the daimyo who led the family to near-destruction 400 years earlier.

With the Dark Moto purged and the Empire safe from the Lying Darkness, Shinjo departs to the Celestial Heavens, leaving Moto Gaheris in command of the Unicorn. Although the clan as a whole is triumphant, it now faces an era of significant change. The Shinjo family has been dishonored and the Shinjo are pariahs within their clan, struggling to reclaim their reputation. The Iuchi also suffer, as their daimyo Iuchi Dairu is murdered by his own daughter Shahai, who succumbs to the lure of *maho*. The Otaku have not suffered great tragedy, but change their family name to Utaku so that Kamoko is the last to bear the name of their founder. The Moto, new rulers of the clan, invigorate many of the most gaijin traditions of the Unicorn and reorganize the clan armies to match their barbarian fighting style, leading the clan toward a future of conflict with others—especially the Lion.

The Imperial Families

While the Imperial Families were largely able to retain their roles and status despite the change of dynasties at the end of the Clan War, they are badly shaken when the new Emperor disappears. Many Seppun commit seppuku in shame, while others scour the Empire for any signs of Toturi. When the Emperor returns, the Seppun are overjoyed, even more so when Seppun Toshiken is named Emerald Champion. However, the subsequent dark behavior of the Shadow-influenced Emperor forces the Seppun into fighting against the Great Clans when Shinjo marches on the Imperial capital. The family is left badly weakened at the end of the War Against the Darkness, although Seppun Toshiken does turn into a strong Emerald Champion and gives the family some of its prestige back in later years.

The Otomo are in a weak position during this era. Chancellor Takuan completely ignores them and the clans treat them little better, especially during the Emperor's absence. Resentment and bitterness among the Otomo lead to many of them being consumed by the Lying Darkness, while others die at Toshiken's hand when Toturi orders the massacre of the Imperial Court. After the war finally ends, the Otomo look forward with relief to a period of stability in which they can rebuild their influence... but they also hear rumors of a Hantei who has returned through Oblivion's Gate.

The Miya are very busy during the Hidden Emperor period and in many ways are the main reason why Imperial prestige as a whole remains intact. Their leadership troubles from the Clan War era lie behind them and they focus resolutely on traveling the Empire to forge treaties, avert famines, and solve numerous other problems. While the Lying Darkness tries to provoke strife, the Miya work to protect peace, and the two clash often during this time. Indeed, their Empire-wide viewpoint means the Miya heralds are among the first to realize something is amiss beyond mere clan rivalries. Thanks to their work, Rokugan is far less damaged by the War Against the Darkness than it could have been, and they also help the rebuilding effort afterward.

This era also sees the last deeds of Toturi's Army, the ronin force which he created during the Clan War. During his absence they serve the Chancellor—who is of course their former general—and work to protect the people. However, after Toturi returns he sends them into several pointless conflicts, most notably against the Naga. Ultimately they lose many of their remaining heroes at Oblivion's Gate, and once the Shadow is defeated the days of Toturi's Army are over. Most of the survivors join the Monkey Clan or the Imperial Legions, while a dedicated few reorganize themselves into the Legion of the Wolf, an independent ronin force under the general Saigorei. Although the Legion of the Wolf continues to fight for the people, its small size means it is quickly forgotten by the Empire as a whole.

The Minor Clans

The most important effect of the Hidden Emperor period on the minor clans is of course the slow end of Yoritomo's Alliance. Internal disagreements, manipulation from the Shadow, and the lack of a common enemy causes the Alliance to gradually collapse. Leading the way out of it is the Fox Clan, as Kitsune Ryosei refuses to marry Yoritomo and preserves her clan's independence for the time being. The Tortoise negotiate their way out a bit more skillfully, and remain on good terms with the Mantis despite not joining them, while the Centipede and Wasp ultimately give up their independence to become families within an enlarged Mantis Clan.

One Minor Clan which attracts attention during this time is the newly created Monkey Clan. It is led by Toku, a favorite vassal of the Emperor and one of the greatest heroes of the Clan War. Many samurai from Toturi's Army join the new Minor Clan, blurring the line between the two groups. These experienced warriors and the Emperor's favor allow the Monkey to quickly become a surprisingly strong clan with a well-respected (if small) army. They participate in the battles against the Naga and defend the capital city (many among them are also part of the Imperial Guard). The clan is granted extra lands at Scorpion expanse during the Scorpion exile in the Burning Sands; when the Scorpion return they wisely choose not to make enemies of the Monkey, instead arranging a wedding between Toku and Shosuro Inao, the Shosuro daimyo's daughter. This in turn gives the Monkey another strong ally in the years to come.

The other Minor Clans—the Sparrow, Badger, Hare, Dragonfly, and Falcon—try to survive the era as best they can, with varying degrees of success. The Dragonfly are embroiled in the conflicts of the Dragon, and even their best diplomats experience difficulties during these times. The Hare, on the other hand, are used to difficult circum-

stances and hidden enemies. Shinjo's return is a tremendous opportunity for them to strike at the Kolat, and they also adapt their methods to fight the Lying Darkness. Thanks to a well-concluded investigation in Otosan Uchi (albeit under obscure circumstances) the Hare are granted the right to have a second family, the Ujina, and the few Ujina samurai in existence soon become known as intimidating fighters.

The Badger continue to serve as mercenaries to gather funds to rebuild their clan, but it is a slow and difficult effort. The Falcon are nearly destroyed by a Shuten Doji spirit and are ultimately absorbed by the Crab to save them from collapse. The Sparrow are also sorely tested, as the Lying Darkness often tries to tempt them with promises of wealth and glory. Only the purest of them survive, but their spirit remains strong.

The Naga

After the Clan War the Naga remain awake and active in Rokugan. They believe the Foul, their great enemy, has not yet been defeated despite the death of Fu Leng. The first two years of Toturi's rule are an interesting time for the Naga as they learn to peacefully interact with humanity. Limited visits do take place between the two cultures, and a wary respect develops, helped along by a few key personal relationships—most famously Mirumoto Daini and his love affair with the Mara, which ultimately gives forth a half-Naga child named Mirumoto Mareshi. The Naga also forge a military alliance with the Crab and assist them in retaking the Hiruma lands.

However, the War Against the Darkness puts human-Naga friendship to the test. The Naga perceive the Lying Darkness as simply another aspect of the Foul, and they sense its rising activity and especially its growing influence in Dragon lands. When the Kazaq does not return from his investigation of the Dragon territory—and in fact is severed from the Akasha completely—their worries are confirmed. They abandon the Crab overnight and travel across the Empire to attack the Dragon lands. In a shocking move, Mirumoto Daini supports the Naga over his sister, and Hoshi—the half-mortal son of the previous Champion—also joins the fray with his own tattooed men and allies from the Brotherhood of Shinsei. This odd alliance battles with Hitomi's loyal Dragon for months and many lives are lost in the conflict, especially after the corrupt Emperor commits the Imperial Legions to support the Dragon.

When Hitomi finally realizes her error and relinquishes her rule of the Dragon, the Naga retreat as quickly and mysteriously as they attacked. They know the Shadow's greatest power is now shifting to the south, to Otosan Uchi and Volturnum. Sensing the importance of what is to come, the Shashakar—the head of the Cobra Bloodline—sacrifices himself to bring Hida Yakamo back and join his soul with the Akasha, rebuilding the Naga alliance with the Crab and bringing forth the soul of the ancient Naga hero, the Qatol, to restore the Sun. The Naga religion believes the Sun and Moon are the Bright Eye and the Pale Eye of their god, Atman, so the fall and restoration of these two divinities has if anything even more significance to them than it does to humanity. The presence of the Qatol's soul within Yakamo means the Akasha is forever linked to the new Sun.

The Naga join the final march to Volturnum to confront the forces of the Lying Darkness. Since they do not need jade to protect themselves from the Taint, they are invaluable allies during this struggle and the breach between them and humanity is closed. But despite this triumph, the Naga sense the final confrontation with the Foul has not yet arrived and they may still be needed once more in the future. They choose to return to the Great Sleep, leaving only a few of their number awake to watch over their people. Before they retreat the Naga give humanity a final gift, a golden pearl of great size. The pearl is produced by the Akasha to purify itself from the human interaction which came with Yakamo's soul; it is originally intended as a gift to the Emperor, but due to a misunderstanding it winds up in the hands of the Unicorn instead. It later hatches to reveal what seems to be a human female, a woman who calls herself Akasha and embodies many traits of the Naga people. She forms a bridge between the Naga and humanity, and her influence ensures the Unicorn watch over the sleeping Naga carefully.

The Shadowlands

The aftermath of the Clan War initially brings on one of the lowest ebbs in Shadowlands activity in centuries, making the Pre-Coup era look downright war-torn by comparison. Fu Leng's death along with the massive slaughter of his armies leaves the Shadowlands without strong leadership and with its numbers at least temporarily reduced. Without the influence of the Dark Kami the natural chaotic tendencies of the Shadowlands also assert themselves more strongly, with the Oni Lords struggling for dominance while the undead Kuni Yori attempts to build his own power base. This division and lack of organization leaves the Shadowlands supine in the face of the Crab-Naga offensives that reclaims the Hiruma lands and castle. For a time, it seems the Shadowlands might be facing total defeat.

However, the rise of the Lying Darkness prevents the rest of Rokugan from joining the Crab in a full effort to defeat the Shadowlands, and the numbers of goblins and undead recover much more quickly than those of humans. Within a couple of years, Kuni Yori is strong enough to besiege the Crab at Shiro Hiruma and even take the life of Hida Yakamo.

However, despite Yori's vile deeds the Shadowlands has not yet recovered enough to pose a serious existential threat to the Empire again, or even to withstand a strong offensive. When the clans undertake the march to Volturnum they are able to fight their way through to the ancient troll city despite opposition from both Yori and Akuma no Oni. Indeed, the Oni Lord is ultimately killed by the redeemed Okura no Oni.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Oblivion's Gate the Shadowlands remains weak, although the Crab Clan's low

stocks of jade mean they will remain in a defensive position for several years. However, a future threat emerges from the hundreds of samurai who fall to the Taint during the march to Volturnum. These Lost men and women will eventually be organized under a single man, one who calls himself Daigotsu.

Rokugan in a Time of Chaos and Civil War

The War Against the Darkness is a trying time for Rokugan, and it is no coincidence that it happens just after the Clan War. The Lying Darkness sees Rokugan is at its weakest in many ages, while the passage of centuries has allowed the Darkness itself to grow ever stronger. The Goju manipulate the clans into the second Empire-wide conflict of the decade, resulting in not only war and famine but also some truly exceptional circumstances such as civil wars within clans.

Famine is an ever-present threat during chaotic periods in the Empire's history (see Chapter Four, The Great Famine, for the most extreme example). During the Hidden Emperor era the problem is further exacerbated by the Empire-wide nature of the conflict and the fact that Rokugan has not yet truly recovered from the preceding Clan War. Crane armies operate in Scorpion and Lion lands, the Mantis move through both territories and eventually occupy much of the Phoenix lands as well, the Unicorn invade the Lion, the Naga assault the Dragon, and the Lion themselves march south through Scorpion and Crane lands to reach the Crab. All of these campaigns draw on supplies from the local populace, interrupting the harvests and the flow of rice between farmlands and cities. Inevitably, food shortfalls lead in turn to peasant revolts and urban unrest, not to mention economic warfare between the clans. All of this is rich ground for role-playing scenarios, as the PCs must grapple with both the practical difficulties and tough moral choices created by such an era. Chapter Four, The Great Famine, offers a setting in which such challenges are the primary focus, but the Hidden Emperor era should remind GMs that these problems are always present during the wars and conflicts that assail the Empire.

Although famine and war can and do shake Rokugan's social structure, the Hidden Emperor period also sees a far more

Civil Wars in Other Eras

Officially, the Crane and Dragon civil wars during the Hidden Emperor era are the only major civil wars known to have occurred in Rokugan (although the Lion got very close during the final year of the Clan War). However, there is no reason why this should actually be true. Rokugan makes a practice of hiding the more embarrassing and shameful elements of its history, and a civil war is something most clans are happy to forget. For example, in earlier centuries the Lion sometimes encouraged their regional daimyo to fight each other on a small scale in order to promote excellence among their soldiers. Similarly, during the sixth century a secret civil conflict called the Foxfire War raged within the Daidoji family, hidden from the rest of the clan and the Empire.

More ambitious GMs, of course, can depict major civil wars during earlier (or later) eras that were edited out of Rokugan's collective memory. A creative GM can likewise expand the storyline by escalating internal conflicts in the official history—such as the Lion "Empire versus Emperor" conflict in the Clan War—into full-fledged civil wars. There are also many situations within Rokugan where a clan civil war could have taken place, but for one reason or another did not. For example, during the Clan War era Hida Kisada's decision to ally with the Shadowlands was accepted by his three children, but what if Yakamo, Sukune, or O-Ushi had chosen to rebel rather than follow their father's decision to betray the Crab Clan's duty?

rare event: civil war. Large-scale conflict within a single clan is extraordinarily rare in Rokugan's history, so much so that the official Imperial histories contain no record of them prior to the twelfth century.

The fact that one civil war in the Hidden Emperor era involves the Crane Clan is even more shocking, since the Crane are known as both highly honorable and intensely loyal. While it is true the conflict was promoted by the Lying Darkness, it would not have been possible if there were not underlying tensions and cultural conflicts which the Darkness could exploit. The Daidoji are a pragmatic warrior family whose methods often place them at odds with the more idealistic and diplomatic methods and beliefs of their Doji and Kakita cousins. When Daidoji Uji attacks Shiro no Yogin, he believes he is commanded by his ancestors to avenge an ancient defeat by the Lion; when Doji Kuwanan opposes his actions, Uji sees this as a dishonorable act by the Clan Champion. The Darkness' disruption of communications makes it easier for the usual chain of obedience and loyalty to break down, but such a failure could happen almost as easily through chance or the intervention of a less supernatural manipulator (such as the Scorpion or the Kolat). If a samurai has reason to believe his superior cannot be trusted—to think he may be Tainted, an imposter, or a madman—he may legitimately choose to disobey or even to order his own vassals to follow him over his superior.

A similar breakdown in the usual lines of obedience and loyalty can occur when there is a conflict between devotion to two (or more) different sources of higher authority. Uji believed he was obeying a dictate from his ancestors. A command from a Fortune, or from the Emperor, could create a similar problem. And of course once a conflict begins the demands of honor mean it can easily sustain itself to an extremely destructive end; the Crane were quite fortunate that the exposure of the Darkness' manipulations allowed them to end the conflict with honor.

All of this can allow the GM to create some very interesting opportunities for role-playing scenarios. What happens when a Daidoji PC must choose between obeying his lord or obeying his Clan Champion? How does he respond if he is challenged to a duel to death by a Kakita samurai who he once served alongside in the same army? And of course an Asahina character could be trying to stop the conflict... or be ordered to serve on both sides at the same time.

Rokugan has a strong social structure, almost set in stone, but it is not unbreakable and when it is damaged the consequences can be dire indeed. This is when a samurai's true character is revealed, and while some are real paragons of honor, others hide a dark heart below a veneer of courtesy. The GM can use such themes to his advantage in constructing compelling and memorable adventures.

The Kolat Versus the Darkness

Ironically, the Lying Darkness's greatest enemy over the thousand years leading up to the Hidden Emperor era was actually another sinister and secretive group: the quasi-religious conspiracy known as the Kolat. It should not really be surprising that a paranoid conspiracy which feared infiltration and made it its business to know everything happening in the Empire became aware of the Shadow and its nature very early on. Long before the Dragon and Unicorn began to realize the Lying Darkness was a threat, the Kolat had already identified the danger and begun training its agents to fight against it. The hero Matsu Hiroru, initiated into the Kolat by his uncle (and Kolat Master) Akodo Kage, learned about the Shadow from the conspiracy and later used that knowledge to wage a one-man war against the agents of darkness.

The Kolat was wary of acting too openly against the Shadow lest they expose and weaken themselves. However, by the tenth century the conspiracy was beginning to suspect the Shadow's true intentions: to unmake the entirety of reality. Since the Kolat's intention was to control that reality and force it to conform to their own design, the notion of letting it be unmade was anathema, but the conspiracy was also painfully aware that it lacked the power to defeat the Shadow. Centuries of cautious research had revealed the underlying secret of the Shadow—it was its lack of name, of definable identity, that gave it its power. However, the ability to name the Shadow was beyond the capacity of any mortal—a fact which made the Kolat Masters gnash their teeth.

By the beginning of the twelfth century, the Kolat had unearthed a potential solution to the

problem: a massive magical ritual which would summon the Sun and Moon themselves down to the mortal realm, forcing them to name the Shadow once and for all. However, the conspiracy knew this would be a drastic step and one that could potentially cause untold damage to the very fabric of Ningen-do. Accordingly, they considered it a last resort, to be used only if it appeared certain that the Shadow was going to unmake reality. As it turned out, Rokugan's victory at Oblivion's Gate and Hitomi's decision to name the Shadow meant that the conspiracy never had to use its trump card, and the secret ritual was lost two generations later when the Scorpion Clan destroyed the Kolat Temple.

All that being said, it is undeniable that for much of the Hidden Emperor era the Kolat stood by and took no action as the Shadow's power grew and it made its play to control and destroy the world. Akodo Kage, the chief Kolat Master during the Hidden Emperor era, was well aware of the Lying Darkness' activities and kept close tabs on the course of Rokugan's struggle against the Darkness, but feared to act lest the Kolat conspiracy be exposed and weakened. What changed his mind was a series of incidents in the winter of 1132 and spring 1133. While in the Imperial capital, Kage was confronted by the ronin Ginawa and his old student Hiroru. The old Kolat Master was forced to activate a Kolat sleeper agent—none other than Hiroru's true love, the storyteller Doji Shizue—to protect himself, then fled with Shizue to the Kolat temple. Less than a month later, Kage was attacked within the Temple itself by a Shadowspawn assassin. Shizue leapt in the way, saving Kage's life at the cost of a mortal wound. Bewildered, Kage demanded to know why she had protected the very man who had brainwashed her and used her as a living weapon against her true love. "To prove that not all stories of honor are lies," Shizue gasped, and died. Shaken, Kage realized he had allowed his fear and weakness to keep him idle while the Shadow grew. At his command, Kolat agents all across the Empire emerged from hiding, using crystal weapons to slaughter the Shadowspawn wherever they could be found. Although it was not a lethal blow to the Darkness, it did purge much of the Shadow's influence from within Rokugan, ensuring that it could only win by controlling Oblivion's Gate.

Creative GMs, of course, can use the Kolat in all sorts of ways in a campaign set in the Hidden Emperor era, especially if some of the PCs are Kolat themselves. A GM who wishes to change the focus of the War Against the Darkness to a more apocalyptic level can choose to drop the storyline of the Sun and Moon dying and being replaced by mortals, and instead task the PCs with carrying out the Kolat ritual and summoning the two supreme Fortunes to name the Shadow. What sort of magical power would be needed for such a world-shaking spell? Perhaps the PCs will have to collect all the greatest relics and artifacts connected to the Sun and Moon, traveling across a chaotic Empire while constantly pursued by the minions of Shadow or even Goju Adorai himself. Perhaps the ritual is a form of blood magic and they must sacrifice themselves—or worse, their friends or loved ones—to carry it out. The possibilities are endless.

Spirit Portals and Oblivion's Gate

Most of the Spirit Realms have portals connecting them to Ningen-do, the mortal Realm, but usually these are difficult to find. In many cases they are only temporary; portals can open spontaneously due to events in the mortal world, such as the gates to Toshigoku which sometimes appear during particularly bloody battles or on the sites of past massacres. Even when such portals are permanent they are often invisible to anyone who is not a shugenja or a spirit creature. Their locations may be tied to the spirit realm they access—deep forests full of life and untouched by human activity often contain portals to Chikushudo, while a temple to the ancestors standing since the first century might contain a portal to Yomi—but sometimes they appear simply due to the presence of powerful spiritual influences. The throne room of the Imperial Palace in Otosan Uchi, for example, is a potent conflux of spiritual energies and portals to several different Spirit Realms have been opened from it. And of course the creatures within

Game Mechanics: Opening and Closing Spirit Portals

How can PCs discover or manipulate a spirit portal? Generally speaking, detecting a portal requires either sensitivity to the Spirit Realm in question or tremendous skill with the kami. A PC who is Blessed or Cursed by a particular Spirit Realm can potentially notice the presence of a spirit portal, although this should not be easy (an Awareness roll at TN 30 or higher should be considered the baseline). A shugenja of School Rank 4 or higher should be able to detect a spirit portal by casting Sense in the appropriate Element (see below) with three Raises. (Some portals may be easier or more difficult to detect, of course, and the GM should adjust the number of Raises accordingly.) Kitsu shugenja, who are strongly attuned to the Spirit Realms, can do this at School Rank 2.

Opening or closing a spirit portal is more difficult. In general, a shugenja attempting this feat will need to be at least School Rank 5 (School Rank 3 for Kitsu shugenja) and cast Commune in the appropriate Element with four Raises. Again, some portals may be easier or more difficult to open, and in some cases extra measures may be required such as performing a ritual or making an offering of some kind (to open a portal) or physically destroying something (to close one).

The Elements most closely associated with portals to a Spirit Realm are listed below. The GM may adjust this if he feels other Elements are more appropriate to a particular portal, or require the use of multiple Elements for an especially powerful portal.

- Water: Chikushudo and Meido
- Earth: Gaki-do and Jigoku
- Fire: Yomi and Toshigoku
- Air: Yume-do and Sakkaku
- Void: Maigo no Musha and Tengoku

the Spirit Realms may open portals for their own purposes. (Or in the case of Sakkaku, lack of purpose. A mujina once opened a portal into the personal bedroom of a vassal family daimyo in Lion lands, much to his dismay when he woke up next to the creature!)

Traveling to the Spirit Realms is dangerous for mortals, not least because powerful entities keep guard at the borders of such places—the Blessed Guard in Yomi, the Fortune Emma-O himself in Meido, and so forth. (After the War Against the Darkness, the redeemed Okura no Oni guards the gates to Tengoku.) And of course many Spirit Realms are inherently dangerous to a varying degree, or try to control and claim any visitors—such as with Jigoku's Taint. (Of course, a trip to Jigoku is a very bad idea regardless of the Taint.)

Permanent and obvious physical gates to the Spirit Realms are extremely rare. The Festering Pit of Fu Leng, a direct portal to Jigoku, is the most notorious example of one, but a few others are known. Oblivion's Gate is probably the single most powerful permanent spirit portal ever to exist, with access to several different Spirit Realms—possibly all. Probably the strangest aspect of the Gate, however, is that souls which pass through it are reembodied, becoming mortal again. Why the Gate has this effect is unknown, no does anyone truly know how or why the Gate was constructed. Its location within the ruins of Volturnum suggests it was built by the trolls, but even the other ancient races such as the kenku seem dubious about this, since the trolls were never known as masters of spiritual travel.

During the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, the minions of Nothing used the Gate to pass into the Spirit Realms and directly attack the ancestral shiryo within Yomi, seeking to further the unmaking of the universe. In turn, thousands of mortal souls—primarily from Yomi, but also plenty from Meido and Toshigoku—crossed back through the Gate to Ningen-do, gaining new mortal bodies. It is possible that if they had later returned through the Gate they would have lost these bodies once more, but since Isawa Hochiu destroyed the Gate immediately after defeating Goju Adorai, this remains a mystery. The Gate did retain some residual power thereafter—a generation later, a handful of other spirits passed through—but detailed study of the ruined artifact is impossible due to its location deep within the Shadowlands.

Of course, while Rokugan did not "officially" become aware of Oblivion's Gate until the Hidden Emperor era, there is no reason why the GM cannot introduce the Gate into a storyline set earlier or later in the L5R timeline. In earlier eras, characters who desperately need to find their way to one of the other Spirit Realms could learn about the Gate from ancient records of Osano-Wo's wars against the trolls. In later eras, perhaps the Gate still retains some power or perhaps whatever force created it allows it to slowly repair itself over time. Oblivion's Gate is an ideal plot device for a host of supernatural adventures and the GM should feel free to be as creative as he might wish.

Rokugan in an Apocalyptic Age

The Celestial events during the War Against the Darkness, particularly the death and replacement of the Sun and Moon and the accompanying 27 days of darkness, are profoundly shocking and terrifying to the Empire and particularly to the heimin, many of whom believe the world is literally coming to an end. They are not altogether wrong, of course, since the Lying Darkness is bent on unmaking reality and comes dangerously close to succeeding. Peasants across the Empire cower inside their huts in fear or flock to temples and monasteries to plead with the Heavens for mercy. This sort of environment is very unusual within a society that thrives on stability and tradition, and creative GMs can confront PCs with a host of adventures and role-playing challenges built around the panic and social breakdown triggered by the rise of the Darkness and the deaths of the Sun and Moon. How do the PCs maintain order among the peasantry when they themselves have no certainty of the world's survival? How does a devout shugenja or Fortunist monk deal with the death of divine beings at mortal hands?

Of course, a truly inventive GM can take things much farther. What if the Darkness succeeded in unmaking a substantial portion of reality before it was stopped? (Obviously it has to be stopped at some point, since it would be kind of difficult to play a campaign in a world that no longer exists!) What if many of the Fortunes are destroyed, or the Celestial offices of Sun and Moon remain vacant for months or even years? A GM can construct a powerful campaign in such a damaged world, a world where all the certainties that hold Rokugan together have collapsed. Do the peasants continue to accept their place in the Celestial Order when the Order itself has been rent asunder? Do samurai continue to obey their lords when the Heavens themselves no longer have a lord? And of course such a world would also offer many opportunities for horror themes, as a darkened and damaged reality is easy prey for the forces of Jigoku and the lingering remnants of the Shadow. GMs seeking inspiration for such a campaign should consider adapting material from novels such as Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* or game settings such as Fantasy Flight Games' *Midnight*.

Mechanical Effects of the Elemental Cities

The Elemental Cities are suffused with the power of their respective Elements and shugenja who visit them often report feeling more powerful and having strange insights into the nature of the universe. However, they sometimes also report being overwhelmed by the scale of the spiritual power they encounter. GMs who wish to represent the Cities' effect mechanically may use the following rules:

A shugenja who casts spells within a City gains two Free Raises on any spells which use that City's favored Element. (The City of Blood also gives this bonus to *maho* spells while it is corrupt.) However, the shugenja is also considered to have the Elemental Imbalance Disadvantage for the appropriate Element while he is within the City.

Anyone who uses the Meditation skill within a City gains a +1k1 bonus to the skill roll.

Each city will also have its own specific effects based around its Element—for example, the City of Empty Dreams will probably enhance Void usage. The GM should tailor these effects to the needs of his specific adventure.

Even in the canonical history of Rokugan, victory in the War Against the Darkness leaves the Empire grappling with major upheavals in the Celestial Order. The Sun and the Moon have changed their very identities, a sinister new Dragon has come into existence, and many thousands of ancestral spirits have become mortals again. The return of so many ancestors to mortal life is especially problematic and soon leads to serious social disruption and ultimately war (see the next chapter, The War of Spirits, for details). In addition, there are many lesser side effects which GMs can use to challenge, unsettle, and intrigue the PCs. People must now pray to Yakamo and Hitomi, changing the human relationship with the Heavens and leading to significant theological issues for groups who strongly venerated the previous Sun and Moon (especially the Moshi family). Physical effects ripple across the Empire, such as the emergence of a mysterious haunted field in Scorpion lands which is supposedly where Onnotangu's body fell from the Heavens. Although the exact place where Amaterasu committed jigai is unknown, it stands to reason such a location would also be affected and an entire adventure could be built around a quest for that place and the spiritual and physical effects it might have on visitors.

One of the more bizarre side effects of the Celestial upheaval at the end of the Hidden Emperor era is the appearance of the five Elemental Cities in Rokugan. When the Living Darkness assaulted the Realm of Yomi, it invaded five cities which stood at the border of that realm. The cities were about to be destroyed when the Phoenix Elemental Masters, seeing their plight through Oblivion's Gate, intervened to save them. This prevented the five cities from being destroyed, but resulted in their being ripped loose from Yomi and cast into the mortal realm. Each city was also somehow transformed by the Elemental magic of the Master who saved it. In the years afterward these cities became sources of elemental power within the mortal realm, and more than one battle was fought to decide their fate.

The City of Loyalty, a place of high walls and castles, was associated with the Element of Earth. It appeared near the Phoenix town of Nikesake and was initially claimed by the Legion of the Wolf, but the Legion later gifted it to Isawa Kaede and the Phoenix Clan as a dowry for her marriage to Toturi. The ronin remained there with the Phoenix's agreement, and the city eventually housed a small dojo for Phoenix Earth Tensai.

The City of Tears, associated with the Element of Water, was initially believed to be destroyed. In fact it was discovered and hidden by Bloodspeaker cultists, who named it the City of Blood and twisted its magic to also support *maho*. They fooled Imperial tax collectors into believing the City was actually a large village called Mizu Mura, allowing it to be hidden in plain sight in the Phoenix lands. Many years later, the Phoenix Master of Water Asako Bairei took it back and purified it.

The City of Empty Dreams, associated with the Void, appeared on an island off the coast of the Phoenix lands. Only *ishiken*—Void shugenja—could see it, and even they found it was not always present. It is said one can see both the past and the future within the City of Empty Dreams, even glimpses of worlds which never existed. Not even the Master of Void fully understands its secrets.

The City of White Clouds, associated with Air, appeared in the Dragon Lands and was briefly investigated by tattooed monks from that clan. However, the Shadow Dragon was drawn to the City, sensing its association with his old Element of Air, and moved it out of its location and possibly out of the mortal realm entirely. Its location and fate are unknown, offering many possibilities for GMs running campaigns focused on the threat of the Shadow Dragon.

The City of Living Flame—associated, not surprisingly, with the Element of Fire—appeared on another island off the Phoenix coast, but one more accessible than the mysterious City of Empty Dreams. The small island has a powerful volcano which erupts frequently, yet the city is never damaged –although it is perpetually covered by soot. The dangerous environment means few people ever visit the city, although it is believed to hold many secrets.

Important Personages

The following section lists several notable NPCs who are especially active during the Hidden Emperor era. Some of these individuals also play important roles in earlier time periods (the pre-Coup and Clan Wars eras) or the subsequent War of Spirits. The GM is also free to use them as templates for NPCs in campaigns set in other times.

Doji Kuwanan

Crane Clan Champion

The second son of Doji Satsume, Kuwanan was very different from his older brother Hoturi. He grew into a short stocky man, quiet where Hoturi was boisterous, resolute where his brother was capricious. Kuwanan was a warrior first and foremost, which allowed him to get along with his father far better than Hoturi. His bulky stature and lack of conversation often led others to mistakenly view him as thick-witted, but in fact he was highly intelligent.

Satsume regarded Kuwanan as a promising soldier and arranged for him to be sent for two years' training in the Lion lands. There Kuwanan developed a personal enmity with Matsu Hiroru, and at one point the young Lion even broke Kuwanan's arm in training, offering a publicly sincere but dishonest apology afterward. The enmity hardened when Kuwanan's betrothed, Shiba Nosuriko, hanged herself the night before their wedding. Although it appeared to be a suicide, Kawanan was convinced Hiroru (who had also paid court on Nosuriko) was responsible.

After completing his training with the Lion, Kuwanan studied with the Daidoji Iron Warriors, even going so far as to spend a year on the Kaiu Wall among the Crab. By the time the Clan War begun Kuwanan was both a powerful warrior and a talented general, although the prominence of Hoturi and his own quiet demeanor still led many to believe he was slow. Kuwanan never seemed to resent being second to his brother, and in truth the two men cared for each other deeply despite their superficial differences.

The Clan War was a severe test of Kuwanan's military skill, as he and Daidoji Uji led the Crane armies against far larger attacks from the Lion and the Crab. He fought in countless battles and his tactics helped save the clan from utter destruction, most notably when the False Hoturi overran much of the Crane territory with an army of Tainted madmen. He was not surprised to see the true Hoturi ultimately become the Crane Clan Thunder, but Hoturi's death in the battle against Fu Leng was a shock—he had always assumed he would spend his life playing support to his elegant older sibling. Suddenly Kuwanan found himself the Clan Champion, forced to take over the responsibilities and political duties of leading the Left Hand of the Emperor.

True to his warrior heritage, Kuwanan focused on rebuilding the clan's military strength while leaving political matters to figures such as Imperial Advisor Kakita Yoshi. During the War Against the Darkness he spent much of the conflict fighting against Yoritomo's Alliance, then found himself drawn into the tragedy of the Crane civil war, fighting against his old friend Daidoji Uji. However, Kuwanan's blunt but honorable nature ultimately allowed him to see through the deceptions of the Lying Darkness and restore peace to the clan. Uji and Kuwanan marched together to Volturnum and fought side by side to save Rokugan. Kuwanan killed his own guards when they succumbed to the Shadow and finally fell mortally wounded, dying within a few days. Thanks to Kuwanan's devotion to the art of battle, the Crane survived the terrible trials of his lifetime, and thankfully before his death he married a fellow Doji, Narumi. She bore him a son, Doji Kurohito, who was born three days after his father perished. Kurohito would go on to lead the clan during the Four Winds era.

The stats listed here present Kuwanan during his reign as Clan Champion.

Doji Kuwanan, Crane Clan Champion

Air: 3	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 5	Void: 4
Reflexes: 5		Agiligy: 5		
Honor: 7.6		*Status: 8.0*		*Glory: 8.7*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 1/Daidoji Iron Warrior 5

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Combat) 7, Courtier 2, Defense 6, Etiquette 4, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo) 2, Horsemanship 4, Iaijutsu 5, Intimidation 3, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: History 3, Lore: Shadowlands 2, Sincerity 3, Spears (Yari) 5

Kata: Iron in the Mountains Style, Strength in Arms Style

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Inheritance (Megumi, the Crane Ancestral Sword), Multiple Schools, Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Lost Love (Shiba Nosuriko), Sworn Enemy (Matsu Hiroru)

Bayushi Aramoro

Master Shinobi

After Bayushi Shoju's mother died, his father found solace in the arms of a Yogo shugenja. From this union a second son was born: Aramoro. He was beautiful and strong where his older half-brother Shoju was ugly and weak, and initially expected to become a courtier since his easy smile won the favor of many court ladies. Although there was some rivalry between the brothers in the early days it was initially not too intense; they both knew Shoju would be the one to rule, and Aramoro secretly consoled himself that he was the better and more capable man. Things changed, however, when they met Shosuro Kachiko, the astonishingly beautiful daughter of the Shosuro daimyo. Aramoro fell in love with her almost immediately and courted her for weeks, sending letters, poems, and presents. After months of effort, when he had begun to think he might have won her heart, Shoju gave him a box. Inside the box were all his presents for Kachiko. Shoju was later seen dining with the samurai-ko and eventually married her.

Aramoro was crushed—not only by losing the woman who he loved, but also because he was utterly defeated by somebody he considered weak. Vowing never to fail again, Aramoro gave up his courtier schooling and requested permission to train with the Shosuro shinobi. He threw himself into his work with unrivalled zeal and soon became one of the greatest assassins in the entire Scorpion Clan, killing dozens of targets all across the Empire. Ironically, this led Shoju to assign him as Kachiko's *yojimbo*, knowing Aramoro would never let her be harmed by anybody. Aramoro accepted the duty without complaint and served as Kachiko's bodyguard for many years, constantly tortured by her proximity but never betraying his duty. (Indeed, this emotional torment may have been an additional motive for Shoju assigning him the task.) Aramoro eventually married Yogo Asami, an actress who often acted as Kachiko's decoy, and she bore him a son named Aramasu.

After the failed Clan Coup, Aramoro continued to serve as Kachiko's bodyguard in secret. By then he knew her heart actually belonged to Doji Hoturi, but such was his devotion that he continued to serve her loyally and without question, even during the period when she sought to tear the Empire asunder in revenge for the defeat of Shoju.

The War Against the Shadow was Aramoro's greatest test, as he remained in Rokugan to protect Scorpion interests while the clan—and his true love Kachiko—endured two years of exile in the Burning Sands. Like many Shosuro shinobi of his time he wore a Shadow Brand, and as the power of the Lying Darkness grew it sought to seduce and devour him. But the Darkness could not give him what he wanted—nobody could make Kachiko love him. He resisted the Darkness' influence and continued to loyally serve the Scorpion, eventually winning the tournament that restored his clan's lands in the Empire.

At the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, Aramaro performed a final act of loyalty: he and several of his fellow shinobi committed seppuku, then immediately rushed through Oblivion's Gate to strike the Goju army in the flank. However, this return from death was only brief—by the end of the battle Aramoro had perished once more, this time remaining within the afterlife. He is remembered as one of the greatest of Scorpion heroes, a paragon of loyalty and devotion unto death.

The stats here depict Aramoro at the end of his life, when he was one of the most formidable shinobi in the history of the Scorpion Clan.

Bayushi Aramoro, Master Shinobi

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 5
Reflexes: 6 Stamina: 5 Agility: 5 Strength: 4

Honor: 3.8 *Status: 5.0* *Glory: 5.3*

School/Rank: Shosuro Infiltrator 4/Bayushi Saboteur 3

Skills: Acting 3, Athletics 6, Chain Weapons 5, Courtier 3, Defense 6, Investigation 4, Intimidation 5, Jiujutsu 6, Kenjutsu (Ninja-to) 6, Knives 5, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: Scorpion Clan 3, Lore: Underworld 4, Medicine 3, Meditation 3, Ninjutsu 7, Poison 6, Sincerity 3, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth (Sneaking) 9, Temptation 2

Advantages: Kharmic Tie (Kachiko, 4 points), Shadowbrand (1), Silent, Social Position (yojimbo to the Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: True Love (Kachiko)

Isawa Taeruko

Master of Earth

The Phoenix Clan during the War Against the Darkness was only a shadow of its former strength. Its numbers were badly reduced by the horror of the Clan Wars and the Elemental Council was incomplete, having lost all but one of its previous members at the Day of Thunder. Help came from the great sensei Naka Kuro, the Grandmaster of the Elements, who swore allegiance to the Phoenix and helped them begin rebuilding their numbers. Younger shugenja within the Phoenix were forced to step up and take control of the clan, ascending to positions such as the Elemental Council with far less experience than any of their predecessors. One such new leader was Isawa Taeruko.

Taeruko was a cousin to the Phoenix Thunder Isawa Tadaka and shared Tadaka's power with the Earth kami and his dedication to his clan. Like many Phoenix she studied the Shadowlands during the Clan War, but unlike most she did not succumb to the Taint or the lure of *maho*, and in the aftermath of the Day of Thunder she was one of the most powerful Earth shugenja left pure and alive within the Phoenix. This made her a natural choice for the post of Master of Earth.

But whereas the previous Master of Earth was a quiet and driven man, Taeruko was a demanding and outspoken woman. Her power and leadership skills were considerable, but she also had a fierce temper and a strong sense of idealism which left her poorly suited for compromise or diplomacy. She was one of the first to welcome the Agasha family into the Phoenix, and interference from the Dragon Clan met with swift retribution from her; she considered the Agasha as Phoenix the moment they swore fealty and defended them as fiercely as she would the Isawa, Shiba, or Asako. Similarly she was one of the first to joint the fight against the Mantis invasion and single-handedly killed many of Yoritomo's samurai, refusing any possibility of compromise.

During the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, Taeruko and the other Elemental Masters (including the newly-arrived Agasha Gennai and the returned spirit Isawa Tomo) used powerful magic to force open the ancient gates of the city of Volturnum. Although Isawa Hochiu ultimately became the greatest hero of the clan at Volturnum, Taeruko would go on to help rule the clan for many more years and would endure several tragedies. Her husband died at the hands of Yobanjin raiders in the year 1145 and her only daughter died at the command of Hantei XVI during the War of Spirits. Nevertheless she continued to serve on the Elemental Council through many later crises and troubles, guiding the Phoenix Clan as best she could. She finally died in the year 1165, defending the ancient Phoenix city of Gisei Toshi against an attack by the Bloodspeaker cult.

The following stats depict Isawa Taeruko as she was at the end of the War Against the Darkness. By the end of her life she was considerably more powerful.

Isawa Taeruko, Master of Earth

Air: 2 Earth: 5 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 3
Intelligence: 4

Honor: 5.2 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 2.0*

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Earth)3/Isawa Tensai

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Courtier 2, Etiquette 4, Intimidation 4, Investigation 4, Knives 3, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 5, Lore: History 3, Lore: Elements 5, Medicine 2, Meditation 6, Sincerity 2, Spellcraft 6

Spells: as the Master of Earth, Taeruko has access to almost all spells she can cast, including many rare and secret Earth spells.

Kiho: Cleansing Spirit, Earth Needs No Eyes, Embrace the Stone, Grasp the Earth Dragon

Advantages: Elemental Blessing (Earth), Sage, Social Position (Elemental Master)

Disadvantages: Contrary, Idealistic

Kitsuki Kaagi

Doomed Magistrate

Kitsuki Kaagi was just an obscure Emerald Magistrate, yet his name is whispered several times during the War Against the Darkness. Sometimes with fear, sometimes with admiration. He was both an example of the Shadow's terrible power and one of the keys to its defeat.

Kaagi was actually born a Lion, a scion of the Matsu family, but he and his brother Iyekao joined the Kitsuki family of the Dragon after their father died in mysterious circumstances. Kaagi was obsessed with discovering the truth behind his father's death and believed there was a connection to the "ninja myth" that circulated among

Kitsuki Kaagi's Journal

Many Kitsuki Investigators, especially those who serve as magistrates, keep detailed personal journals in which they carefully record all their experiences, ensuring an accurate record of events. Kitsuki Kaagi was no exception, and kept a journal of his investigation of the Shadow. Unfortunately, because the journal contained extensive knowledge of the Lying Darkness it was also a vessel for the Darkness' power. The Kitsuki family locked the journal into a room with crystal walls, walls which slowly blackened and cracked under the influence of the Shadow's power. Three times, older Kitsuki who were ready for retirement entered the room and read aloud from the book—read until their voices grew dark and strange, and when their superiors looked into the room... it was empty. Still, their sacrifice was not wholly pointless—the Kitsuki slowly learned more about the nature of the Lying Darkness, and when Kitsuki Kaagi returned they were ready and willing to bring him before Hitomi herself.

In game terms, reading Kaagi's journal automatically awards the Advantage of Forbidden Knowledge: Lying Darkness for free... but also awards a Shadow Rank.

GMs interested in reading the "real" Journal of Kitsuki Kaagi may wish to seek out the L5R 1st Edition supplement *Way of Shadow*.

the common folk; he knew the Kitsuki had studied ninja crimes for generations and believed the Kitsuki Method offered the best hope of solving the mystery. His obsession deepened after his brother disappeared—in fact, taken by the Shadow.

As a magistrate, Kaagi had a successful but for the most part obscure career, for he specialized in strange crimes with unusual circumstances. Eventually, through a series of increasingly dangerous investigations, Kaagi became acquainted with the force known as the Lying Darkness. The pivotal moment came when he assisted Isawa Ujina in the "rescue" of Doji Ninube—who became the first of the Shadow's "Ninube family" servants. In truth, the Shadow allowed Kaagi to learn about it, for it had already consumed his brother Iyekao and wanted to devour him as well. Using meditation techniques he had learned from the Dragon Clan, Kaagi was able to hold off the influence of the Lying Darkness long enough to entrust his personal journal to his *eta* servant Mei, who carried it to Shiro Kitsuki. The journal, its cover hastily scrawled with the words, "Do not read this," became an important and dangerous source of knowledge for the Kitsuki family. Kaagi himself vanished, apparently consumed by the Shadow.

Yet it eventually proved that this was not the end for Kaagi. While the Shadow had gained a strong grip on his mind, it could not quite overcome him completely. He spent years in a Shadow-corrupted monastery, where the Goju who had been his brother tormented him endlessly. Somehow Kaagi held on to the last shreds of his identity, and in the year 1132 he was discovered and rescued by Ginawa and Hiroru during their search for the Emperor—a particular irony given that Hiroru had briefly encountered Kaagi a decade earlier. Kaagi returned to the Dragon lands and told Hitomi as much as he could about the Lying Darkness; some believe it was Kaagi's words that finally convinced her of the danger facing the Empire and prompted her to leave the Dragon Clan and seek out her true destiny. Regardless, soon after his meeting with Hitomi, Kaagi committed seppuku, finally saving himself from the Shadow's power.

Kitsuki Kaagi, Doomed Magistrate

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 4

Awareness: 5 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 6.2 *Status: 5.0* *Glory: 6.4*

School/Rank: Kitsuki Investigator 4

Skills: Athletics 2, Courtier 3, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Investigation (Interrogation) 7, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: Living Darkness 7, Medicine 3, Meditation 4, Poison 4, Sincerity 3, Stealth 2

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Great Destiny, Kharmic Tie (Brother - 3) Read Lips, Servant (Meilekki)

Disadvantages: Soft-Hearted

Matsu Hiroru

the White Ninja

Matsu Hiroru was born the second son of the Matsu daimyo and was thus destined to serve as the guardian of the Hall of Ancestors. He was a solitary boy who spent most of his time hunting in the woodlands, using a bow his sister had given to him. He enjoyed observing people more than talking to them, and developed keen insights into their behavior and motives. Several early experiences taught him to believe that honor did not make much difference once you were dead. He was a poor student, for he had little interest in his future duties and disliked being referred to only as "Tsuko's brother." He began playing increasingly harmful pranks on his classmates, earning a bad reputation despite never being caught.

During a martial arts tournament he caught the eye of Akodo Kage, one of the ten Kolat Masters, who began training him personally. Kage gradually introduced Hiroru to the Kolat philosophy while training him into a powerful

assassin. He also told Hiroru something of the Lying Darkness and gifted him with a powerful *nemuranai*, a white *gi* thought to be made from Lady Sun's crystal tears, which granted tremendous gifts of stealth and skill. Hiroru was happy to comply with Kage's wishes, since he believed he could use "honor" to justify whatever he was doing; besides, his victims were all equal in death.

Hiroru took an instant dislike to Doji Kuwanan when he arrived in his dojo, for he saw Kuwanan's presence as a sign of victory for the Crane. He focused his energy on making the young Crane's life impossible, going as far as breaking his arm during a sparring match. He also began a liaison with Kuwanan's future wife, later threatening to shame her family with the truth of their relationship. The young Phoenix maiden could not bear this and hung herself in shame on the night before she was to marry Kuwanan.

The incident was a shock to Hiroru's spirit. For the first time he realized he was responsible for the death of an innocent. He confronted Kage, who sneered at his sudden weakness. Filled with loathing at his own actions, Hiroru fled his clan and faked his death, officially becoming a ronin despite never being effectively cast out.

Wandering the Empire alone, Hiroru became the plague of the Kolat and other assassins, a ninja who killed other ninja. He also discovered much more about the Lying Darkness and slew its Goju minions wherever he found them. His distinctive white *gi* made him infamous in the Empire's underworld and earned him the nickname of "the white ninja." During the Clan War he finally found a cause to believe in and joined Toturi's Army, fighting for the Empire's protection and encountering a kindred spirit in the person of the Lion ronin Ginawa. Hiroru also met the famous Crane storyteller Doji Shizue, with whom he became hopelessly smitten. For her part Shizue saw good within Hiroru's tormented soul and accepted his affections gladly.

During the War Against the Darkness, Ginawa and Hiroru searched the Empire together for their missing Emperor and former general. They did not find Toturi, but they did succeed in rescuing Kitsuki Kaagi from the clutches of the Lying Darkness. During a fateful visit to Otosan Uchi, Hiroru met again with his old master Kage and his love Shizue—who proved to be a Kolat sleeper agent and stabbed Hiroru on Kage's command. Ginawa saved his friend and Hiroru finally recovered, although he was left deeply shaken by Shizue's disappearance. Nonetheless, the two ronin went forth again, discovering Oblivion's Gate. Hiroru returned to the Empire in time to be Emperor Toturi's second in his seppuku.

Soon after the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, Hiroru learned of Shizue's death—the Crane samurai-ko had sacrificed herself to save Akodo Kage's life, proving to him the value of honor. Devastated at losing the only person who ever thought him a good man, Hiroru entered a spirit portal deep within the Shadowlands known as Amaterasu's Furnace. Some say he still travels through the Spirit Realms, forever searching for his beloved.

Matsu Hiroru, the White Ninja

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 3
Reflexes: 4		Agility: 4	Perception: 5	

Honor: 2.1 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 1.5* *Infamy: 3.6*

School/Rank: Matsu Berserker 3/Kolat Assassin 2

Skills: Acting 4, Athletics 6, Battle 2, Courtier 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Knives 5, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: History 2, Lore: Kolat 2, Lore: Lying Darkness 3, Ninjutsu 6, Sincerity (Lying) 5, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 6

Kata: Reckless Abandon Style, Striking as Air

Advantages: Ally (Ginawa, Loyalty 3/Influence 1), Crafty, Inheritance (the crystal gi), Quick, Silent

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (former Kolat), Social Disadvantage (ronin), Sworn Enemy (Doji Kuwanan), True Love (Doji Shizue)

Seppun Toshiken

Emerald Champion and Hero of the Empire

Born the only son of a woman named Seppun Jifuhime, Seppun Toshiken did not know the name of his father for many years. His mother was not married and the circumstances of his birth were considered shameful; she had managed to conceal her pregnancy but could not conceal her child. Jifuhime was sent to a monastery to live out her life as a nun, and her son was given to others of the family to raise.

As he grew up, young Toshiken had to suffer being a part of the most honorable family in the Empire while being considered personally shameful because of the circumstances of his birth. He often got into fights with other children when their taunts drove him past endurance. When he finally entered the Seppun dojo, he almost immediately focused on the art of iaijutsu, since he knew it was the way adults settled their disputes. As it turned out, Toshiken was naturally gifted, his blade quicker and more precise than students several years older. He defeated many of his classmates in non-lethal duels and they soon learned not to slander his honor or his mother's name. By the time Toshiken passed his gempukku, he was already known as one of the best duelists of his family.

As a young man Toshiken served in both the Imperial Guard of Otosan Uchi and the Imperial Legions, earning renown on the battlefield during both the Clan War and the subsequent War Against the Darkness. He also became famous for his blunt honesty—the ideals of honor he held himself to did not leave much room for flowery words or double meanings. He married—twice, in fact, since his first wife died during the Clan War—and ultimately had three sons.

Toshiken did not see his mother again until he learned she was dying of illness. On her deathbed she revealed the name of his father: Kakita Toshimoko. The grieving Toshi-

ken was incensed: Toshimoko was one of the most famous and powerful man in the Empire and could easily have married Jifuhime and saved her honor, but he had instead chosen to protect his own reputation. In truth, Toshimoko did not even know he had a son, but Toshiken did not know this and tried without success to meet his father and express his anger. He did eventually contact his half-brother, Toshimoko's legitimate son Ichiro, but despite their common hatred for Toshimoko the two men were very different. Ichiro was a politician, a drunkard, and a manipulative man who was largely ignored by his father.

When Toturi returned from his abduction in early 1132, he shocked the Empire by naming Seppun Toshiken the new Emerald Champion without first holding the traditional tournament. Toshiken was initially honored, and he in fact had the skills to fulfill the office. But Toturi's mad orders became increasingly disturbing, culminating in the command to kill the whole Imperial Court—accompanied by the implication that if Toshiken refused his two older sons would perish. In fact the children were already corrupted by the Shadow; horrified, Toshiken carried out the order and then fled the city, organizing the remaining forces of Toturi's Army to resist the mad Emperor.

Toshiken and Ichiro finally confronted their father Toshimoko together. The Gray Crane apologized for his failures and Toshiken was moved by his sincerity. In that moment Ichiro tried to kill his father; Toshiken struck him down, for despite his own anger at Toshimoko he could not let such a dishonorable act pass. He and Toshimoko together resumed the duties of the Emerald Champion with vigor and courage. Toshimoko died at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate and Toshiken continued to serve as Emerald Champion for many more years, through the War of Spirits and all the way to the beginning of the Four Winds era. He raised Ichiro's son, Noritoshi, who eventually became Kakita daimyo and one of the finest swordsmen of his generation.

Toshiken finally gave up the office of Emerald Champion when age and lingering illness made him too infirm to carry it on. He died in the year 1160, slain by a Crane samurai-ko who was possessed by the Tainted spirit of his father's old ronin rival, Dairya.

The stats here depict Toshiken during the Hidden Emperor era, when he was still a relatively young man and had only recently taken the office of Emerald Champion.

Seppun Toshiken, Emerald Champion and Hero of the Empire

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 5
Reflexes: 5		Agility: 5	Perception: 5	

Honor: 6.8 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 6.5* *Infamy: 2.1*

School/Rank: Seppun Guardsman 4/Emerald Champion Path

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 4, Courtier 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 3, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu (Focus) 7, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Knives 2, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 4, Meditation 2, Sincerity (Honesty) 3

Kata: Striking as Void

Advantages: Great Potential (Iaijutsu), Quick, Social Position (Emerald Champion)

Disadvantages: Can't Lie, Infamous (Illegitimate Child), Sworn Enemy (Kakita Ichiro)

Goju Adorai

Champion of the Shadow

Little is known of the creature called Goju Adorai—indeed, his very existence was unknown to the Empire until the final months of the War Against the Shadow, when he began to appear openly within Rokugan. The true scope of his power was not apparent until the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, where he defeated no less a warrior than Yoritomo himself. Only the might of Isawa Hochiu combined with a crucial distraction from a Shosuro actress finally brought him down.

Some believe Adorai was actually the original Goju, the man who wrote *Celestial Agonies* and lent his name to countless later Shadowspawn. In truth, it is impossible to know whether Adorai and the first Goju were the same being. What does matter is that Adorai served as champion of the Lying Darkness and it invested him with a considerable amount of its power; thus, when Adorai died at the hands of Isawa Hochiu, it badly weakened the Darkness and created an opportunity for Hitomi to name it, breaking its power completely.

Mechanically, Adorai was an exceptionally powerful Greater Shadowspawn with a number of apparently unique capabilities. Physically he appeared to be a muscular man dressed like a peasant (complete with a straw jingasa), but with clawed hands and a strange, sinister grin. Some who met him claimed he had fangs or glowing eyes, although this may simply have been the result of his shapeshifting powers. Regardless, Adorai was a terrifying opponent and GMs should generally only use him to challenge the most powerful adventuring groups.

Goju Adorai, Champion of the Shadow

Air: 4	Earth: 6	Fire: 4	Water: 3
Reflexes: 6		Agility: 6	Strength: 6

Initiative: 10k6 — *Armor TN: 35*

Damage: *7k3 claws or by weapon* — *Attack: 10k6 claws (Simple) or any weapon 9k6 (Complex)*

Reduction: 15 (0 against crystal) — *Wounds: 128: Dead*

School: As a Greater Shadowspawn, Adorai does not normally have a school. However, if the GM has decided to use the optional ninja schools from Appendix One of the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, Adorai should be treated as a Rank 5 Goju Ninja.

Skills: Acting 5, Intimidation 7, Sincerity (Deceit) 6, Stealth 8

Special Abilities

- *Cohesion of Shadow: Adorai does not feel pain and thus does not suffer Wound penalties. He continues to function at full strength until reduced to Dead.*
- *Fear 5 when revealed as a Shadowspawn—in his default semi-human form, Adorai is Fear 3.*
- *Partial Invulnerability: Like all Greater Shadowspawn, Adorai takes half damage (rounded down) from non-crystal weapons and from non-Void spells and other magical effects not specifically intended to target the Nothing and its minions. This stacks with the effects of his Reduction. Crystal weapons and Void spells affect him normally.*
- *Mental Resistance: Adorai is immune to all Fear effects and to all spells that create illusions or influence the mind or thoughts.*
- *Shadow Powers: Adorai has all of the powers and drawbacks of Shadow Rank 5, including shapeshifting. He can assume the form and identity of any person he has been able to observe for a full Round—this shapeshifting requires a Complex Action. Contact with crystal or with light shone through crystal will reveal his true form—however, due to his great power he is not actually harmed by mere contact with crystal or crystal-focused light.*
- *Shadowbolt: Like all Greater Shadowspawn, Adorai can cast a Shadow Bolt at any target in line of sight. However, he can do this three times per day instead of once.*
- *Swift 3.*

New Game Mechanics

The following section contains an assortment of new game mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition role-playing game. Although these mechanics are introduced here because they are particularly appropriate to the Hidden Emperor era, they are usable in many other eras of play as well.

New Alternate Path: The Nameless Ones

The existence of the individuals called the Nameless Ones was at once both a great boon for the Phoenix and a terrible curse, for those who were doomed to become Nameless Ones were in many ways lost forever to their family and clan. The process by which a Nameless One was created was very poorly understood, and to the clan's perceptions it seemed to happen through the enigmatic intervention of the Void itself, moving to protect those capable of interacting with it. Perhaps two dozen Nameless Ones were identified throughout the clan's history, starting with Isawa Ujina in the late eleventh century, so the Phoenix had very little opportunity to study the phenomenon.

A Nameless One is created when an ishiken, one of those rare individuals capable of communing with the Void, is corrupted by some form of spiritual contamination. The most common such malady, of course, is the Shadowlands Taint, but the first of the Nameless Ones was created by the Lying Darkness and that sinister force was probably connected to all of the Nameless Ones to a greater or lesser degree. Regardless, on some occasions when an ishiken becomes corrupted, the Void itself purges the corruption from their body and spirit. This is an incredibly traumatic occurrence; sometimes it happens at the instant of corruption, while on other occasions it takes place over an extended period sometime after the contamination occurs. Regardless of when it happens, the purification is horrifically scarring, severely altering the individual's physical appearance and mental faculties. Grotesque deformities are inevitable; this always includes severe scarring but sometimes extends much farther, even to the loss of limbs or facial features. Mentally, the Nameless Ones are changed as well, commonly suffering from amnesia, mental fugue, or loss of identity (hence their name). A precious few have retained some semblance of their identity after this, most notably Isawa Ujina himself, but this is extremely rare and apparently limited to the most powerful of ishiken.

The boon of the Nameless Ones, if there can be said to be a positive side to such a traumatic loss, is that they are consumed with an all-encompassing hatred of the Shadowlands in all its forms. Even more significantly, however, the magic of these individuals becomes an incredibly po-

tent weapon against the Shadowlands. For this reason as well as due to the great reverence the Phoenix have for all life, the Nameless Ones were permitted to continue to serve the clan in whatever capacity they could.

After the exposure of the Lying Darkness at the end of the Hidden Emperor era, the true source of the Nameless Ones' contamination becomes apparent, and the Phoenix grow far more wary of them. Fortunately, the Darkness' defeat effectively results in an end to the creation of new Nameless Ones, and within a generation the strange order is no more.

Although the canonical Nameless Ones only appear in a brief portion of Rokugan's history (starting with the Pre-Coup era and ending with the Hidden Emperor era), creative GMs can use them in other time periods as well. The Lying Darkness could potentially have corrupted ishiken in almost any earlier era, and the Shadow Dragon could do so in later eras as well.

New Alternate Path: The Nameless Ones [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Isawa Shugenja 3
- **Requirements:** Ishiken-do Advantage

Technique: Darkness Undone

The Nameless Ones are terrible foes of all corruption, but especially of the Shadowlands. When casting any spell that targets an opponent with the Shadowlands Taint, you may expend one additional spell slot to lower your opponent's Reduction by an amount equal to your School Rank. You may spend multiple spell slots in this manner, up to a maximum equal to your Void Ring. The lowered Reduction lasts until the beginning of your next Turn.

New Family Names: The Hoshi and Hitomi

During the internal struggle which rips the Dragon Clan apart in the Hidden Emperor era, two new "families" appear in the Tattooed Orders: the Hitomi who follow the half-crazed Dragon Thunder, and the Hoshi who follow Togashi's half-mortal son. After the Lady Hitomi abdicates and departs to become the new Moon, Lord Hoshi attempts to restore unity and harmony to the clan by recognizing all three family names.

This arrangement prevails for almost four decades before growing spiritual imbalance (within both the Dragon Clan and the Celestial Heavens) prompts Hoshi's son Satsu to order the three families reunited under the Togashi name. However, the separate orders within the family—ise zumi, kikage zumi, and tsurui zumi—continue to pursue their separate paths toward enlightenment.

- **Hoshi Family Bonus:** +1 Void
- **Hitomi Family Bonus:** +1 Strength

New School: Hoshi Tsurui Zumi

The monks of the *Tsurui Zumi* order are a sub-group of the Togashi Tattooed Order, created in the Hidden Emperor era when Togashi Hoshi rebels against Hitomi and begins tattooing his own followers. In contrast to the Togashi Ise Zumi and the Hitomi Kikage Zumi, the Tsurui Zumi are less focused on direct physical action and more on the mystical ways of the spirit; although they still study the martial arts, their focus is on ki techniques and other such mystical fighting abilities, rather than on the more straightforward combat favored by the Togashi or the brutal aggression of the Hitomi. Many Hoshi choose to eschew combat altogether in favor of meditation, contemplation, or strange and whimsical behavior which they consider important to the path of enlightenment. However, when the time comes to fight in defense of the Dragon Clan, they do so readily enough.

The Hoshi family is introduced in the Hidden Emperor era, but the Tsurui Zumi tradition predates the family and continues after it is gone, so this school may be used (with a name change) in many different eras of play.

New School: Hoshi Tsurui Zumi [Monk]

- **Benefit:** +1 Void
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Etiquette, Jiujutsu, Meditation (Void Recovery), any two Skills
- **Honor:** 4.5
- **Outfit:** Robes, Bo, Traveling Pack, 2 Koku
- **Special:** Though the Tsurui Zumi is a Dragon affiliated School, mechanically this School is treated as a Brotherhood of Shinsei School (as described on page 231 in the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook).

Technique: Swift Fist, Subtle Heart

The Tsurui Zumi searches for enlightenment on many different paths, but does not shy away from physical action when it is needed. You may spend a Void Point as a Free Action to activate this Technique for a number of Rounds equal to your School Rank. While this Technique is active, you may either add +1k1 to the total of your unarmed attack rolls or +1k0 to the total of your unarmed damage rolls. You choose which bonus to apply at the beginning of each Turn.

You begin the game with one Tattoo. You also begin the game knowing two Kiho. You must meet all prerequisites in order to use these Kiho. You may purchase additional Kiho normally as per the rules for a Brotherhood of Shinsei monk.

At School Rank Four you gain one additional tattoo.

New School: Hitomi Kikage Zumi

Where the monks of the Hoshi family embrace the tsurui zumi path of mystical power and deep contemplation, those of the kikage zumi order—especially the Hitomi—embrace violent physical action as their path to enlightenment. Kikage zumi are most prominent during the reign of Lady Hitomi, but remain a prominent element of the tattooed orders all the way to the Race for the Throne, when the Hitomi family is finally absorbed back into the Togashi.

It should be noted that while the kikage zumi order dominates the Hitomi family, it is not exclusive to it. Violent and martial tattooed men appear from time to time for centuries before the reign of Lady Hitomi, and continue to appear after the family bearing her name is extinguished. Thus, much as with the tsurui zumi, the kikage zumi school may potentially be used in almost any era of play if the GM permits it.

New School: Hitomi Kikage Zumi [Monk]

- **Benefit:** +1 Reflexes
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Jiujutsu, Lore (choose one), Meditation, any two non-Low Skills
- **Honor:** 4.5
- **Outfit:** Sturdy Clothing, Traveling Pack, 4 koku

Techniques

Rank 1: The Gift of the Lady

The tattooed men all receive the mystical blood of a god in their unique tattoos, but the warriors of the kikage zumi often manifest their tattoos spontaneously through the gifts of their divine patron. They spend less time in the house of the tattoo masters and more time in their dojo practicing the martial arts. The art of Kaze-do teaches the Kikage Zumi to move as swiftly and unpredictably as the wind, confounding their opponents. You gain one Tattoo at this rank. You may add your Reflexes to your Armor TN, and when rolling to control a Grapple you may choose to use your Reflexes instead of your Strength.

Rank 2: Strike the Base

As the Kaze-do student grows more proficient, he is able to focus the power of mind, soul, and body into punishing strikes of the hands and feet. You may spend a Void Point on damage rolls for unarmed attacks, including damage inflicted in a Grapple.

Rank 3: Moving the Wind

The Kikage Zumi now strikes with the swiftness of Air itself, the true path of Kaze-do. You may attack as a Simple Action when making unarmed attacks. You gain one additional tattoo.

Rank 4: Strike the Center

The Kikage Zumi learn to strike with speed and terrible force, while also using the swiftness of the wind to hurl their opponents to the ground. When fighting unarmed, you may perform the Knockdown maneuver for 1 less Raise, and gain a bonus of +1k1 to the total of all unarmed damage rolls (including damage inflicted with a Grapple).

Rank 5: Strike the Summit

Final mastery of the ways of Kaze-do allows the tattooed man to deliver strikes and throws that deprive his enemies of Air itself. Any time you perform a Knockdown maneuver, you may call two additional Raises; if the Knockdown succeeds, your opponent is automatically Stunned. If you elect to throw an opponent during a Grapple you control, he must roll Earth at TN 20 or he is also Stunned. You gain one additional tattoo.

The War of Spirits

Toturi I, Emperor of Rokugan, made himself sit impassively on the Steel Throne as the man who wanted his Empire entered the Court of Otosan Uchi.

Or rather was carried *in, in an ornate palanquin. Behind it stalked a massive slab of a man who, like the rest of the procession—and Toturi himself—glowed with the golden radiance of spirits returned from the dead. His archaic armor was unmistakably that of a Crab. Hida Tsuneo, Toturi thought. The Stone Crab. Another legend come back to life.*

Toturi glanced right and left, at the handful of his most senior vassals who remained in attendance. Except for them, and the Seppun Guardsmen lining the walls, the Emperor had dismissed the rest of his court. Those who remained stood alert, prepared for anything... because anything was possible when the present came face-to-face with its past.

The palanquin-bearers stopped and lowered their burden. Two more servants hurried to pull aside the curtains. The figure within, however, did not move.

Neither did Toturi.

An awkward moment followed. Toturi let it linger, then nodded. A Miya herald stepped forward. "His Imperial Highness Toturi I, sole ruler of Rokugan, who avenged the fallen Hantei line by defeating the monster Fu Leng, welcomes the esteemed representative of the former Imperial dynasty, Hantei XVI, as he completes his tour of the Empire prior to returning his rightful place in the Celestial Order as a blessed ancestor."

The silence returned. Toturi continued to wait.

Finally the figure in the palanquin stirred, unfolding a lean frame and stepping down to the floor. Raptor-sharp eyes scanned the room, then settled on Toturi.

"Your herald requires punishment for delivering such an error-ridden proclamation," he said, his soft voice like silk over steel. "The Hantei dynasty is very much alive and well, and will now resume the Throne. Your stewardship is appreciated, but you are dismissed."

Toturi regarded Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum. Public history said little of his reign, now five hundred years in the past, but the secret records of the Ikoma and Shosuro said it was the most brutal in Rokugan's history. The atrocities attributed to him since returning through Oblivion's Gate only reinforced the tales.

Still, Toturi remained carefully composed. "The only error," he said, "is yours, in believing that you have any claim to this throne."

Hantei glanced at Tsuneo, who had moved up to stand at his right, only slightly behind him. "The Emerald Throne belongs to the Hantei," he said, "not an upstart ronin."

Toturi tapped the throne's arm. "The Emerald Throne is gone, destroyed by Fu Leng, along with the last of your dynasty. This is the Steel Throne, and though I did not seek it, it belongs to me."

Hantei sighed theatrically. "This is not open to debate." He gestured to the Champions of the Lion and Unicorn. "You, and you... seize this pretender. He is a traitor to the Empire."

Someone coughed. No one moved.

Toturi permitted himself a small smile. "You are correct about one thing, Hantei. There is no debate. You have no power here."

The Hantei's answering smile did not touch his eyes. "You may have brought some of these dogs to heel, ronin, but I have more power than you know." His soft voice seemed only to intensify the viciousness of his words. His gaze flicked to Shiba Tsukune, Champion of the Phoenix. Toturi could only watch, stunned, as she drew her sword.

The War of Spirits

"Our war is not a war of arrogance, your majesty, but of a people who have returned home. We only wish to take our due. If that means your Empire must change, then so it must."

—Uidori, returned spirit, addressing Emperor Emperor Toturi I

The first three decades of Rokugan's twelfth century were turbulent ones to say the least. The Empire had endured the Scorpion Clan Coup, the subsequent Clan War, the rise of Fu Leng and his defeat on the Second Day of Thunder, and the culmination of a millennium of scheming by the Lying Darkness ending in its defeat at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate. The Empire desperately hoped the following years would be comparatively peaceful ones in which it could rest and rebuild. Unfortunately, this was not to be. A new enemy arose, entirely unlike any the Empire had ever faced: Rokugan's own past.

The War of Spirits depicts a unique form of dynastic contest, very different from the Clan War or later conflicts such as the Four Winds or the Race for the Throne. Instead of a battle between rival contemporary claimants, it is conflict pitting Rokugan's samurai against their own ancestors, brought back to life by the power of Oblivion's Gate. This allows the GM to confront the PCs with unusual challenges and choices. Where do their loyalties truly lie? With the hero Toturi, sitting on the Imperial throne? Or with the returned Hantei Emperor, able to claim a blood descent from the Empire's founding Kami?

Origins of the War

"The spirits of the past have come through Oblivion's Gate to the present, bringing with them old wars long since forgotten. If they do not return to Yomi, they challenge the Emperor, the strength of the clans, and the very balance of nature. I will see them die, even if I must give up my life to join them."

—Bayushi Paneki

The origins of the War of Spirits can be traced to the year 1132 during the final months of the War Against the Darkness. Ancestral spirits were found to be returning to Rokugan in physical form, hinting at a degradation in the barriers separating the various realms of existence. In particular, spirits from Yomi (the Realm of Blessed Ancestors), Meido (the Realm of Waiting), and Toshigoku (the Realm of Slaughter) had begun to appear in Ningen-do. The epicenter of these spiritual transgressions was eventually tracked to the ruined troll city of Volturnum, deep in the Shadowlands, where an ancient artifact known as Oblivion's Gate stood. Almost too late, the Empire realized that the Lying Darkness was attempting to unmake not just the Empire but all of creation by erasing its past. Rokugan mustered an army and marched to Volturnum to challenge the Lying Darkness. The resulting battle seemed to be going against the Rokugani, but at the critical moment spirits from Yomi and the other realms began to cross through Oblivion's Gate in great numbers to aid the Imperial forces. They were led by Toturi himself, who had committed seppuku to free himself from the Darkness' corruption. Caught between the forces of Rokugan and Toturi's army of returned spirits, the Darkness faltered, opening the way for a few heroes and the edict of the new Lady Moon to finally defeat it. In the aftermath, the multitude of returned spirits

Terminology

Throughout this chapter, the words "spirit" and "returned spirit" are used interchangeably to refer to the re-embodied ancestors who emerged through Oblivion's Gate. However, this terminology can be slightly confusing, since the term "spirits" is also used generically to refer to beings from the other Spirit Realms, such as those presented in Chapter 12 of the Legend of the Five Rings 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*. GMs should be aware of this so as to avoid creating confusion in their players.

Beings who are not native to Ningen-do are usually referred to generically as "spirits" to distinguish them from humans. The spirits described here, however, are the restored souls of mortal humans who originated in and are native to Ningen-do. Accordingly, the mechanics presented in *Enemies of the Empire* for "spirits" should not be applied to any of the returned spirits of this chapter. Mechanics for depicting returned spirits will be found at the end of this chapter.

marched back to Rokugan alongside the victorious Imperial forces.

As a result, thousands of spirits from every period of the Empire's history now walked Rokugan. Many were honorable samurai, aware that they were out of their rightful place in the Celestial Order and prepared to return to the afterlife. But many more were more reluctant to leave Ningen-do, convinced the Fortunes had caused them to return from the dead to take a stand in current Imperial affairs or, more problematically, to resume duties from their own times. And some were simply opportunistic, eager to seize this unexpected chance to right past wrongs, settle old scores, or resume quests for glory and power. Among this last group the most prominent by far was Hantei Okucheo, otherwise known as Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum—the sixth century Emperor of Rokugan who had been the most tyrannical ruler in the Empire's history.

Year 1132

- Oblivion's Gate opens. Spirits of the dead begin to return to Ningen-do. Rokugani shugenja determine the boundaries between the mortal and spirit realms are weakening and the source of this weakness is centered in the Shadowlands, in the ancient troll city of Volturnum.

Year 1133

- In a lucid moment, Emperor Toturi I commits seppuku, freeing himself from the power of the Lying Darkness and leaving his wife Isawa Kaede—the Oracle of the Void—as ruler of Rokugan.
- **Battle of Oblivion's Gate.** The Empire marshals an army and marches to Volturnum to confront the Lying Darkness. During the ensuing battle, great numbers of spirits from the Empire's past pass through Oblivion's Gate, led by the now-cleansed spirit of Toturi I. The Lying Darkness is finally defeated and in the process Oblivion's Gate is destroyed, trapping the returned spirits in Ningen-do. All of the survivors march back to Rokugan where Toturi resumes his role as Emperor.

A New Threat Arises

"Let the people hate, as long as they also fear."

—Hantei XVI

Toturi, now free of the influence of the Lying Darkness, resumed his position as Emperor. Hantei XVI, however, assumed a more sinister role. Mindful that the Empire had changed substantially in the past five centuries, Hantei Okucheo held his immediate ambitions in check and embarked on a series of clandestine journeys through Rokugan. He was accompanied by another returned spirit, Hida Tsuneo, the so-called Stone Crab, who was consigned by a curse to remain by the Hantei's side and obey all his commands. Okucheo observed as he traveled, his sharp eye and cunning mind dissecting the Imperial political landscape. He scrutinized every relationship among those he considered influential, studied every instance of discontent, and noted every grievance, real or perceived. Not surprisingly, he found the most unrest among the returned spirits—especially those disturbed ones who had come from Toshigoku. But he uncovered more than a few political issues among contemporary Rokugani that were ripe for exploitation. He also carefully developed his own private spy network, ensuring he soon had eyes and ears in every court.

Outwardly, however, Rokugan had entered what could almost be considered a "golden age." Emperor Toturi put great emphasis on reconstruction, a critical need in the wake of more than a decade of wars and catastrophes. He also fathered three children by his Empress Kaede, apparently assuring the Imperial succession and promising political stability for the Empire. Reconstruction went well, improving the standard of living across Rokugan for noble and commoner alike. The greatest difficulty facing Toturi remained the thousands of returned spirits, many of whom were restless and dissatisfied with the modern Empire. Local conflicts flared as old scores were remembered and renewed, keeping the Emerald Magistrates and sometimes even the Imperial Legions busy. Toturi finally issued an edict directing the returned spirits to either commit honorable seppuku and return to the afterlife or submit themselves to a ritual developed by the Phoenix Clan, a ritual that would sever their remaining connections to the spirit realms and make them fully mortal once more. Many obeyed, but not all—however, the decree did seem to reduce the tensions and promise a prosperous and peaceful future for the Empire.

Sadly, this was an illusion. Hantei Ochukeo had not been idle and many of the minor conflicts erupting across the Empire were his doing, created by exploiting points of stress within and among the Great Clans. Among the most egregious was a border clash between the Crane and Crab Clans, ostensibly over the fealty of the Yasuki family. This incident perfectly illustrated the problems arising from the presence of returned spirits in Rokugan. When Yasuki Masashi died in the third century the Yasuki were still a Crane family. When he returned through Oblivion's Gate, he was horrified to discover the Yasuki had long since changed fealty to the Crab. Masashi led a group of disaffected Crane spirits to demand the family be reinstated to the Crane. Hantei Ochukeo whispered seditious counsel in Masashi's ear, while Hida Tsuneo influenced his former clan to ensure the result would be a bloody, inconclusive conflict that could only heighten tensions between the two clans. At his suggestion the Yasuki daimyo refused Masahi's demands, prompting a series of small but bitter border clashes between Crab troops (mostly mortals) and Crane forces comprised mainly of spirits.

Year 1136

- **Birth of The Sword.** Tsudao, Toturi's first child, is born. She will prove adept as a warrior and a military leader, earning the title of "The Sword."
- The Phoenix perfect a ritual which will render a spirit mortal. Toturi issues an edict that all returned spirits must either submit to this ritual or commit honorable suicide and return to the afterlife. Many spirits obey, but many more do not.

Year 1137

- **Birth of the Wolf.** Toturi's second child, Toturi Sezaru, is born under auspicious signs. The boy's hair turns white shortly after his birth, a sign of great destiny. Because of his prowess with magic and what will prove to be an almost obsessive desire to hunt down the Empire's enemies, Sezaru comes to be known as "The Wolf."

Year 1138

- The Crab and Crane battle on the Yasuki border. Following a rejected demand from Yasuki Masashi, a brief but bloody clash erupts between the Crab and the Crane.

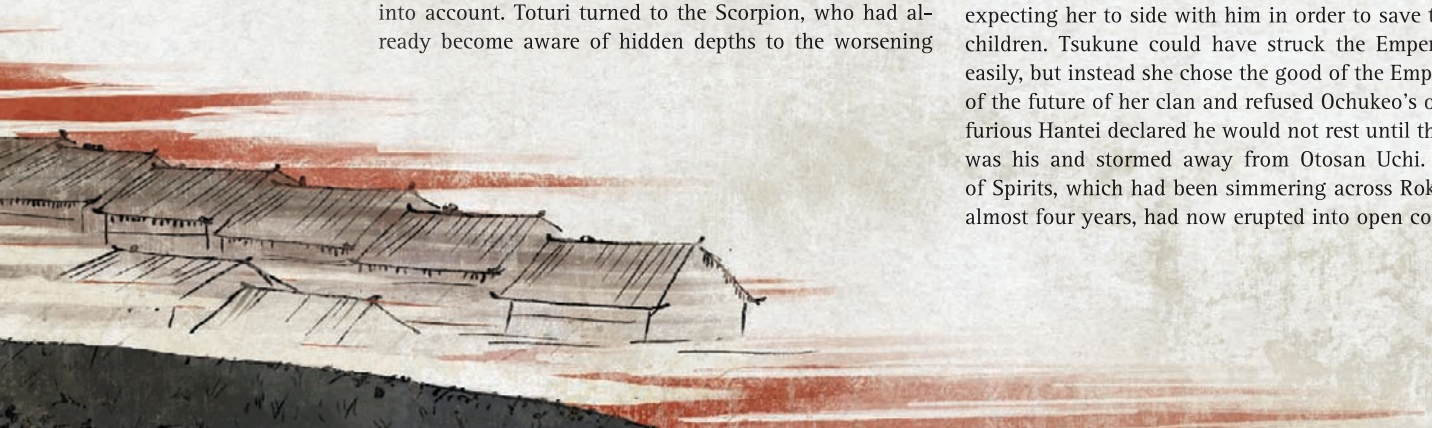
Eventually, the eruptions of unrest around the Empire became too frequent to be explained by the usual to-and-fro of Imperial politics, even taking the returned spirits into account. Toturi turned to the Scorpion, who had already become aware of hidden depths to the worsening instability. The Emperor charged Bayushi Yojiro, the Scorpion Clan Champion, to uncover the truth and ensure that whatever was behind the growing strife did not succeed in destabilizing the Empire. Even the Scorpion found it difficult to penetrate the complex web of misdirection with which Hantei Ochukeo covered his activities, but the truth finally came to light. However, the Scorpion seized the opportunity to ingratiate themselves to Ochukeo by inserting a spirit from their own clan, Bayushi Baku, as one of his close advisors.

- **Hantei XVI seizes the Phoenix Children.** A spirit force led by Hida Tsuneo and assisted by the disgruntled Dragon daimyo, Agasha Tamori, seizes Kyuden Isawa in a bold raid. The children there, including those of the Elemental Masters, are taken hostage.

It was characteristic of Hantei Ochukeo's twisted mind that he prepared for his attempt to claim the throne by taking hostages rather than trusting to force of personality or the weight of his lineage. Forces loyal to the Hantei gathered in the desolate Dragon Heart Plains between the Dragon and Phoenix lands and marched on Kyuden Isawa. Two factors assisted Hantei in this gambit. First, it had become apparent that returned spirits, bolstered by their supernatural connection to realms beyond Ningen-do, had less need for rest and sustenance than mortals. This allowed spirit armies to march farther and faster than their mortal counterparts—an advantage that would be important more than once in the coming war. Second, Hantei was assisted by mortal agents, particularly Agasha Tamori, daimyo of the Agasha family of the Dragon. Most of the Agasha had defected to the Phoenix during the War Against the Lying Darkness. Tamori was left bitter and isolated, eager for a chance to strike back at the Phoenix and his rebellious family; he assisted Hida Tsuneo and his spirit army in seizing Kyuden Isawa. Hantei XVI ordered all of the children in the castle be held hostage against the future cooperation of the Phoenix.

- **Hantei XVI Demands the Throne.** Hantei Okucheo arrives in Otosan Uchi and demands Toturi surrender the Throne to him. Toturi refuses. The Hantei is infuriated when Shiba Tsukune, the Phoenix Champion, refuses to turn on Toturi in spite of his holding her clan's children hostage. Hantei declares war on Toturi and the War of Spirits begins.

Hantei XVI was not terribly surprised when Toturi refused to surrender the Throne, but what happened next did catch him off guard. The Hantei turned to Shiba Tsukune, expecting her to side with him in order to save the Isawa children. Tsukune could have struck the Emperor down easily, but instead she chose the good of the Empire ahead of the future of her clan and refused Ochukeo's order. The furious Hantei declared he would not rest until the Throne was his and stormed away from Otosan Uchi. The War of Spirits, which had been simmering across Rokugan for almost four years, had now erupted into open conflict.



Choosing Sides

"Tsuneo was the greatest general of his age, now turned against the Empire at Hantei XVI's command. He will never surrender, and he will never fall. How can we defeat a legend?"

—Shiba Gensui

The extent of Hantei XVI's insidious preparations over the preceding years quickly became clear. Internal conflict wracked the Unicorn and Crane as spirit factions sought to usurp power from the current leaders. The Lion were afflicted as well, but that clan's greater understanding and affinity with the spirits of the ancestors allowed mortals to retain control. The Dragon, still reeling from the great schism Hitomi caused within their clan a few years earlier, largely retired to their fortified mountain keeps and took little active part in the war thereafter—although Tamori continued to support the Hantei. The Crab were deeply conflicted by the presence of Hida Tsuneo, a revered Crab hero, and adopted a stance of uneasy neutrality, focusing on maintaining their guard on the Wall against the Shadowlands. The Scorpion, meanwhile, adopted the most inscrutable stance of all the clans—outwardly, they professed loyalty to Toturi but in many of their actions they appeared to neither support nor particularly oppose either Toturi or Hantei XVI. The Phoenix seemed destined to support the Hantei openly (if grudgingly) due to his control of their children in Kyuden Isawa. However, the Steel Chrysanthemum miscalculated; in a fit of rage over Tsukune's refusal to support him, he ordered one of the children killed to force the Phoenix Elemental Masters to side with him. This ignited a furious counterattack that drove the Hantei's forces from Kyuden Isawa and placed the Phoenix firmly on Toturi's side for the remainder of the war. Finally the Mantis, spurned by Hantei XVI as insignificant in spite of their accomplishments during the Clan Wars, sided willingly with Toturi.

- **Battle of Fallen Ground.** The first major battle of the War of Spirits, fought near the Lion-Phoenix border, pits a spirit army under Hida Tsuneo against a mainly Lion army under the general (and former Akodo ronin) Akodo Ijiasu. It is a mortal

victory, albeit a costly one. Tsuneo is prevented from attacking Otosan Uchi and falls back on Kyuden Isawa.

- **The Phoenix children are freed.** Hantei XVI's murder of the Master of Earth's daughter causes the Phoenix to rebel and drive the spirits from Kyuden Isawa.

The War of Spirits quickly became a protracted campaign of attrition. Even counting only on the Lion, Phoenix, and Mantis for full support, Toturi's forces outnumbered those of Hantei XVI, but the spirits were led by a general of unsurpassed brilliance, Hida Tsuneo, and benefited from significant logistical advantages thanks to their supernatural stamina. For the next twelve years, the armies of the living and the dead skirmished frequently and fought several bloody but inconclusive battles. Meanwhile, the Great Clans—particularly the Crane and Unicorn—were wracked by almost constant internal conflict between spirit and mortal factions.

As the war tore at Rokugan, the reconstruction begun by Toturi not only halted but in many places was undone. The lands of the Crane—particularly the Asahina—were especially hard-hit. The Empire's protracted suffering weighed heavily on Toturi.

Year 1139

- **The Anvil is Born.** Toturi's third child, a somber and intellectual boy named Naseru, is born. He will become known as "The Anvil" for his iron resolve and harsh approach to politics.

Year 1142

- **The Battle of Shallow Waters.** A mortal army comprised predominantly of Lion troops is attacked by a much larger spirit army in a river valley on the edge of the Golden Sun Plain. The Lion fall back on a fortified camp; the camp is eventually overrun, but its sacrifice allows most of the mortal army to withdraw intact.

Year 1145

- **Battle of Shiro Iuchi.** Spirit forces manage to capture the seat of the Iuchi family after a hard-fought battle. The sometime-ronin Shinjo Morito plays a key role in the defense.
- In recognition of his valor at Shiro Iuchi, Shinjo Morito's claim to the land he and his followers have occupied near the Phoenix border is recognized by Emperor Toturi. This eventually leads to the creation of the Ox Clan in 1158.

Year 1146

- **The Second Battle of White Shore Plain.** A mortal army of Unicorn, Scorpion, and Phoenix troops engages and defeats a spirit army at White Shore Plain, then moves to retake Shiro Iuchi. A young Scorpion bushi named Bayushi Paneki reputedly infiltrates a spirit camp and poisons their food supply, swinging the following day's battle in favor of the mortal army and allowing Shiro Iuchi to be retaken.

Year 1147

- **The Mantis sail to the Ivory Kingdoms.** After actively participating in the War of Spirits during the first few years, the Mantis Clan seems to all but disappear from the Empire from this time forward. Many think the Clan Champion, Yoritomo Aramasu, is showing disinterest in the Empire's woes, but in reality Aramasu and the Mantis are obeying an order from Toturi to sail to the gaijin lands known as the Ivory Kingdoms and assist the ruling *maharajah* against an aggressive rebellion by the Cult of the Destroyer. The Mantis are largely successful, and Rokugan avoids a new threat from overseas... at least for a time.

Year 1150

- **The Battle of Drowned Honor.** Hida Tsuneo moves to take control of the key Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari. A combined mortal force of Crab and Scorpion troops engage his force, marking one of the first major commitments of Crab troops to the war and the first time they have stood against Tsuneo. The mortals win, pushing Tsuneo away from the city, but the victory is costly: Hida Yasamura, the husband of Crab Champion Hida O-Ushi, dies with an arrow in his throat, fired from the bow of a spirit Crab.
- **The Battle of Quiet Winds.** Determined to end the suffering caused by the ongoing war, Toturi marches the bulk of his army south through Beiden Pass to join a large waiting Scorpion force. He finally achieves the decisive engagement he seeks at the Battle of Quiet Winds, so-named because the day of battle is still and sultry. However, at a crucial moment the Scorpion appear to change sides and join the spirits. Toturi's army is forced to withdraw, with only a valiant and sacrificial rearguard action by the Lion preventing a total rout.
- **The Fall of Beiden Pass.** Driven from the field at the Battle of Quiet Winds, Toturi's army retreats northward through Beiden Pass, seeking to regroup and prevent the Steel Chrysanthemum from threatening Otosan Uchi. At the urging of Bayushi Baku, Hantei XVI orders Hida Tsuneo to send the spirit army in pursuit. However, this is actually a trap of Scorpion design. When most of the spirit army is in the Pass, Phoenix shugenja collapse it, burying and destroying the spirit army.

The Battle of Quiet Winds is a controversial moment, for the Scorpion did not warn Toturi beforehand of their specific plans. A decade before, Toturi had ordered the Underhand, "See that the spirits do not win," but by 1150 it had been so long that even Toturi briefly wondered whether he

The Fate of Hida Tsuneo

Hida Tsuneo did not survive the War of the Spirits and he is widely believed to have died in the collapse of Beiden Pass. However, some of the more poetic accounts of the War have offered a different version of his fate. In this account, Tsuneo remained at the Steel Chrysanthemum's side during the final march, and Hantei Ochukeo was so furious at the loss of his army that he impulsively stabbed Tsuneo to death. The Stone Crab died with a smile, free at last from the oath of loyalty and the unending curse which together bound him to Ochukeo.

It is up to each GM which version of Tsuneo's fate to use in his game.

had been betrayed. Only after the spirit army was in motion did a Scorpion shinobi delivered a message to Toturi revealing the truth and urging him to use the Phoenix to destroy the Pass. Isawa shugenja executed a powerful ritual, entreating the kami of fire and earth, and in a thunderous instant most of the Hantei's army was destroyed and the War of Spirits brought to a sudden and spectacular end.

- **Treaty with the Spirits.** With the bulk of his army lost, Hantei XVI finally agrees to negotiate with Toturi. In exchange for peace, Toturi's youngest son Naseru is fostered to the Hantei, taking the family name and symbolically joining the Toturi and Hantei bloodlines. In return, Hantei Ochukeo renounces his claim to the Throne of Rokugan and retires to an estate in Otosan Uchi, bringing the War of Spirits to an end.
- **Lord Sun creates the Great Crater.** The destruction of Beiden Pass leaves the Empire without a major direct route through the Spine of the World Mountains. In answer, Lord Sun hurls fire into the mountains near the ancient Seikitsu Pass, creating the Great Crater and reopening a route through the peaks.

The Aftermath of the War of Spirits

"One of your children, Toturi, must bear the Hantei name and accept the Hantei blood. Only if our ancestors are honored, and only if a child of both our bloodlines remains close to the throne, will we cease our war."

—Hantei XVI

The treaty which Hantei Ochukeo and Emperor Toturi I agreed to was a compromise that left both sides unsatisfied. Ochukeo was forced to give up his claim on the Throne, but in return gained control of Toturi's youngest son Naseru, who he seems to have regarded as a sort of protégé or possibly a weapon of later vengeance. Toturi did not like these terms but was anxious to bring an end to the war and restore peace and hope to the Empire. As an additional concession he granted the Tamori name to the descendants of Agasha Tamori, who had remained loyal to Hantei XVI throughout the War, thus forming the new Tamori family within the Dragon Clan. Finally, all of the remaining spirits agreed to either undergo the ritual to become mortal or to commit honorable suicide. (The preferred method for this was to jump off a seaside cliff near Otosan Uchi, which came to be known as the Leaping Place.) After sixteen years of turmoil the War of Spirits had come to an end. Lord Sun's blast of heavenly fire upon the Spine of the World Mountains served as a final capstone to the tumultuous era.

Although the War of Spirits ends officially in the year 1150, there are some noteworthy epilogues.

A private estate is set aside for Hantei Ochukeo in Otosan Uchi, where he takes up residence with his personal retainers and Prince Naseru. Ochukeo remains as maddened and cruel as ever, frequently beating and abusing Naseru and the other Imperials who watch over him. At some point during this era Naseru loses an eye to Ochukeo's abuse, although in the interest of maintaining the peace he refuses to publicly admit how it happened. Finally in the year 1155 the aging former Emperor is found dead, stabbed to death. Naseru again refuses to say how it happened despite repeated requests from his father Toturi, and the truth remains a mystery. Some tales claim the old Hantei's fiancé, Otomo Hoketuhime, came to Naseru's rescue, while other versions claim Naseru killed Okucheo to protect Hoketuhime (with whom he later had a brief romance). Regardless, neither of them ever admit the truth about the second and final death of the Steel Chrysanthemum.

Alternate Paths: Victory for the Hantei

What if Hantei Okucheo had succeeded in overthrowing Toturi and reclaiming the throne for the Hantei Dynasty? Subsequent Imperial history would have changed almost completely out of recognition. Hantei XVI would have imposed a reign of terror against all who opposed him, relying on Tsuneo and fanatically loyal legions of spirit troops to enforce his will. Low-level civil war and unrest would likely have simmered for years if not generations, and Bayushi Atsuki's later attempt to recreate the Gozoku Alliance would probably have gained considerably greater support. Meanwhile, an Empire under Ochukeo's mercurial and selfish rule would have been poorly prepared for other internal and external threats such as the attack by Daigotsu, the re-emergence of Iuchiban and the Bloodspeakers, and the eventual Kali-Ma Invasion.

Also in the year 1155, a young man named Akodo Kaneka announces himself as the son of Emperor Toturi by a geisha, Hatsuko, the woman who was Toturi's lover at the time of the Scorpion Clan Coup. Kaneka's claim is supported by several reliable sources, and it causes an uproar in the Imperial Court since he is technically the oldest (albeit illegitimate) child of the Emperor. Toturi, however, never has the opportunity to officially recognize Kaneka as his son before his own death during a Shadowlands attack in the year 1158, an event which triggers the turbulent dynastic struggle known as the Four Winds Era.

The Clans and Factions During the War of the Spirits

"We stand at a time of crisis. Before us lie the road of the past and the road of the future. Which one will you follow?"

—Emperor Toturi the First

It would be overly simplistic to say any given clan fully supported either Hantei or Toturi during the War of Spirits. The truth was much more complex, in part due to the presence of spirits in all of the clans. Moreover, by the start of the War of Spirits the clans had just come through almost two decades of severe unrest and hardship, losing many heroes and tens of thousands of samurai. Few were eager to leap into a new conflict no matter their loyalties.

The Crab Clan

"Something dark grows in the heart of the Shadowlands, but the Seven Clans have no time for the minions of Fu Leng. Let the clans fight their ancestors: the Crab have better things to do."

—Hiruma Yugure

The Crab entered the War of Spirits deeply conflicted. Their Clan Champion, Hida O-Ushi, had held the title for only a short time following the ascension of her older brother Hida Yakamo to become Lord Sun. She had seen her father, Hida Kisada, forge a tragic alliance with the Shadowlands during the Clan Wars, and her younger brother Hida Sukune sacrificed by the Tainted shugenja Kuni Yori as part of a dark ritual. Although the Crab had purged themselves of their Tainted elements and were struggling to rebuild and put the dark days of the Clan Wars behind them, the clan still suffered from much self-doubt and internal strife. Yori's betrayal had left the Kuni especially weak and viewed with suspicion by the rest of the clan. Bargaining with the Shadowlands had left a dark stain on the soul of the Crab and O-Ushi desperately sought to cleanse it.

For many Crab, the return to Rokugan of Hida Tsuneo, the Stone Crab, offered an opportunity to rally the clan around a glorious hero. Returned Crab spirits likewise saw Tsuneo as their natural leader; from their point of view, the contemporary mortal Crab were less trustworthy, given their murky reputation for having dealt with the Shadowlands. To his credit, Tsuneo distanced himself from calls for him to resume the Clan Championship he had once held, knowing this would lead to nothing but further unrest within the clan at a time when it needed to be united.

What few realized was the extent to which Tsuneo was bound to the maniacal Hantei XVI, trapped by the combined effects of his own oaths of loyalty and a dying curse from the Emperor's mother. He was doomed to follow the Steel Chrysanthemum even into death. However, even the crazed Hantei Ochukeo was canny enough to recognize that ordering Tsuneo to plunge his own clan into civil war might have been too much. Instead he relied on Tsuneo's standing among the Crab to take refuge within the clan's lands after he returned to Rokugan in the year 1133.

O-Ushi believed the most effective way to keep the Crab united and focused was to direct their efforts at rebuilding and

maintaining the Carpenter Wall, restoring the Hiruma lands, and keeping watch over the Shadowlands. This southward focus continued through most of the War of Spirits, with Crab forces only occasionally participating in events beyond their own lands. Only late in the war did the Crab marshal in large numbers, and even then they served on both sides of the conflict, reflecting the clan's ambivalence. Hida Tsuneo himself led a brief siege of the Crab holding of Sunda Mizu Dojo, while Crab led by O-Uchi's husband Yasamura fought in the Battle of Drowned Honor near Ryoko Owari, facing spirit Crab loyal to Tsuneo. Crab forces also participated on both sides of the Battle of Quiet Winds and the subsequent pursuit through Beiden Pass; in fact, spirit Crab under Tsuneo were the leading element of Hantei's pursuing force and were entirely destroyed when the Pass fell.

The Crane Clan

"Doji Meihu... an ancient general, fallen in war against the Crab. The present means nothing to these spirits - save that they can use it to attain their forgotten goals."

—Kakita Kaiten, Crane Clan Champion

The Crane Clan entered the War of Spirits with its leadership in disarray. Doji Kuwanan, the former Champion, had fallen at Oblivion's Gate. His infant son Doji Kurohito had been born after Kuwanan marched to Volturnum, so the family daimyo and master sensei Kakita Kaiten took up the title of Regent until Kurohito could come of age. Unfortunately, Kaiten's skill with the sword was of limited use in dealing with the issues plaguing the Crane. They had recently endured a violent civil war engineered by the Lying Darkness, and suffered further when the legendary Great Sea Spider twice attacked and ravaged Crane lands, resulting in widespread famine. Accordingly Kaiten was ill-prepared for the influx of returned spirits after the Battle of Oblivion's Gate.

The clan quickly fractionated into spirit and mortal factions. The Crane spirits brought staunchly traditionalist attitudes back from death and were perturbed by many of the changes that had occurred in the Empire, especially the Yasuki family's switch to the Crab Clan, deeply distressing to many spirits who had died before the Yasuki War. The growing political power of other clans (especially the Scorpion) and the assumption—or in the spirits' view, usurpation—of the Throne by a non-Hantei were also areas of sharp discontent. The Crane spirits soon agitated for a return to "correctness" across the Empire, even if that meant undoing some arrangements which contemporary mortals saw as having been resolved decades or even centuries earlier. Tensions grew, culminating in the infamous delegation by the spirit Yasuki Masashi and his followers to the Crab, demanding the return of his family to the Crane. The delegation was not sanctioned by Kaiten and by no means represented an official Crane position, but it nonetheless led to a violent border skirmish that nearly erupted into full-scale open war between the two clans. Only the timely intervention of three Imperial legions led by Toturi's trusted vassal Toku put an end to the fighting.

However, the damage had been done. Masashi deeply resented Kaiten's lack of support for what he believed to be a righteous cause, and when the War of Spirits finally burst into the open he and his followers rose against the mortal leadership of the Crane. For much of the rest of the War, spirit and mortal factions fought for control of the Crane Clan. During this time young Doji Kurohito grew to manhood; following his gempukku in the year 1147 he assumed the Championship of the Crane and moved to suppress the rebellious spirits.

Although Kurohito was determined to restore order to the Crane he was not prejudiced against the spirits and indeed fell in love with a returned spirit, Isawa Akiko. His marriage to her not only cemented an alliance with the Phoenix but also greatly improved his standing among the returned Crane spirits. By the time the War of Spirits had ended, Kurohito had largely reunified the Crane, and after the War he was instrumental in persuading Toturi to allow any spirits who chose to do so to undergo the Phoenix ritual to become mortal... thereby allowing his beloved Akiko to remain in Ningen-do.

The Dragon Clan

"We saw a unit of spirit warriors turn back without a strike, unwilling to fight against three Dragon ise zumi. When we asked the Dragon why, they spoke in riddles."

—Chobo, wandering sohei

The Dragon Clan is often remembered for its lack of clear participation in the War of Spirits; however, the clan was still reeling from the aftereffects of an internal conflict far more acrimonious. During the War Against the Lying Darkness the Dragon had been deeply divided by the actions of Mirumoto Hitomi. Hitomi's rule tore the clan apart, leading to open war with the Naga, the departure of most of the Agasha family, and the split of the tattooed order into three factions. Hitomi finally redeemed herself, ascending to become Lady Moon and naming the Lying Darkness, breaking its power. Togashi Hoshi, the half-mortal son of the Kami Togashi, succeeded her as Dragon Clan Champion and began the painful process of reuniting his clan.

Hoshi had inherited some of his father's divine precognition and it is likely that he had some forewarning of the protracted conflict that would embroil the Empire with the return of the Steel Chrysanthemum. He chose to keep the Dragon Clan largely out of the War, maintaining an outward policy of neutrality. While both sides in the War viewed this with some bitterness, in fact the Dragon ranks had been badly depleted by the time of Oblivion's Gate and they had few forces available to commit to any further battle. A large number of spirit Dragon returned to Rokugan, but while a few did side with the Hantei most adopted the relatively passive stance of their mortal clan-mates. By keeping his clan mostly out of the War, Hoshi may have prevented a disproportionate number of spirits from swelling the Hantei's ranks, thereby subtly aiding Toturi's mortal forces.

The notable exception to this pattern was the involvement of the daimyo Agasha Tamori. During Hitomi's mad reign most of the Agasha family left the clan and swore fealty to the Phoenix. Tamori was embittered and seized the opportunity for revenge on his former family and the clan that accepted them. He became a close advisor to Hantei XVI, providing him with much valuable knowledge about contemporary Rokugan, and was instrumental in the plot to seize the Phoenix children and use them to force that clan's cooperation.

After the War Toturi agreed to create a new family within the Dragon, the Tamori, as a concession for peace. Despite this accomplishment, the revenge-obsessed Agasha Tamori did not enjoy his success for long. Sometime before or during the War of Spirits he became Tainted (some accounts believe it happened during the earlier March to Volturnum, but no definitive explanation has ever been found). After the War he soon became the Dark Oracle of Fire, unleashing violence and death against both the Dragon and Phoenix Clans.

The Lion Clan

"You will obey me!" the spirit samurai shouted. "I am daimyo of the Akodo. I am Champion of the Lion!"

"No more," Kitsu Motso said, his voice like ice. "No more."

—The War of Spirits, third scroll

As the predominant military clan of Rokugan, the Lion had suffered terrible losses during the series of wars afflicting the Empire in the previous two decades. However, the clan emerged from the chaos relatively unified, due not only to their natural tendency to honor and obey but also because the Throne was held by the former Akodo Toturi, once the daimyo of the Akodo and Champion of the Lion Clan. When unrest began simmering among the returned spirits and the mortal leadership of several clans (including the Lion) was challenged, the Lion response was quick and decisive. Kitsu Motso, the Lion Champion, held firm against the demands from spirits within

the clan. In particular, many spirits wished to revisit old grudges against the Crane to the east and the Scorpion to the south. Through a combination of clear speech and outright displays of force, Motso was able to largely deflect and dissipate the spirits' dissatisfaction. He was assisted in this effort by Akodo Ginawa, the former ronin who now served as Akodo family daimyo, as well as the Kitsu family whose close communion with the honored ancestors gave them deep understanding and affinity for the spirits. By the time the War of Spirits actually began, the Lion Clan was largely unified under strong leadership, its attention focused on supporting Toturi's claim to the Throne and protecting Rokugan from the forces of the returned Hantei.

The Lion Clan remained the most staunchly loyal supporters of Toturi throughout the entire war. While a few spirit Lion did fight for the Hantei, the vast majority fought for Toturi. In fact, one of the most storied Lion units of the War was called Tsuko's Heart, an elite legion consisting entirely of returned Lion spirits who fought against Hantei XVI's forces throughout the War. Tsuko's Heart was easily recognizable on the battlefield, since its members were all returned spirits and glowed with the golden light of the spirit realms. Spirit or mortal, however, Lion forces fought throughout Rokugan and were usually in the vanguard of the mortal armies.

They also often suffered the heaviest casualties. The Lion are remembered for valiant rearguard actions during the War, such as at the Battle of Shallow Waters and the Battle of Quiet Winds, allowing the main force of their armies to disengage and avoid destruction. In both of these cases, the Lion rearguard forces—which at the Battle of Quiet Winds included Tsuko's Heart and Kitsu Motso himself—were all but obliterated.

The Mantis Clan

"Go back and tell the all-powerful Hantei XVI that he has no empire and the Mantis have no need for his 'gratitude.' If he wants to take his armies to Otosan Uchi, he can swim there."

—Moshi Shanegon

Like the Dragon, the Mantis are remembered for their lack of major participation in the War of Spirits. Unlike the Dragon, however, this lack of involvement was not self-imposed. While the Empire warred against its own past the Mantis were embroiled in a very different war in the distant Ivory Kingdoms.

The Mantis had only recently been elevated to Great Clan status at the end of the Clan Wars and did not absorb the Wasp and Centipede Clans until the end of the War Against the Darkness. Yoritomo, the ambitious hero who accomplished these deeds, perished at Oblivion's Gate and the rule of the Mantis passed to his adopted son, Aramasu, a former Scorpion. At the outset of the War of Spirits the rest of the Empire viewed the Mantis poorly, with clan attitudes ranging from mild resentment to open hostility.

Alternate Paths: The Ivory Kingdoms and an Earlier Destroyer War

GMs looking for an unusual challenge to present to their PCs may wish to send them on Aramasu's mission to the Ivory Kingdoms. This allows Rokugani characters to be placed in an exotic alien setting among *gaijin* people—barbarians. While such PCs would logically be from the Mantis Clan, the GM can always find reasons for members of other clans to participate as well, perhaps because of particular skills and talents or due to personal alliances or friendships. While no formal detailed campaign setting for the Ivory Kingdom exists, an ambitious GM can certainly develop one based on the culture and mythology of the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia.

However, a GM who truly wants to mix things up may instead wish to consider what would have happened if Aramasu's mission had failed. Twenty years after the War of the Spirits, the Cult of the Destroyer succeeds in taking control of the Ivory Kingdoms and unleashes a massive invasion of Rokugan led by their dark goddess Kali-Ma. If Aramasu's mission was defeated this could have happened in the midst of the War of Spirits. How would a divided Rokugan have dealt with such a terrible threat? Would even the great Emperor Toturi have been able to withstand the Destroyers in such circumstances?

The Phoenix and the Scorpion were particularly bitter toward the Mantis, the former because of the invasion of their lands during the War Against the Darkness, the latter because of Aramasu's betrayal of his Scorpion lineage. Only the Crab could be considered somewhat friendly toward the Mantis, partly because of a shared lineage tracing back to Hida Osano-Wo and partly because Yoritomo had impressed the Crab by his sheer heroic strength.

Despite the Empire's hostility, the Mantis were fiercely loyal to Toturi right from the beginning of the War of Spirits. They saw Toturi as one like themselves, a man who had risen to great heights through courage and determination. They also respected him for keeping his promise and elevating them to Great Clan status rather than going back on his word once Fu Leng had been defeated. The Mantis mastery of the seas offered Toturi a significant strategic advantage over Hantei XVI's forces, and the returned Hantei Emperor refused to recognize their true strength or to grant them respect as a Great Clan.

Ultimately, however, it was not their own small size or the ire of the other clans which kept the Mantis largely away from Rokugan during the War. Mantis traders had brought back disturbing news from the distant Ivory Kingdoms, far to the southwest—the ruler of the Kingdoms, a

man called the *maharajah*, was desperately attempting to fend off a coup attempt by a vile group called the Cult of the Destroyer. Toturi asked the Mantis Champion to assemble a force and intervene on behalf of the *maharajah* lest Rokugan face another serious threat amidst the current War. In the year 1147 Aramasu led a Mantis fleet to the Ivory Kingdoms and spent the next three years there, serving the *maharajah* as mercenaries and fighting a bitter campaign that eventually drove the Cult back into hiding. Toturi expressed his gratitude to Aramasu upon his return, but most of the Empire would never hear about this Rokugani involvement in *gaijin* affairs. Years later, the Mantis would learn that Aramasu even had a son by a gaijin lover during his sojourn in the Kingdoms.

The Phoenix Clan

"Hantei commanded his spirit armies to take the Phoenix children as hostages against the wrath of the Isawa. It was one of his greatest mistakes."

—Asako Misao

As already noted, the Phoenix suffered perhaps the greatest indignity during the War of Spirits—with the complicity of Agasha Tamori, a force of spirits under Hida Tsuneo was able to march from the Dragon Heart Plains to Kyuden Isawa and seize the castle before the Phoenix could respond. The ruthless Hantei took the children there hostage—several hundred of them in total, including the children of the Elemental Masters, many of the clan's senior nobles, and the son of Clan Champion Shiba Tsukune.

Why target the Phoenix? Hantei XVI had spent his first four years in Rokugan after his return through Oblivion's Gate traveling covertly through the Empire, but remained ultimately tied to his refuge in Crab lands. Hida Tsuneo urged him to secure a base in the north of Rokugan as well, but the Dragon were ensconced in their mountains and the Lion were obviously too loyal to Toturi. That left the Crane and the Phoenix. Hantei Ochukeo chose the Phoenix as his target, in large part because he felt the power of the Elemental Masters should be his or no one's.

In the Hantei's eyes his plan was perfect, but in fact the Steel Chrysanthemum had misjudged; not everyone saw the world through his paranoid power-hungry eyes. Shiba Tsukune refused to turn on Toturi even if it threatened the very future of her clan. When he returned to Kyuden Isawa the Hantei was in a murderous rage; he ordered one of the Phoenix children killed. With no choice but to obey, a shame-faced Hida Tsuneo murdered the daughter of Isawa Taeruko, the Master of Earth. The Phoenix captives, roused to fury, erupted in rebellion and drove the spirits from Kyuden Isawa. From that moment, the Phoenix were immovably allied with Toturi.

Although the Phoenix were still weak after the terrible losses of the Clan War, their assistance to Toturi proved vital to the overall mortal war effort. The returned spirits had somewhat stronger constitutions than mortals; they required less food and sleep and healed faster. Only the magical prowess of the Phoenix shugenja allowed mortal forces to maintain themselves against the superior spirits during the grinding war of attrition that prevailed over the long years of the War of Spirits. The Phoenix also proved invaluable in maintaining communications between the mortal forces. Although the limited numbers of Isawa generally avoided direct involvement in battle, when they did step in their facility with magic often proved decisive. Most notable, of course, was the collapse of Beiden Pass at the end of the War, the blow that effectively won the conflict. This final deed was a massive ritual requiring all the shugenja in Toturi's army, importuning the earth and fire kami to cause an otherwise stable rock formation to suddenly collapse and erupt in flame and ruin. So complex and difficult was the ritual that even Toturi's wife Isawa Kaede and his son Toturi Sezaru took part.

After the war the Phoenix Clan enjoyed a welcome period of peace and respite, though sadly the rise of Tamori as Dark Oracle of Fire would trouble them greatly in the ensuing Four Winds Era.

The Scorpion Clan

"The Scorpion have betrayed the Lion and the Crane, just as you said they would, Baku-kun. Tsuneo will be able to march on Beiden Pass and we will soon take Otosan Uchi from the upstart, thanks to your treachery."

—Hantei XVI

As befits the Clan of Secrets, the Scorpion involvement in the War of Spirits was never what it seemed to outsiders.

After the Battle of Oblivion's Gate most of the Scorpion Clan's efforts, like those of the other clans, went toward reconstruction. This was a particularly large and difficult task for the Scorpion, who had endured disbandment during the Clan War and exile during the War Against the Darkness. The clan did its best not to shirk its other duties, in particular running a discreet campaign to identify all those who still carried the touch of the Shadow and ensure they were dealt with. However, the Scorpion Clan did not immediately recognize the machinations of Hantei XVI and it was not until late 1136 that they realized something was amiss in the Empire. Bayushi Yojiro, the Scorpion Champion, reported to Toturi that he believed a single guiding purpose was behind the increasing bouts of unrest among the returned spirits. Toturi commanded Yojiro to find out who was behind the turmoil and gave him a simple instruction, one that would guide the Scorpion for the next fourteen years: "See that the spirits do not win."

When Crane spirits and Crab mortals clashed over the allegiance of the Yasuki family, Scorpion agents immediately went to work tracing the unrest back to its source, at last discovering Hantei XVI. Yojiro was alarmed but also saw an opportunity. Even before reporting back to Toturi, Yojiro met with Hantei Ochukeo, offering him the services of an enigmatic spirit named Bayushi Baku to act as his aide and liaison. Yojiro also candidly informed the Hantei that he intended to play both sides in the coming conflict, pragmatically waiting until he could back the winner. Hantei XVI was disgusted but also intrigued; he accepted the Scorpions' blunt non-aggression if it meant they would assist Toturi no more than they assisted him.

For most of the War it appeared Yojiro was true to his word. While he outwardly seemed to support Toturi, his support was lukewarm at best. The Lion and later the Phoenix were not shy in their contempt for the vacillating Scorpion. Meanwhile, Baku continued providing Hantei XVI with valuable counsel and intelligence. Scorpion military forces remained largely uncommitted until the Battle of Drowned Honor, when a spirit force under Hida Tsuneo moved to take Ryoko Owari. The spirits were driven back and the Scorpion, apparently incensed at this attack, marched to join the mortal army coming south from Beiden Pass for the Battle of Quiet Winds. This was ultimately a double ruse; the Scorpion first appeared to switch sides, betraying Toturi, but then used Baku to persuade Hantei XVI to pursue the retreating mortals into Beiden Pass. The collapse of the Pass may have been achieved with Phoenix magic, but it was very much a Scorpion plan.

Toturi was careful to offer sincere praise to the Scorpion after the hostilities ended, but even the most loyal of his vassals had to wonder how the Clan of Secrets would have acted if the mortal forces had clearly been *losing* the War. If anyone actually had the nerve to voice this question to Yojiro, the answer has never been revealed.

The Unicorn Clan

"The spirits killed my family to honor a war three hundred years old. If need be, I can find them in Jigoku itself, and I will give them death."

—Utaku Yu-Pan, family daimyo

Like the Crane and the Lion, the Unicorn faced an early eruption of disunity within their clan, pitting spirit and mortal factions against each other. Unlike the Lion, however, the Unicorn mortals—led by the Great Khan, Moto Gaheris—were not able to readily smooth over the unrest and reunite the clan. And unlike the Crane, the result was not simply a build-up of tension and low-level political skirmishing. Open conflict erupted among the Unicorn, flaring along the fault lines of recent upheavals.

For most of its history, the leading family of the Unicorn had been the Shinjo, but centuries earlier the family had been infiltrated by the Kolat conspiracy; by the time of the Clan War even the Clan Champion was member of that sinister sect. When the Kami Shinjo returned to Rokugan near the end of the War Against the Darkness

she purged the Kolat and named the Moto family as the new leaders of the clan, with Moto Gaheris as Champion. In the time of the War of Spirits this recent change was still reverberating through the clan, and the return of so many ancestral spirits through Oblivion's Gate only exacerbated matters. In particular the returned Shinjo saw the new leadership of the clan as a bitter affront. Thus, while relatively loose factions of spirits and mortals developed in the other clans, the lines within the Unicorn hardened along family lines. Even before Hantei XVI traveled to Otosan Uchi to claim the Throne, tensions within the Unicorn were bubbling toward civil war, and when the War started in earnest the Unicorn became locked into vicious internal conflict. This suited the Steel Chrysanthemum quite well; he had little regard for the "uncouth barbarians" of the Unicorn in any case, since in his time they had been gone from the Empire for over five hundred years and would not return for almost three hundred.

The immediate result of this infighting was to keep the Unicorn effectively out of the early years of the War of Spirits. Gradually, however, Moto Gaheris and the mortal faction gained the upper hand. The cost was steep; hundreds were killed and thousands wounded before Gaheris could claim to be truly back in control of the Unicorn Clan. After the year 1145, however, more and more Unicorn forces joined the ranks of the mortal armies. Hantei XVI struck back by sending an army—one of the very few to include Lion spirits fighting against Toturi—to seize Shiro Iuchi, hoping to block more Unicorn reinforcements from reaching the eastern Empire. Shiro Iuchi was retaken less than a year later by mortal forces, freeing the Unicorn to continue marching eastward. They valiantly assisted the mortal forces until the end of the War.

The Minor Clans

"The Ox bought their freedom from the Unicorn with the blood of our ancestors, fighting to destroy the sprit armies that threaten Iuchi lands."

—Matsu Ketsui

The circumstances of the Minor Clans during the War of Spirits generally mirror those of the Great Clans, as each clan had to contend with returned spirits and the historical agendas they brought back with them. There were a couple of notable exceptions, however.

When the War of Spirits erupted, the Monkey Clan had been in existence less than a decade and if any Monkey spirits returned through Oblivion's Gate they would have been few in number and only recently deceased. There are no records of any internal division within the Monkey and the clan's founder, Toku, was true to his close bond with Toturi I. The Monkey were staunch allies of the mortal forces throughout the War, and Monkey forces, though small, fought in many engagements and acquitted themselves well. On those occasions when Toturi himself took the field, Toku was invariably nearby with a contingent of Monkey samurai.

The War of Spirits also saw the beginnings of a new Minor Clan. Prior to the war, Shinjo Morito of the Unicorn had chosen to leave his clan as a ronin and settled with a group of followers in lands on the border of the Phoenix Clan. He did so by asserting the Phoenix, due to their severe losses during the Clan Wars period, could not properly control these lands themselves. Morito returned to Unicorn lands to fight in defense of Shiro Iuchi and although the spirits eventually captured the castle he was recognized by Toturi for his valor and allowed to claim ownership of the lands he had settled. Morito gifted a number of valuable *gaijin* artifacts to the Phoenix Clan as a gesture of friendship (and at least partial compensation for the loss of lands). In the year 1158 Morito would be formally recognized as the leader of the Ox Clan. What the Empire did not know was that the Ox were the refuge for those Kolat who had fled the Unicorn Clan, and the Minor Clan would continue to serve as a major Kolat stronghold until the conspiracy's final exposure over a decade later.

The Imperial Families

"A single word in the right person's ear can wreak more havoc than a thousand swords."

—Otomo Dsichi

The War of Spirits was a particularly difficult time for the Imperial families. Much like the Crab with Hida Tsuneo, the Imperials were deeply conflicted over the return of Hantei XVI. On the one hand, Toturi had led the effort to save the Empire from Fu Leng, unified Rokugan, and

defeated the Lying Darkness. On the other hand Hantei Ochukeo, no matter how ruthless and paranoid he might be, was still a Hantei descended from the Kami and first Emperor of Rokugan.

The Otomo, with their close blood-ties to the Hantei, were especially conflicted. In spite of the best efforts of daimyo Otomo Ishihama, the family was quickly locked in the sort of ruthless and convoluted politics one would expect from expert politicians whose very reason for existing was causing inter-clan strife. Many Otomo were ruined and ostracized, and at least a hundred committed seppuku during the course of the War—a heavy loss to such a small family. The Otomo became such a dangerously politically-charged group that many Rokugani courtiers simply disassociated themselves from them for the duration of the War. However, it was in this brutal court environment that the young Otomo Hoketuhime, future daimyo of the family, sharpened her skills.

The Seppun, led by daimyo Seppun Hotaitaka, were also wracked with internal conflict—but the reasons were far more personal. Although the story of the Steel Chrysanthemum's original reign had been largely purged from the official Imperial histories, the Seppun knew the original killers of Hantei XVI included many of the Emperor's own Seppun guardsmen. The Seppun agonized over their family's role in his death; Seppun spirits from before that time were appalled their descendants had participated in regicide, while spirits from afterward (and many contemporary mortal Seppun) found themselves second-guessing the role their family had played. Some of Emperor Toturi's advisors urged him to discharge the Seppun from their duty as bodyguards, worried they would try to kill Toturi and put Hantei XVI back on the Throne to atone for their past deeds. Toturi refused and kept his Seppun guards close, a trusting move that gained him both respect and gratitude from many in that family. Over the course of the War the Seppun essentially split, with the mortals largely remaining loyal to Toturi and the spirits mainly joining the Hantei to serve as his guards and servants. To their credit, after the War the Seppun quickly reunited in service to Emperor Toturi.

The Miya faced the same conflict as the Otomo and the Seppun, but chose an entirely different means of dealing with it. The family daimyo, Miya Yumi, declared the Miya would choose no side in the War and would serve both to the best of their ability. This arrangement proved to work quite well, as the Miya became an independent and largely neutral intermediary between Toturi I and Hantei XVI through much of the war. Yumi maintained this policy even after her husband, the returned spirit Miya Donosu, was killed at Hantei XVI's command early in the war for delivering an ultimatum from Toturi. Donosu knew the risk and met his death willingly, providing an example to the Empire of a spirit embracing a return to the afterlife.

The Shadowlands

"Deep in the Shadowlands, a new threat arises. Something collects hearts and bodies. . . and when it comes to Rokugan, we must be prepared."

—Hida O-Ushi

During the War of Spirits, the Shadowlands seemed to enter a period of quiescence. The Crab speculated that the Battle of Oblivion's Gate had slaughtered so many oni, *bakemono,* and other Shadowlands creatures that the evil realm had simply been battered into temporary dormancy. Even when Hiruma scouts and their Nezumi allies began to encounter hints that something was stirring deep in the Shadowlands, the Crab were unable to assemble a coherent picture of the threat. If they had, it is likely Hida O-Ushi would have sought to launch the largest assault she could assemble—and even that might not have been enough.

Thousands of samurai had been lost at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, but not all had died. Many had been gravely wounded and left for dead, or captured by their foes, or simply separated and gone astray during the confusion of battle. Many more wounded perished on the return to Rokugan. Thousands of these fallen samurai became Lost, consumed by the Taint, or *hyakuhei*, self-willed undead reanimated by the Taint's power. The man calling himself the Dark Lord Daigotsu began to gather these vast new hordes of Lost and forge them into a cohesive army. It was during the War of Spirits that Daigotsu and his followers built the City of the Lost deep within the Shadowlands, deliberately echoing and mocking the social order of Rokugan. It was in this era, too, that Daigotsu conceived the dark new social code called Shourido, a twisted reflection of Bushido that draped "honor" over personal

achievement. While the War of Spirits ground on, the Lost grew in strength and purpose, fighting their own war against other Shadowlands factions. By the end of the War of Spirits, Daigotsu's forces were the predominant faction in the Shadowlands and would soon turn their eyes northward, toward the Carpenter Wall and Rokugan.

The Kolat

"We are finally free of the Hantei. We must not let them reclaim the Throne."

—Ikoma Tsai

It is one of the great ironies of the War of the Spirits that a clandestine faction devoted to overturning the basic social order of Rokugan came to be one of the Empire's most ardent defenders. The Kolat, a secret quasi-religious conspiracy devoted to overthrowing the Kami and placing mankind in control of the mortal world, had suffered heavy blows during the War Against the Darkness. The Kami Shinjo purged them from the Unicorn Clan and the Lying Darkness influenced Toturi to kill any real or imagined Kolat in the Imperial court. Even so, the Kolat still saw the rule of Toturi—a mortal man—as a major step forward in their campaign to institute the rule of man. Hantei XVI, on the other hand, would be a step back toward direct rule by the Kami. Accordingly, the Kolat provided Toturi and the mortal forces with a great deal of assistance. Kolat agents scattered throughout the Empire fed information on the spirits' troop movements and intentions, information which then conveniently came into the possession of mortals who could use it. Although the true extent to which Kolat assistance swayed the War will likely never be known, it is safe to assume it was considerable.

Later in the War, the Kolat further improved their position when Shinjo Morito was granted ownership of what would become the lands of the Ox Clan. The lands he had claimed protected the approaches to the Kolat's Hidden Temple, helping secure it against discovery.

The Nothing and the Shadow Dragon

"The Empire rejoiced after Oblivion's Gate. Still, not all shadows in the Empire are cast by mortal forms."

—Soshi Angai

In the aftermath of the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, the Empire as a whole assumed the Shadow had been defeated forever. However, this was not quite true. Although the power of the Nothing had been shattered, a small remnant of its formless essence remained and was absorbed by the Tainted Air Dragon. The Dragon knew taking the Nothing into itself would create a creature of monstrous power and evil, but it also knew it would limit the Nothing's power—if not forever, certainly for a very long time.

The resulting entity was the Shadow Dragon, a powerful, cunning, and inscrutable creature. During the War of Spirits the Shadow Dragon remained in hiding deep within the Shadowlands, slowly gathering the remaining Goju to its side. The Shadow Dragon sent these creatures back into Rokugan as spies, preparing to meddle in the affairs of the Empire, but during the War of Spirits it was for the most part content merely to wait and gather information. It also formed an alliance of convenience with Daigotsu, offering the assistance of its Goju.

Those Shadowspawn known as Ninube did not answer the Shadow Dragon's call and instead went into hiding, plotting a future agenda of their own. In truth, they were still controlled by the power of Nothing, but the Shadow Dragon allowed them to believe they were acting independently. Regardless, they too remained hidden during the War of Spirits, watching and plotting for a future effort.

The War of Spirits as an RPG Setting

Why should a GM choose to set a Legend of the Five Rings RPG campaign during the War of Spirits? The best way to answer this question is to consider what Rokugan would be like as a campaign setting during this time.

First, the Empire has just emerged from a long and turbulent period. The past decade has seen the Scorpion Clan Coup, the rise of Fu Leng, the Clan Wars, the Second Day of Thunder, and the War Against the Lying Darkness, which culminated in the Battle of Oblivion's Gate (these events are described in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven of this book). Rokugan has suffered an enormous amount of harm and is struggling to recover. Many castles, holdings, and settlements have been damaged or destroyed and the rebuilding efforts are still underway. Tens of thousands of people—samurai and commoner alike—have died, and many thousands more displaced as refugees. In such a turbulent environment, law and order have weakened and in some places broken down completely; banditry and crime are rife. The authorities—including magistrates and in some cases the Imperial legions—are laboring to restore order, sometimes using brutal methods. And of course there are still supernatural threats lurking, the lingering remnants of Shadowlands invasions and the rampage of the Lying Darkness. Opportunistic evils such as Bloodspeaker cult cells and other such blasphemers are also taking advantage of the civil unrest to further their own schemes.

As if this general chaos isn't enough, the Great Clans themselves are in varying states of turmoil. All have suffered heavy losses during the preceding years of war, in-

cluding the deaths of many great heroes, and several clans labor under additional burdens. The Scorpion Clan, disbanded in the wake of Bayushi Shoju's Clan Coup and then exiled to the Burning Lands just a few years later, is still viewed with deep suspicion by many in the Empire. The Mantis Clan, while relatively isolated from the turmoil in the Empire by virtue of its island holdings, has just lost its founder Yoritomo and is grappling with its new role as a Great Clan. Meanwhile, the Dragon Clan struggles in the aftermath of the bitter split caused by Hitomi, and the Empire itself adjusts to the first non-Hantei Emperor in its history.

All of this makes for a chaotic, unsettled era in which individual heroes—such as player characters—can find many opportunities for challenge and greatness. In contrast to the pre-Coup era (Chapter Five of this book) where the PCs operate in an environment of stability, here things are loose and unfettered and the PCs have a great deal of room to influence larger events. On the other hand, for much of this era there is no overarching antagonist for the Empire and thus the GM is not obligated to drag the PCs into a giant epic. Enemies of such overwhelming power and danger such as Fu Leng or the Lying Darkness tend to dominate a campaign setting, with every event related to or colored by the struggle against them. In the early part of the War of Spirits there is no such villain, and even after the Steel Chrysanthemum is revealed and wages his war to recover the Throne, the conflict is a slow-paced and protracted one involving only a few large-scale battles and much low-level skirmishing and maneuvering. It is only during the final year of the War that it becomes an all-consuming campaign, with both sides making their final throw for victory. This creates an environment in which the PCs need only intermittently become involved in a larger meta-plot and their actions can have impact without automatically dragging them into the role of epic fantasy heroes who have to save the entire world. A campaign set during the War of Spirits can instead focus more on the interaction of the PCs with the myriad challenges and issues facing Rokugan as it rebuilds from previous disasters.

More fundamentally, Hantei is a very different antagonist from supernatural entities like Daigotsu, the Shadow, or Kali-Ma. He is certainly dangerous, a ruthless despot driven by deep paranoia and an almost breathtaking sense of entitlement. But he also has a legitimate claim to be ruler of the Empire (especially given that his original reign only ended because his followers finally had their fill of his atrocities and rose against him). He is of the Hantei bloodline, descended from the original Kami-Emperor of Rokugan. This means that even if the PCs get involved in the larger struggle of the War of Spirits, they are faced with a degree of ambiguity. If Hantei XVI does take the Throne from Toturi, is that necessarily a defeat for the Empire? The result may be unpleasant, but does that in itself make it wrong by Rokugan's moral code?

This is not to say a GM cannot introduce antagonists of epic scale; in fact, some suggestions in that regard are presented below. But one of the things that makes Rokugan different as a fantasy RPG setting is its rich cultural and historical detail, offering many opportunities for characters to dabble in the social, political, cultural and military nuances of the game world, not to mention the moral complexities and conflicts created by the Code of Bushido. The War of Spirits is a superb time period for this sort of gaming. Indeed, a GM may find some of the PCs are genuinely sympathetic to Hantei XVI's cause, irrespective of whether they play mortal or spirit PCs. An adventuresome GM should capitalize on this, using it to confront the PCs with moral and spiritual challenges as they wrestle with the choice between two futures—a seemingly bright and hopeful one offered by Toturi, but based solely on achievement and without a clear mandate from the Heavens, or the darker and more uncertain one offered by Hantei Ochukeo who nonetheless can be considered a more legitimate and Celestially endorsed claimant to the Throne.

Of course, if the GM is running for a group of players who prefer clearer and more definite choices between "good" and "evil," he may want to pass over the War of Spirits in favor of one of the more straightforward L5R eras such as the Clan War.

Game Periods During the War of Spirits

The best way to consider the War of Spirits as a game setting is to divide it into its four reasonably distinct parts: The early days, when the armies of the Empire have just returned from Volturnum, the returned spirits are a new challenge facing Rokugan, and Hantei XVI has not yet made his presence felt; the quiet before the storm, when the Empire has entered an apparently promising "golden age" of reconstruction, but the Steel Chrysanthemum's scheming and meddling are taking effect and causing increasing unrest; the ongoing war, when Hantei XVI has revealed himself and the mortal and spirit forces have become locked in a contest of attrition; and the culmination, the relatively brief but dramatic climax of the War and its immediate aftermath.

The Early Days

Generally encompassing the period from 1133 to 1134, this is a time of fearful uncertainty. The armies of Rokugan, weary and battle-scarred, have returned from the Battle of Oblivion's Gate at Volturnum in the Shadowlands. Both Fu Leng and the Lying Darkness have been defeated and Emperor Toturi I, now an embodied spirit, has returned to Otosan Uchi to reclaim the Throne. While the Empire mourns its many dead heroes, it also marvels at the thousands of returned spirits who originate from nearly every age of the Empire. To many Rokugani this seems a miracle; surely the presence of the returned ancestors can only strengthen the Empire, both in population and in the strength drawn from its rich and honored history. This is especially important because Rokugan has not yet begun to recover from its recent wars. Cities, towns, and villages are damaged or destroyed, roads churned into ruts by the passage of armies. Recent battlefields are still littered with broken armor and discarded weapons, and while the bodies of the fallen have been gathered and burned this has left the remains of massed pyres blackening the landscape. Worse, with many peasants dead or scattered the fields have been left fallow, so the Empire faces the prospect of potential famine ahead.

If the PCs are martial characters—bushi especially, but possibly shugenja or even shinobi or monks—it is likely they have seen recent battle, perhaps against Fu Leng and his minions or against the Shadowspawn armies of the Lying Darkness. They may even have fought at Volturnum. If they are courtiers or other less militant characters, they probably have still seen their share of hardship and strife, whether in tense negotiations during the Clan War or something as horrifying as the slaughter of the Imperial Court under the Shadow-maddened Emperor Toturi. Additionally, PCs will have contended with whatever affected their respective clans. For example, a Togashi character may recall the bitterness he felt at being driven from his clan at Hitomi's order, while a Scorpion character may have vivid recollections of exile in the Burning Sands. A PC who is a returned spirit (see below for a discussion of playing spirits) will probably be especially unsettled, since he has abruptly been pulled from the afterlife and thrust back into a Rokugan that could be hundreds of years later than his own. Regardless, while there may be glimmers of hope that better times are ahead, most people will be anxious and uncertain, unwilling to look forward with too much optimism.

Outside of Otosan Uchi and the major clan holdings, the Empire is a lawless place, fraught with banditry and threatened by the scattered remains of Tainted creatures and Shadowspawn armies. PCs who are accomplished warriors could find themselves given any number of difficult or dangerous jobs, from tracking and eradicating bandit gangs to escorting caravans to helping defend refugees as they are resettled and put back to work on badly needed crops. If the PCs are magistrates they will likely find themselves in the position of the iconic "new sheriff in town" from the Wild West genre, facing implacable opponents in a lawless frontier setting. Even a seemingly simple task such as delivering a message or item from one holding to another can be a complicated and hazardous undertaking. In court, meanwhile, diplomatic characters must feel out

the disrupted political landscape and take advantage of openings left by those who have died or otherwise been lost to the Empire.

The Quiet Before the Storm

The period beginning in late 1134 and ending with the fateful meeting between Hantei XVI and Toturi in Otosan Uchi in mid-1138 is a time of false optimism. Outwardly, Rokugan is now recovering from the preceding years of war and destruction. Emperor Toturi has put great emphasis on reconstruction and the clans are naturally anxious to restore their holdings and reconsolidate their grip on their various roles and duties in the Empire. As this period proceeds, more of the Empire will be rebuilt, fallow farmlands reclaimed and refugees resettled. The ranks of the Emerald, Jade, and clan magistrates are steadily replenished, allowing law and order to be restored in more and larger areas. The threat of famine recedes and trade booms with fewer worries about bandits and other outlaws. There are many fewer stray Shadowlands and Shadowspawn creatures prowling Rokugan. Most importantly, Emperor Toturi and his wife Isawa Kaede are blessed with two children, Toturi Tsudao and Toturi Sezaru, apparently ensuring the Imperial succession.

However, all is not as it seems. Even as the Empire rebuilds and hope for a brighter future is restored, there are increasingly frequent and violent bouts of unrest involving the returned spirits. At first it is relatively easy to blame this on spirits who are simply out of their proper time and unwilling or unable to accept the changes in modern Rokugan. By the end of this period, however, it is becoming clear something more sinister is at work. Clashes between spirits and mortal authorities become more frequent, and previous tensions thought to be resolved instead flare anew. The violent skirmish between the Crane and Crab over the Yasuki family is the culmination of this period; this event pushes both clans close to a new Yasuki War and shows clearly that something is very wrong in Rokugan.

In the middle of this period, in the year 1136, Emperor Toturi decrees all returned spirits must either commit honorable suicide or else submit to the ritual developed by the Phoenix to render them mortal once more. Many spirits—particularly those who originated from Yomi, the Realm of Blessed Ancestors—accept the decree, but many more—notably those who came from Meido and Toshigoku—are unwilling to return to the afterlife. This creates further tensions between mortals and spirits. By the end of this period, the name Hantei XVI is being spoken aloud and the strife involving the returned spirits is about to erupt into civil war.

This setting provides many opportunities for PCs to continue the roles they may have begun in the era's early days. For example, if they are magistrates they have helped to restore Imperial law, so they are facing less of a lawless frontier setting and will instead be settling into a normal role as law-keepers rather than law-makers. However, outbreaks of trouble involving returned spirits will begin to take up more and more of their time. Similarly, martial PCs may find themselves called on to assist in quelling large eruptions of unrest, up to and including the deployment of an Imperial Legion. Conflicts will often be between returned spirits and mortals, but conflict among spirits could certainly occur, especially involving spirits from similar time periods who are resuming their various historical animosities. More politically-oriented characters will find fertile ground for intrigue and scheming in the courts as the shock of the immediate post-conflict period has passed. The clans will certainly be jockeying for Imperial favor in their rebuilding efforts; there is likely to particular competition to acquire Miya's Blessing, the annual caravans of builders and artisans who travel to the three areas in Rokugan requiring the most assistance. Any clan which can obtain the Blessing will gain a distinct advantage and any courtier who can assist in obtaining it will gain huge stature in his clan.

An Ongoing War

This is the longest period of the War of Spirits, beginning immediately after Hantei XVI's confrontation with Toturi in 1138 and ending as the winter thaw begins in spring 1150. It is a difficult time of protracted, grinding war, characterized by long periods of simmering tension as the opposing mortal and spirit forces maneuver and skirmish, punctuated by brief periods of explosive violence when armies come to battle.

The combatants are roughly evenly-matched in a strategic sense. Toturi has the advantage of numbers, particularly as the war progresses; staunch early support from the Lion and the Mantis is progressively bolstered by the addition of the Phoenix and, toward the end of the period, significant contributions from the Unicorn and the Crab. The Hantei's forces are more diffuse, being composed mainly of spirits and a small number of mortals from all of the clans. However, the spirits have the advantage of superior mobility and logistics thanks to their more robust supernatural nature, and benefit from the great confusion and turmoil Hantei XVI sowed throughout the Empire during the previous period (as described above). Tactically, the spirits have a definite advantage because of the great martial skill of their commanding general, Hida Tsuneo, as well as their supernatural resistance to fatigue and wounds.

Most of the major battles are bloody but inconclusive. Casualties steadily mount and battle damage to the Empire undoes much of the reconstructive efforts launched with so much hope in the preceding period. By the year 1149 Toturi realizes this prolonged war cannot continue lest the Empire be damaged beyond repair. Moreover, the longer the conflict continues the more divided the Empire is likely to become. He decides to seek a final, decisive engagement with the bulk of the spirit army, setting up the climactic events of 1150.

Since this period lasts almost twelve years, an entire RPG campaign can run its course with the conflicted Empire as its background. Since the Empire is in constant turmoil the GM can confront the PCs with a host of different challenges and threats. The Crane and Unicorn lands are consumed with civil war. Those of the Dragon are virtually closed off as that clan withdraws into neutral seclusion. It is unclear where the Scorpion stand and how travelers through their lands are likely to be received. The Mantis appear to have withdrawn from the Empire almost entirely; very few are aware that they have committed much of their forces to battle in the far-off Ivory Kingdoms. Spirits are likely to be viewed with deep suspicion in the lands of the Lion, the Phoenix, and the Mantis, while outsiders generally are likely to find a cold reception among the Crab or the Dragon. A party of PCs involved in a mission of any type will find simply traveling across Rokugan a difficult and potentially hazardous experience. Even magistrates with appropriate travel papers may find their movements watched, curtailed, or blocked. Keen diplomatic skills will be at least as important as combat ability in traversing the conflicted Empire.

If a GM and players desire a more martial game, this period is ideal. Not only do the iconic large battles listed in the Timeline offer ample opportunity for PCs to participate in mass combat, there are dozens of smaller battles and skirmishes that occur between every imaginable combination of forces during this time. Likewise, the courts have become vicious battlefields of their own as retainers loyal to Toturi cross political swords not only with their usual rivals but with the courtiers of the "neutral" Dragon and Scorpion. Hantei XVI has also infiltrated his spies and provocateurs into the mortal courts. Meanwhile the Steel Chrysanthemum holds courts of his own, usually in the Crab lands but wherever he can find a sympathetic ear. Practicing politics under the baleful eye of Hantei Ochukeo can be a true challenge to a courtier PC. Finally, more stealthy and secretive characters such as Shosuro Infiltrators will find their skills in demand by both sides as spies, saboteurs, and assassins.

A potential side-story campaign during this period would involve the Shadowlands. The realm of Jigoku is apparently quiet, with only the occasional fitful attack on the Wall by small groups of creatures, but the Crab under Hida O-Ushi are concerned with what may be occurring in the vile lands to the south. In fact the Dark Lord Daigostu is organizing the survivors from Oblivion's Gate and beginning to construct the City of the Lost. As he does, he fights vicious battles against other forces in the Shadowlands, including tribes of Nezumi and the followers of major Oni Lords such as Kyoso no Oni (who view the rise of the Lost as an unacceptable challenge). An entire campaign could be set in the Shadowlands; a *truly* adventurous GM could let the players take on the challenge of playing the Tainted followers of Daigotsu as they struggle for supremacy in the name of the Dark Lord.

The Culmination

In the spring of 1150 Toturi sets out to bring his spirit opponents to decisive battle, seeking a final end to the war that has afflicted Rokugan for so long. He marshals his army in the Lion lands and marches south through Beiden Pass, meeting up with a large Scorpion force. When Toturi's men finally meet the main spirit force at the Battle of Quiet Winds, they are apparently betrayed by the Scorpion—but of course this is a ruse, and the spirit army is almost entirely destroyed when it pursues its mortal foes into Beiden Pass. The remainder of the year sees Hantei XVI accept defeat and grudgingly acknowledge Toturi's claim to the Throne in exchange for certain concessions, especially the fostering (or perhaps a better term would be hostage-taking) of Toturi's youngest son Naseru. Meanwhile, virtually all of the remaining returned spirits undergo the Phoenix ritual or commit suicide at the Leaping Place near Otosan Uchi.

Certainly, the year 1150 is an exciting time in which to set an RPG campaign, suitable particularly for martial characters as most of the action is on the battlefield. Opportunities for massed battle are offered by the Battle of Drowned Honor, the Battle of Quiet Winds, and the subsequent destruction of the spirit army in Beiden Pass. However, these events could also form the backdrop to a more small-scale game. For example, a party of PCs could be given the task of scouting the movements of an opposing army prior to battle or obtaining something crucial for victory. Perhaps the Phoenix ritual that destroyed Beiden Pass was only possible with the use of a particular *nemuranai*, and the party must locate it and return to Beiden Pass with it before the spirit army makes it through. Perhaps a party of stealthy and pragmatic characters must infiltrate enemy forces to steal battle plans, sabotage supplies, or assassinate a key leader.

Another intriguing possibility which falls somewhat outside the norm for L5R (though perhaps more familiar to those accustomed to the traditional dungeon-exploration genre) can be found at the very end of this period when Lord Sun creates the Great Crater to reopen a pass through the Spine of the World Mountains. The Crater exposed an ancient ruin, the City of Night, briefly described in Chapter Nine of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire* along with the Five Ancient Races believed responsible for its construction. This supplies a good starting point and source of inspiration for GMs who would like to have their players be the first explorers of this cryptic ruin. Perhaps the City of Night is not the only mysterious place in these long-inaccessible mountains...

Prominent Personalities of the War of Spirits

There are many famous NPCs during the War of Spirits era, some of whom have already been depicted in previous L5R 4th Edition supplements such as *The Great Clans*. The following section depicts a few more of these for the GM to use in fleshing out his campaigns. As always, these characters can easily be adapted for play in other eras as well.

Bayushi Yojiro

"the Honest Scorpion," Clan Champion

Bayushi Yojiro lived a difficult life. He was at heart an honorable man who genuinely desired to live according to the tenets of Bushido. Unfortunately, this put him in conflict with his duties as a Scorpion. He had a natural talent for understanding the schemes of other Scorpion courtiers and could readily construct political traps for the unwary, but he could not bring himself to deceive someone who placed their trust in him. Most other Scorpion viewed him with disdain and mistrust—the usual fate of a *junshin*—while those outside the clan could not believe Yojiro's apparent honesty was not just another Scorpion ruse. He finally demonstrated his loyalty to his clan beyond question when he prepared to destroy a man he believed was responsible for a vile crime against the Scorpion. At the last moment his lord told him the crime had been entirely manufactured but Yojiro should proceed anyway: "If you can do it out of hate, then you can do it out of loyalty." Yojiro obeyed, ruining his innocent victim and winning an appointment as a clan magistrate, but the incident was a turning point for him. He set out to live honorably in all ways and soon became known throughout the Empire for his honesty and sense of justice. (Ironically, the Clan Champion Bayushi Shoju and his wife Kachiko both found Yojiro and his sterling reputation to be a very useful tools for the clan.)

Immediately prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup, Bayushi Shoju "exiled" Yojiro from the clan and entrusted him with the clan's ancestral sword, ensuring the sword would be safe and Yojiro's reputation and position as a magistrate would not be harmed if the Coup failed. This allowed Yojiro to continue to serve the Empire as a magistrate after the Scorpion were dissolved and again later when they were exiled to the Burning Sands, as well as preserving the precious Ancestral Blade.

During the War Against the Darkness, Bayushi Kachiko realized the Scorpion had been compromised by the Nothing and named Yojiro her successor, commanding him to redeem the clan. After Kachiko vanished Yojiro led the Scorpion to play a pivotal role in the march to Volturnum and at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, greatly restoring the clan's standing in the Empire.

As Clan Champion Yojiro appeared to cast aside his youthful idealism and fully embrace the clan's ideals, and during the War of Spirits he exploited the Scorpion reputation for treachery to insinuate himself into the Steel Chrysanthemum's confidence. Yojiro presented the outward image of cynical neutrality, waiting to see which side—mortal or spirit—would prevail before committing his clan. However, in fact Yojiro never truly gave up his *junshin* ideals even if he learned to be far more subtle in their application. Throughout the War of Spirits he was loyal to Toturi's order, "See that the spirits do not win," and crafted a deception more than a decade long which climaxed with the destruction of Hantei XVI's army in Beiden Pass.

After the War of Spirits Yojiro ruled the clan for several more years, finally falsifying his own death and going underground to confront other threats to Rokugan and the Empire. Tragically, this final deception led to his death as he was murdered by a Unicorn samurai who did not even know he was killing the Master of Secrets.

Bayushi Yojiro, "the Honest Scorpion," Clan Champion

Air: 5	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 4
		Agility: 4		
Honor: 6.5		*Status: 8.0*		*Glory: 7.0*

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 5

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Courtier (Rhetoric) 4, Defense 4, Etiquette (Conversation, Courtesy) 7, Games: Go 3, Games: Shogi 5, Iaijutsu (Assessment, Focus) 6, Investigation 6, Kenjutsu (Katana, Wakizashi) 5, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: Law 6, Sincerity (Honesty) 7, Tea Ceremony 3

Advantages: Allies (many, especially Lion), Blackmail (many), Inheritance (Itsuwari, Ancestral Sword of the Scorpion), Social Position (Clan Champion), Voice

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation: Junshin, Soft-Hearted, Unlucky (1 Rank)

Hantei XVI

the Steel Chrysanthemum

Hantei Ochukeo, Hantei XVI, was probably the most brutal and hated Emperor in the history of Rokugan (with the possible exception of Hantei XX). Born in the year 569, the young heir apparent to the Throne outwardly appeared to be an intelligent and capable boy—so much so that in 589 his father chose to retire and step down in favor of his son. Unfortunately, Ochukeo had been plagued by megalomania and paranoia even as a child, and by the time he ascended to the Throne as Hantei XVI he saw plots and conspiracies in every shadow. He ruled erratically, driven by anger and impulse, and ordered his armies to crush any opposition real or imagined. Thousands died, many tortured to death in an effort to extract confessions to

crimes that never occurred. Hantei eventually had four of his siblings put to death and his entire court lived in constant fear of his malignant whims. His own mother Otomo Kaoichihime plotted against him, and when he discovered her treachery Hantei XVI ordered his general Hida Tsuneo, Champion of the Crab Clan, to brutally execute her in open court. Kaoichihime's death was the last straw; the Imperial Guard and Ochukeo's last surviving brother stormed the palace's throne room and killed the mad Emperor along with Tsuneo and those few others still loyal.

For the next five hundred years, Ochukeo and Tsuneo were consigned to Toshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter, where they wandered in a constant state of madness and violence. Finally, though, they escaped through Oblivion's Gate while the Empire fought the Lying Darkness at Volturnum. Once he returned to Rokugan and escaped Toshigoku's influence, Hantei XVI recovered enough of his sanity to begin scheming to reclaim the Throne from the current Emperor, eventually leading to the War of Spirits.

Ochukeo was a highly intelligent man with a complete lack of morals and a genius for labyrinthine plotting. Unfortunately, even after recovering a portion of his sanity he remained prone to severe paranoia, impulsive cruelty, and murderous rages, as well as a tendency to interpret all those around him as merely weaker versions of his own cruel and ruthless self. Both true honor and normal human empathy seem to have been completely alien to him, and he routinely tortured and murdered his enemies in the most brutal fashion. For all that, however, he was also cunning and manipulative and did quite well at convincing unhappy spirits to back his claim to the Throne.

Although he was finally defeated, Toturi I realized that simply executing a former Emperor—even one as cruel as Hantei XVI—would just restart the conflict. For his part Hantei XVI seems to have hoped that by raising Toturi's youngest son Naseru he would create an agent to subvert the dynasty on his behalf. Ultimately he failed and died (again and finally) in the year 1155, stabbed to death by either Naseru or Otomo Hoketuhime, although the true killer was never revealed.

Hantei XVI, Returned Spirit, the Steel Chrysanthemum

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 4
Willpower: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 2.5 Status: 9.5 Glory: 4.0 Infamy: 4.5

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 5

Skills: Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 3, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 8, Defense 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation, Courtesy) 6, Games: Go 4, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation (Bullying, Control) 5, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katana, Wakizashi) 3, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: Law 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 6, Temptation 4

Advantages: Allies (various), Precise Memory, Read Lips, Servants (various), Social Position (former Emperor), Wary

Disadvantages: Brash, Consumed (Control), Driven (to seize the Throne), Infamous, Insensitive

Special Abilities: Returned Spirit (see rules in this chapter)

Notes: Hantei XVI's Lore knowledge initially reflects sixth century Rokugan, but by the time the War of Spirits gets underway his Lore includes contemporary Rokugan.

Hida Tsuneo

The Stone Crab

Hida Tsuneo was Champion of the Crab during the sixth century. A formidable bushi and skilled tactician, he also served as Hantei XVI's right hand, bound to the mad Emperor by oaths of loyalty which he refused to break.

Tsuneo is a complex and divisive figure in Rokugan's history. He was well-known as a heroic warrior and consummate battlefield leader who prevailed in many battles against the Shadowlands, and his deeds in that regard were remembered and preserved by the Crab Clan even after the reign of Hantei XVI was purged from the official histories. His stoic courage and rigid self-control earned him the title of "the Stone Crab" and tales of his deeds remain an integral part of Crab Clan lore. However, he also remained completely loyal to the Steel Chrysanthemum and obeyed every order the mad Emperor gave him. Tsuneo believed his oaths of fealty bound him more strongly than steel and he refused to even contemplate disobedience, no matter how grotesque the command. Hantei XVI

took cruel and cynical advantage of this, making Tsuneo his closest advisor and using him to perpetrate some of the most egregious atrocities ever seen in Rokugan. When Hantei ordered Tsuneo to crush the skull of his own mother Otomo Kaoichihime in open court, the Stone Crab did not hesitate to obey. As she died Kaoichihime cursed him to follow her son "even beyond death," and a few moments later both Tsuneo and the Emperor were killed by the Imperial guard.

Tsuneo and his Emperor spent the next six centuries condemned to Toshigoku, where the Stone Crab stood and fought by the Hantei's side as stubbornly as he had in life. After they returned to Rokugan through Oblivion's Gate, the Crab rallied around Tsuneo and even offered him the Clan Championship, but he refused and initially served merely as Hantei XVI's bodyguard and sometime confidant. Once the War of Spirits got underway, Tsuneo took command of the spirit armies and fought against the mortal forces of Toturi. A brilliant general, he fended off larger forces and scored numerous victories, threatening to eventually drag down Toturi's dynasty by exhaustion. He also continued to perpetrate atrocities at Hantei XVI's command, most notoriously killing the young daughter of the Phoenix Master of Earth at Kyuden Isawa.

It is commonly accepted that Tsuneo was killed along with his army in the collapse of Beiden Pass, and a few survivors claimed the Stone Crab actually seemed to smile as the mountainside came thundering down. A more obscure legend claims he was murdered by Hantei Okucheo after the destruction of the spirit army, and this tale asserts that Tsuneo died murmuring, "I have kept my oath and my honor." Regardless, it is indisputable that the Stone Crab perished at the end of the War.

Tsuneo did leave one positive legacy in Rokugan. Shortly before the Battle of Quiet Winds in 1150, he grew affectionate with a peasant girl named Hariko. She gave birth to a son who would later be acknowledged by the Crab and grow into Hida Isamu, a hero of the clan.

Hida Tsuneo, former Crab Clan Champion, the Stone Crab

Air: 4 Earth: 5 Fire: 3 Water: 4 Void: 3
Agility: 4 Strength: 5

Honor: 5.0 Status: 7.5 Glory: 6.0 Infamy: 5.0

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 5

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Combat, Skirmish) 7, Courtier 2, Defense 6, Etiquette 3, Games: Go 3, Heavy Weapons (Ono, Tetsubo) 7, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 6, Kyujutsu 4

Advantages: Crab Hands, Hands of Stone, Large, Social Position (former Clan Champion), Tactician

Disadvantages: Infamous, Obligation (compelled to follow Hantei XVI)

Special Abilities: Returned Spirit

New Game Mechanics

The following section offers rules for playing Returned Spirit characters in the L5R 4th Edition role-playing game. Although these mechanics are aimed primarily at games set in the War of Spirits era, they can be used in any era of play to depict similar types of characters.

The GM's Toolbox: Returned Spirits as Characters

One of the great attractions of the War of Spirits as a game setting is the ability to interact with spirits from throughout Rokugan's past, since spirit characters can hail from literally any part of the Empire's history. Regardless of whether such characters are PCs or NPCs, the challenge they present is primarily a roleplaying one. A GM who is developing a spirit NPC should consider what such a spirit would know about the Empire. A returned spirit who died during the Clan Wars is going to be almost up-to-date regarding Rokugan (indeed, some characters who died during the Battle of Oblivion's Gate almost immediately returned through the Gate as embodied spirits, meaning they were gone from Ningen-do for literally only minutes). However, a returned spirit who died fighting Fu Leng's minions during the First War is going to find modern Rokugan almost unrecognizable. Although this would not be quite so dislocating as someone from, say, Dark Ages Britain suddenly finding themselves in the middle of modern London—Rokugan has not experienced nearly the same degree of technological, social, and cultural change as the real world in the last 1000 years—it will still be deeply confusing and unsettling. (A better comparison might be the reaction of the hypothetical Dark Ages Briton if he was transported to the London of the mid-1600s.) Moreover, many of the returned Rokugani spirits are actively hostile to the changes they encounter. The reaction of Yasuki Masashi to the Yasuki family's move from the Crane to the Crab is only the most prominent example of this problem.

Returned spirits should initially be portrayed as confused "strangers in a strange land," but as time goes on they are more likely to take a stand toward the changes that have occurred. It should be noted that not all spirits will react negatively to the modern Empire; some may in fact approve of what Rokugan has become and support the contemporary Toturi Dynasty. And of course many of them, regardless of opinion, will eventually conclude that they do not belong here and will return to the afterlife when Toturi issues his decree.

When depicting a returned spirit, whether PC or NPC, it is important to consider which realm they came from. Spirits from Meido will be all but unchanged from their former lives, since they were awaiting judgment and reincarnation when

the opening of Oblivion's Gate drew them back to the mortal world; they are the spirits most likely to be excited or even euphoric at the prospect of another life in Ningen-do. Those who were *shiryo* in Yomi, the Realm of Blessed Ancestors, were honorable souls who fulfilled their destiny, and they should generally express the greatness that earned them their place in the afterlife. Spirits from Toshigoku, however, are likely to have been warped or driven to varying degrees of madness by the bloody horror of the Realm of Slaughter. (Hantei XVI, of course, was already insane before his original death; spending centuries in Toshigoku only made him worse.) It is unlikely any spirits returned from other realms such as Gaki-do or Jigoku, since such tortured souls would have been violently insane and probably Tainted—although a mission to hunt such wild spirits and return them to the afterlife would potentially provide a challenging and exciting RPG plot.

Playing a Spirit PC

If a GM is prepared to allow returned spirits as PCs, there are several important considerations. First of all, such a PC gains some meaningful advantages from his spirit nature, something which may lead to accusations of unfairness. Secondly, while roleplaying a character misplaced in time can certainly be fun, it is also challenging to do effectively while not interfering with the overall flow of the game or claiming disproportionate attention. This can be a particular problem in clans like the Unicorn where the presence of a spirit may automatically lead to conflict and throw obstacles in front of the group. GMs and players must also be wary of "metagaming" (whether deliberate or inadvertent), since the spirit PC will have great knowledge of past events but little to no understanding of the current era.

A returned spirit (whether PC or NPC) is always clearly recognizable as such, because their exposed skin glows softly but distinctly with a golden light. This makes their nature impossible to conceal and also makes it somewhat difficult for them to employ stealth—which may explain why Hantei XVI was so willing to go along with Bayushi Paneki's declaration that the Scorpion would support both sides.

New Special Ability: Returned Spirit

The exposed skin of a returned spirit glows with a soft golden light. The glow will not penetrate clothing or armor that is completely opaque but otherwise cannot be obscured and only fades when the spirit dies. The spilled blood of a returned spirit glows in a similar way until the blood dries. Mechanically, a returned spirit (whether NPC or PC) can be represented by applying the following Special Ability to a human character from any clan or school.

The greater toughness of returned spirits grants them Reduction 3 (0 against jade, crystal, or obsidian).

They have one rank of the Magic Resistance Advantage. This does not function against spells with the Jade, Crystal, or Obsidian keywords, or spells that are specifically described as affecting spirits. (Additional Ranks of Magic Resistance still cost 4 or 6 Experience Points to purchase.)

For the purposes of healing Wounds, resisting poison, and resisting the effects of Fatigue, Fasting, and Drowning, a returned spirit is considered to have a Stamina two Ranks higher than his actual Stamina.

Returned spirits have three Ranks of the Lore skill in the Spirit Realm of their origin—generally Meido, Yomi, or Toshigoku.

Returned spirits suffer a –2k1 penalty to Stealth rolls in any situation where their glow may give them away (GM's discretion).

All returned spirits have the Cursed By the Realm Disadvantage pertaining to the Spirit Realm from which they originate. They receive no Experience Points for this Disadvantage.

New Disadvantage: Anachronism [Mental/Social] (2 points)

Although the society of Rokugan embraces traditionalism and for the most part eschews all change, some degree of social evolution is inevitable. For those spirits returned through Oblivion's Gate, these changes can seem profound and extremely confusing. You are out of touch with modern conventions and styles. The Target Number of all Artisan, Craft, and Social Skill Rolls you make is increased by 5.

Only returned spirits may purchase this Disadvantage.

New Basic School: Moto Death Priests

The startling individuals known as the Moto Death Priests are adherents of the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang, the pantheon of wrathful gods of death and judgment who were worshipped by the Moto family prior to its allegiance to the Unicorn Clan. When the Moto were still nomads, they paid homage to these Lords of Death out of both reverence and fear. However, when the Lady Shinjo taught the Moto there were gods who could show compassion and reward loyalty, they forsook their old devotion and joined the Unicorn. For centuries, the enraged Lords of Death sought their wayward worshippers, finally locating them in the Empire of Rokugan and afflicting them with ill fortune and misery, a kharmic phenomenon sometimes referred to as the Moto Curse. It was not until the days of Moto Gaheris, near the end of the War of Spirits, that the gods were contacted directly and a bargain was struck: the Lords of Death would stay their wrath and in exchange the Moto would resume their worship.

After the reunion of the Moto and the Lords of Death, worship of these gods spreads to other families within the Unicorn, especially once they are elevated to the position of lesser Fortunes in the cosmology of Rokugan. Holding sway in the Realm of Waiting, they pass judgment on the dead who await reincarnation, and their power even attracts a few worshippers from other clans. The Death Priests who revere the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang are singularly focused and disturbing men and women; they bring the blessings of death to those who are determined to be enemies of the Unicorn, and their prowess in battle is something other clans quickly learn to fear.

New Basic School: Moto Death Priests [Shugenja]

- **Benefit:** +1 Willpower
- **Skills:** Athletics, Horsemanship, Hunting, Lore: Theology, Meditation, Spellcraft, any one Skill
- **Honor:** 3.5
- **Outfit:** Sturdy Traveling Clothing, Wakizashi, any one weapon, Traveling Pack, Horse (Unicorn steed), 5 Koku
- **Affinity/Deficiency:** Earth/Air

Technique: Blessings of the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang

The Moto Death Priests carry the favor of gaijin death gods and bestow their blessings to their enemies. As a Simple Action you may sacrifice a spell slot and target one enemy (within a maximum range equal to your School Rank x 100 feet). Make a Contested Willpower Roll against that opponent. If you are successful, the target may not benefit from exploding dice or from Advantages that allow him to re-roll a roll. This effect lasts for a number of Rounds equal to your School Rank.

You gain a Free Raise on any spell with the Travel keyword.

- **Spells:** Sense, Commune, Summon, 3 Earth, 2 Fire, and 1 Water

New Advanced School: The Sodan-Senzo

All members of the Lion Clan's Kitsu family have some degree of ancestral connection to the original five kitsu who became human, although in most cases the link is only via marriage. Still, the connection is sufficient that the average practicing Kitsu shugenja has the ability to perceive and influence the connections mortals possess to the ancestral realms. A small handful of the Kitsu, however, possess a true blood lineage to their inhuman kitsu founders, and in these individuals much more significant powers can manifest.

The true-blooded Kitsu are known as *sodan-senzo*, and the family's sensei teach them secret techniques that evoke their hidden powers. They can not only sense ancestral connections but can actually project their souls into the spirit realms in order to interact with the souls of the dead. The Kitsu regard this as the most sacred of tasks and never undertake such a thing lightly. Some are also able to manifest a pale shadow of the original kitsu's physical abilities as well, something that has proven a fatal surprise for many of the Lion's enemies over the centuries.

New Lion Advanced School: Kitsu Sodan-Senzo [Shugenja]

In general, only Kitsu shugenja may join the sacred elite of the sodan-senzo. However, on a few rare occasions a Kitsu who married into another family or clan has manifested the gifts the family founders. The GM is the final arbiter of whether a character from outside the Kitsu shugenja school may become a sodan-senzo.

Requirements

- **Rings/Traits:** Water 4, Awareness 3
- **Skills:** Lore: Spirit Realms 4, Meditation 5
- **Other:** Must be a true blooded Kitsu with the ability to cast Water spells of Mastery Level 4 or higher

Techniques

Rank One: Senses of the Kitsu

The first gift of a true son of the kitsu is the ability to detect portals between the realms. Any time a spirit portal exists within a radius equal to your School Rank x 10 miles, the GM may opt to secretly make a Spellcraft / Perception (TN 25) roll to determine if you detect it. If the portal is within a number of miles equal to your School Rank or less, you pass this test automatically. Your previous School Rank increases by one for the purpose of casting spells.

Rank Two: Hand of the Kitsu

Although peaceful, the kitsu were powerful warriors, and their descendants carry that potential within them. Your unarmed damage increases by an additional +0k1, representing the spiritual talons of the kitsu. You may make a Meditation Skill Roll (TN 30) to project your soul into the realms of Meido or Yomi, where you may interact with ancestral spirits (using Social Skill Rolls as normal if required).

Rank Three: Soul of the Kitsu

For the true kitsu there are no boundaries. When you project your soul into the spirit realms (as described above in the Rank Two technique) you may take another person with you if they also succeed at the Meditation Skill Roll. This passenger may see and hear everything you experience, but may not speak. Ancestral spirits with whom you interact can sense this passenger. Additionally, you gain one additional rank in your previous School for the purpose of casting spells.

Heroes of Rokugan
Champions of the Saphire Throne

The Crane lands, Ichigun province, summer 1503

"Doji-sama?"

Doji Matsui turns his head, careful not to disrupt the work of the servant lacing up the ties on his armor. "Hai, what is it?"

The scout kneels in the entrance to his tent. "The Crab army has arrived, Doji-sama. It appears to be... significantly larger than expected."

"What? How is that possible?" Matsui helps the servant finish tying knots. "Summon my officers at once."

"Hai, Doji-sama." The scout hurries out of the tent. Matsui follows him a few minutes later, tucking his daisho under his obi. His shirieken are already gathering outside; he gestures sharply to them before swinging onto his horse. The shaggy pony utters an unhappy snort as he spurs it into a gallop.

The officers pull up on a low hillside, looking down into a grassy valley. Doji Matsui grunts to himself at his first sight of the Crab army, sprawled across the valley in a seething mass of dark gray and brick red. Scores of banners flutter in the light summer breeze.

"That is... at least twenty legions," one of the shiriekan says after a moment.

"Impossible," Matsui shakes his head, trying to deny the reality in front of him. "They sent sixteen legions to the south, to attack the Yasuki lands. That would leave them only eight for this front. Did they countermarch?"

It is Daidoji Ketsura, the commander of the scouts, who answers him. "No countermarch. Look at the banners, my lord. The eighteenth Hida legion, the eleventh... those are Wall units."

"They have stripped the Wall? Madness," one of the shiriekan says.

Ketsura shakes his head. "Not madness. An intelligent gamble. The Shadowlands have been silent for years. I served on the Wall ten years ago, after my gempukku. We could have held it with one-third of the men we had."

Matsui clenches his hands, then unclenches them with an effort. "How did we not have warning of this, Ketsura-san? Did your scouts somehow miss that this army was more than twice the size we expected?"

Ketsura shakes his head again. "They had Tsuru's Legion screening their flanks. We never got close enough to inspect them by sight until today. I offer my deep apologies, Matsui-sama. If you wish my seppuku I gladly offer it."

"That would be pointless, Ketsura-san. We shall need your skills for the battle. Afterward we can discuss responsibility."

The word "battle" seems to awaken the shirieken, and their anxious speculation suddenly fills the air.

"They could have sent this many south as well!"

"Perhaps even a third army, behind these?"

"Unlikely, they only have one Tsuru's Legion, how would they conceal it?"

Matsui cuts the chatter short with a raised hand. "The size and strength of the beast does not matter. It will still die when you cut off its head." Calm returns, as his words remind them of the way the Crane have won in the past, against far worse odds than these. "Prepare our troops to receive the Crab attack. They will surely charge in disorder once their commander is dead." The officers turn to their tasks, and he spurs his horse, then pauses. "Ketsura-san."

The scout commander turns back to him. "My lord?"

"Our victory is certain... but it would be as well, I think, if the Clan Champion learned of what the Crab are doing."

"I shall dispatch couriers at once, my lord."

"Good." Matsui rides forward, into the middle of the valley.

At this closer range the Crab army looks like some great sprawling beast, growling and muttering as it shifts its feet. Matsui rises in the saddle and draws a deep breath, then unleashes a parade-ground shout. "I am Doji Matsui, favored student of the great Kakita Saburashi, sensei of the Kakita Dueling Academy! Eighteen men have fallen to my blade! When the last Crab was eliminated from the Emerald Tournament, it was I who defeated him! If your commander is brave enough to face me, let him come forth! Or remain behind your ranks and show himself a coward before the Empire!"

Not bad, Matsui thinks, as the Crab army shifts and growls like a bear prodded in its lair. All those lessons in rhetoric were not wasted after all, though I doubt my sensei would approve. He smiles to himself as the noise from the Crab ranks rises and falls. The Crab general will have to answer the challenge, or be shamed before his men, leaving them without spirit.

Sure enough, after a few minutes a single figure in full armor walks out of the Crab ranks, pacing slowly and purposefully toward Matsui. The Crane dismounts and walks forward to meet his foe.

A soldier of the Wall indeed, he thinks, noting the scratches on the much-repaired armor, the heavy scars that seam one side of the man's face, the eyepatch with the Yasuki mon resting in the left eye-socket...

A shock runs through him. "Yasuki Koruma-san?"

The Crab smiles, a terrible sight on his scarred face. "It has been a few years, Matsui-san, but I seem to recall that our match at the Emerald Tournament was not quite as one-sided as you made out."

"Indeed," Matsui answers. For a moment the famed Crane glibness abandons him and he gropes for words. Finally he says, "They sent you to the Wall?"

"I was a Crab skilled enough to make the finals of the Emerald Tournament. What better place for me?"

"Enough, my friend," Matsui says, stricken. "Concede now, and take your army home. We both know you cannot defeat me, and without your leadership this army will be helpless."

Yasuki Koruma smiles, a sad smile. "That is why I already ordered them to advance, Matsui-san."

Matsui stares past the Crab general, and feels his heart stutter as he sees the Crab legions already hunching forward, advancing with a slow and measured pace. "This... it will be a massacre, Koruma-san. You might win, but the loss of life--"

"Enough words, my friend. Let us finish this." The Crab goes into stance. Even now, Matsui can see an echo of his old grace, the style and skill that brought him through the Emerald Tournament.

Matsui takes up his own stance, sliding his hand down to the hilt of his katana. A beat, two, and the sword flashes free, a silver blur in the summer sun.

Yasuki Koruma was once close to Matsui's skill level, but he has spent the last three years on the Wall, while Matsui has trained under the Kakita Dueling Masters. The Crane's blow cuts him from hip to shoulder, and his own sword never leaves its saya. Matsui flicks the blood from his sword with a quick flourish and slaps it back into its sheath. He is already thinking ahead, wondering how he can turn back the charge Koruma has unleashed... when he realizes the Crab has not fallen.

Yasuki Koruma steps forward, one pace, then two, entrails tangling his feet. Blood and words squeeze past clenched teeth.

"The mountain... does not... FALL."

Too late, Matsui reaches for his blade again. The Crab's hands close around his throat, and there is no room to draw. He claws at Koruma's fingers, trying to pry them loose. His vision turns gray and blotchy, and he pours the last of his strength into his hands, trying to break the Crab's iron grip.

The last thing Doji Matsui and Yasuki Koruma hear is the remorseless thunder of twenty thousand marching Crab.

An Alternate Rokugan

Heroes of Rokugan: Champions of the Sapphire Throne was originally run as an international convention-based L5R campaign in the years 2005-2010. It is a setting in which the Empire is beset by unexpected pressures both external and internal, leading to a Celestial imbalance, conspiracies and coups, and a Shadowlands invasion. The central themes include the dangers of ambition and dishonor, the impact of mortal sins on the Celestial balance, and the problem of a traditionalist society confronting its first steps toward modernization and toward joining the larger world outside its borders. In terms of this book's approach to campaign settings, Heroes of Rokugan (or HoR for short) is an example of an alternate timeline campaign, a game set in a version of Rokugan that diverges significantly from the canon history depicted in the L5R core rulebook and in most of the other settings in this book. (Chapter Ten, A Thousand Years of Darkness, is another example of an alternate timeline campaign setting.) Alternate timelines are—or should be—a staple of L5R role-play, especially in large-scale or epic campaigns. After all, when major world-shaking events are taking place neither the players nor the GM will enjoy a story whose outcome is already set in stone.

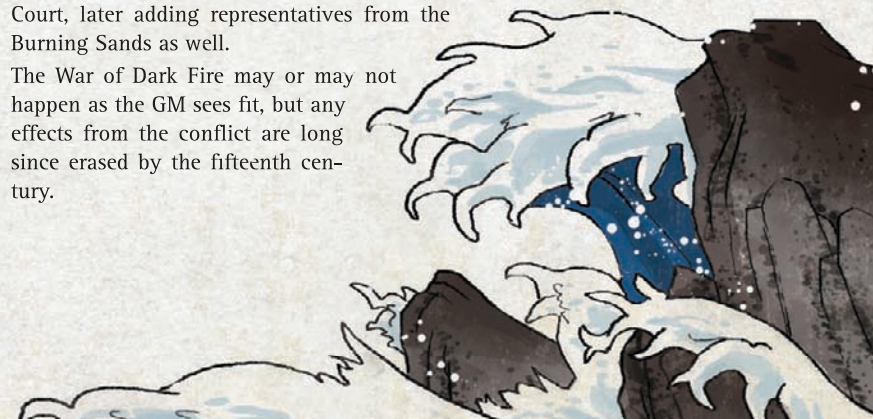
HoR is also an example of a setting deliberately designed to give the player characters pride of place as its heroes. In many of the canon L5R eras and storylines the heroes are already well established, forcing the PCs into what amount to supporting roles unless the GM is willing to fundamentally remake the storyline. In the HoR story, however, the prominent NPCs are for the most part inept, misguided, or outright villainous, so the fate of the Empire falls largely onto the shoulders of the PCs.

A Changed History

The setting for HoR is an "alternate future" set in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries of the Isawa Calendar, with the main action taking place in the years 1500-1504. However, its history diverges from the canon story of Rokugan much earlier, in the late twelfth century—specifically with the survival of the Toturi Dynasty and the changes which flow from that profound difference.

Exactly how the Toturi Dynasty endured is not terribly important, and GMs can choose a variety of options. Perhaps Toturi Tsudao (Toturi II) survived her confrontation with the Dark Lord Daigotsu and went on to rule the Empire for many years. Perhaps Toturi III did not succumb to a misguided quest for Enlightenment that led him to a fatal battle in the Shadowlands, or perhaps his letter appointing his brother Kaneka as Toturi IV was successfully delivered. Regardless, the survival of the dynasty means the Race for the Throne never happens; it is a Toturi Emperor who later receives the guidance and endorsement of the Celestial realm after the ascension of the Jade and Obsidian Dragons to the rule of Heaven. This has a number of other impacts on Rokugan's subsequent history, of which the more prominent are listed here:

- Since the Toturi Dynasty never fell, most of the wars and catastrophes which accompanied the Race for the Throne (the Winter of Red Snow, the Third Yasuki War, the Lion-Unicorn war, the plague and the associated purging of the Horiuchi, etc) never happened.
- The Spider Clan and its plot to infiltrate the Empire is exposed when the Heavens bestow their wisdom and vision on the Emperor. The Spider are systematically rooted out, eventually culminating in a major battle in the ruins of Otosan Uchi. Daigotsu perishes and the remnants of his followers flee back to the Shadowlands, ending the Spider threat. Otosan Uchi's ruins are badly Tainted in the fighting and subsequently purged and purified by the Kuni. The Yotsu ronin family plays a major role in the fighting and in recognition of its deeds is proclaimed the Tiger Clan.
- Due to ongoing, Imperially-sanctioned Mantis interventions in the Ivory Kingdoms, the Cult of the Destroyer never seizes power and the subsequent Kali-Ma Invasion never happens. The Toturi Dynasty recognizes the need to keep tabs on the affairs of the Ivory Kingdoms and permits an ambassador from that kingdom to attend the Imperial Court, later adding representatives from the Burning Sands as well.
- The War of Dark Fire may or may not happen as the GM sees fit, but any effects from the conflict are long since erased by the fifteenth century.



The 1400s: Prelude to Catastrophe

The main storyline of HoR begins in the year 1500, but its background develops over the course of decades and GMs may wish to run games set in that era as well. The history of the Empire in the 1400's sows the seeds for crises which will afflict not just Rokugan but the Celestial Order itself. Superficially, however, the Empire enjoys an age of stability and relative peace, comparable to the Pre-Coup era. The threat from the Shadowlands has faded, the ruins of Otosan Uchi have been cleansed, the Toturi Dynasty's rule is secure and unquestioned, and the terrible trials and struggles of the Four Winds are a tale fading into the mists of the past. But beneath this façade of prosperous unity, problems fester...

Year 1403

- The safety and complacency of the Empire in 1500 can be largely traced to the year 1403, when the last descendent of Daigotsu perishes in an assault on the Hiruma lands. Thereafter the Shadowlands and the Lost collapse into disunited squabbling. The Crab are by no means freed from their duty—forces from the Shadowlands continue to raid and harass the Empire's border—but the major organized assaults orchestrated by the Dark Lord and his descendents are a thing of the past, and within a few decades many Rokugani begin to imagine the threat is gone for good.

Year 1422

- A gaijin fleet from the kingdom known as the Thrane arrives from over the seas. The Thrane bring gifts and apologies for the deeds of their honorless ancestor Garen Hawthorne. After much debate, Emperor Toturi X agrees to allow the Thrane to resume limited trade with Rokugan, restricting them to a single port in the old capital Otosan Uchi and placing them under the supervision of the Tortoise and Tiger Clans. An ambassador from the pale-faced gaijin joins the representatives of the Ivory Kingdoms and the various Burning Sands cultures in the Imperial Court.

The further expansion and legalization of gaijin trade brings a rush of new prosperity and wealth to the Empire, but the effects of this are not altogether harmonious. Merchants grow in power, organized crime spreads into many new corners of the Empire, and innumerable samurai succumb to the lure of corruption. And while the Thrane as a whole come to Rokugan only for trade and exotic goods, some among their ranks see the Empire as a fertile ground for exploitation and possibly even conquest.

Year 1446

- The gaijin known as the Merenae return to Rokugan as well, although the well-entrenched Thrane prevent them from making much headway in trade or diplomacy.

Year 1449

- In response to the growing importance of the gaijin trade, Emperor Toturi X orders the construction of a walled "foreign district" within the Imperial Capital. The gaijin are permitted to follow their own customs so long as they remain within the District, but must adhere to Rokugani law when they emerge to visit the rest of the Capital. Weapons using gaijin pepper are still forbidden even within the District, however, on pain of death.

Year 1454

- A major inter-clan conflict known as the War of Bleeding Flowers erupts in the northern Empire. The Lion Clan, under the rule of an aggressive Clan Champion, attacks the Crane castle of Shiro Kyotei in long-delayed vengeance for the tenth-century deeds of Tsume Retsu. The castle is razed to the ground, the Tsume family put to the sword, and the Lion annex the associated Kintani Valley.
- The Dragon Clan, outraged by the Lion Clan's ferocity, intervenes in the war and suffers bitter defeats of its own. Much of its border territory is overrun by the Lion, and the Dragonfly Clan is savaged and loses over half its lands. When both the Unicorn and Phoenix Clans threaten intervention, the Emperor steps in and decrees an end to the fighting.
- After the war, the Lion declare the Tsume family disbanded—with no survivors to the ruling family line, their declaration cannot be contested, and the handful of surviving Tsume vassals become ronin.
- The Dragonfly Clan is unable to recover from the devastation of the War of Bleeding Flowers and is absorbed into the Dragon Clan as the Tonbo family.

The War of Bleeding Flowers is the largest conflict within Rokugan in half a century and has many long-lasting consequences. The Dragon and their new Tonbo family dedicate themselves to building up their military strength for an eventual war of vengeance against the Lion. The Crane, while less driven than the Dragon, nevertheless become significantly more militant in their policies and the lords of the Daidoji work to expand their clan's armies.

The Tsume vassals are the true losers of the war. The rest of the Crane Clan is unwilling to take them in, viewing them as painful reminders of a humiliating defeat. They are left to wander the Empire, making their way as ronin. Determined to retain their pride as Crane, the remaining Tsume meet every year (usually in Crane lands) to renew their loyalties and pledge themselves to avenge their dead lords. They also go to considerable effort to try to preserve some aspect of the old Tsume military traditions, teaching their spearman technique to their children.

Year 1463

- Shosuro Hido, nicknamed "the Spider," becomes daimyo of the Shosuro family. He is a man of poor health but profound ruthlessness and boundless ambitions, and dreams of holding power over the entire clan and even the Empire itself. He begins subtly undermining the authority of the Clan Champion and building a covert network of Shosuro shinobi, the so-called "Spider's Fangs," who are solely loyal to himself.

Year 1468

- An outbreak of plague ravages the northern Empire, taking many lives. Among the casualties is the Crane Clan Champion, leaving his clan under the leadership of his widow Doji Koneko and their newborn son Doji Sarutomo. Koneko's political skills prove equal to the task, and she soon earns the title of "O-Doji" from allies and respectful rivals alike.

Year 1470

- A *maho-tsukai* cult attacks the lands of the Hare Clan. The cultists are defeated with assistance from the Scorpion Kuroiban, leading to improved relations between the formerly hostile clans. The Phoenix Clan is alarmed by the incident and focuses its efforts more strongly on hunting out *maho* everywhere in the Empire.

Year 1476

- Miya Shikan becomes Miya family daimyo and Imperial Herald. He is a man obsessed with the need for peace in the Empire, and embarks on a relentless campaign of treaty-making and diplomacy against those who might wage wars. Within a few years even the small border skirmishes between the Great Clans come to an end.

Shikan's relentless efforts make him by far the most influential of the Emperor's Chosen, and his enforced peace results in steadily rising tensions between clans who can no longer resolve their differences with small border wars. However, there is a dark side to Shikan's unrelenting pursuit of his dream. He is willing to do almost anything to maintain his precious peace, since he sees it as more important than anything else—including law, morality, and Honor.

Year 1478

- Crown Prince Toturi Kenji announces he will marry Shosuro Amika, niece to Shosuro Hido. The proclamation comes as a shock to the courts, since it bypasses the normal elaborate negotiations and match-making procedures expected for an Imperial marriage. Rumormongers suggest the prince has fallen in love with the Scorpion maiden, and they are correct; at the orders of her uncle she has seduced him into defying convention and marrying her. The Shosuro lord hopes her children will be pliable tools allowing him to control the Imperial throne by proxy.

Year 1480

- Princess Amika gives birth to twin sons, Hatsu and Kobashi. The Empire rejoices.

Year 1481

- Emperor Toturi XI retires and announces he is departing on a quest to seek the Shrine of Shinsei. Toturi Kenji ascends to the throne as Toturi XII; with his Scorpion bride now Empress, the Scorpion Clan's fortunes rise even faster.
- Unfortunately, in this same year Empress Amika falls in love with the handsome, proud, and charismatic lord of the Mirumoto: Mirumoto Jinzaki. They begin a secret affair which will last for six years.

Notwithstanding Amika's profound failure of loyalty, her position as wife to the Emperor does allow the Scor-

pion Clan to gain considerable influence within the courts. A Scorpion is appointed Chancellor and the clan's political power soon rivals the Crane. However, Shosuro Hido is not pleased with these results—his ambitions are higher than mere influence.

Year 1482

- The princess Yukihime is born to Empress Amika. The child is actually Mirumoto Jinzaki's daughter.

Year 1483

- Sven Oldarsson, an ambitious and ruthless scion of an influential Thrane family, is appointed as the Thrane ambassador to Rokugan. Oldarsson views Rokugan as a potential colony and begins searching for allies among the Empire's samurai, looking for someone he can sponsor as a puppet ruler.
- The Empress gives birth to another daughter, Maihime. This child is also Jinzaki's.

Year 1484

- The Empress gives birth to a legitimate son, Gendo. His health is poor and within a couple of years he begins to suffer epileptic fits.

Year 1485

- Moto Temujin becomes Khan of the Unicorn Clan. He is ruthless and temperamental, with deep-seated dreams of power and conquest, but initially lacks judgment. When Miya Shikan blocks Temujin's attempt to start a war with the Scorpion Clan, the young Khan loses his temper and calls Shikan a "tofu-eating geisha-boy." The ensuing political firestorm does great damage to the Unicorn Clan's position and prestige, and teaches Temujin a valuable lesson about restraining himself.

Moto Temujin is the first of two ambitious warlords who will tear Rokugan asunder within a few years. Although he possesses a dark and compelling charisma, he is a man wholly without conscience, to whom others are tools or victims. His early dreams of crushing the neighboring clans soon give way to grander fantasies of conquering Rokugan and even the world, and as his political skills grow he begins working to undermine Shikan's peace.

Year 1486

- During an Imperial Winter Court held on the Mantis Isles, Sven Oldarsson makes the acquaintance of Yoritomo Ogawa, the revered sensei of Dojo Raiden. After several months of cautiously feeling each other out, the two become allies with the goal of eventually putting a Mantis-controlled Emperor on the throne of Rokugan.

Yoritomo Ogawa is a scion of the ancient line of the Gusai, the family which was officially exterminated in the fifth century for its foolish attempt to seize the Imperial throne. By the time he meets Sven Oldarsson, Ogawa has already spent decades dreaming of achieving what his ancestors could not. His career as an esteemed sensei has built up an extended network of allies and admirers among the Mantis, including the Clan Champion and his sons, and he does not find it difficult to steer them down the path of embracing his dishonorable ambitions. The alliance with Oldarsson—the beginning of the secret conspiracy of the Three Old Men—is initially cautious, with neither man willing to openly speak of their plans. Ogawa does not yet trust a gaijin enough to openly explain his goals, while Oldarsson is wary of a possible double-cross. Nevertheless, their alliance—which will shake the Empire to its foundations—begins here.

Year 1487

- Empress Amika gives birth to another illegitimate child, a girl named Hisako.

Year 1488

- The Empress gives birth to the last of her illegitimate children, a son named Hizatoru.
- Mirumoto Jinzaki loses a formal challenge to Kakita Saburashi, daimyo of the Kakita family and master sensei of the Dueling Academy. The duel is widely regarded as the most magnificent fight in generations, but for Jinzaki it is a shattering experience, exposing his inner weakness and moral failure. Filled with self-loathing but lacking the courage to publicly admit his crime or commit seppuku, he ends his affair with the Empress and retreats into isolation and self-contempt, leaving the rule of the Mirumoto to younger and more aggressive daimyo.
- The Empress, herself shaken by her lover's collapse, forsakes both Jinzaki and her uncle and attempts to serve Toturi XII as a loyal bride.

Year 1489

- The Empress gives birth to a legitimate son, Kobe. However, because he was conceived prior to the end of her affair with Jinzaki, Amika is uncertain as to whether Kobe is truly the Emperor's son.
- The Test of the Emerald Champion ends in victory for Kakita Saburashi, but the Kakita daimyo respectfully declines the reward, humbly claiming that despite his victory his performance was not worthy of the office. The Emperor, angered by Saburashi's action but unwilling to directly punish him, names the Lion Clan Champion, Matsu Hoketsaku, to hold the office.

Year 1490

- The Emperor's twin sons Hatsu and Kobashi are fostered to the Crane and Lion Clans for training. The move is arranged through an alliance of convenience between the Left and Right Hands; they are enemies, but neither clan wants the Scorpion to have a hand in training the Emperor's eldest sons.

Year 1491

- Akodo Gintaku becomes daimyo of the Akodo family after his father finally retires. Gintaku is a coldly ambitious man with little conscience and boundless goals. He begins working to place loyal officers in key locations within the Lion command structures.

Akodo Gintaku is a rival to Moto Temujin in ambition and ruthlessness, but where Temujin is driven by rage and a lust for power, Gintaku is coldly self-controlled and manipulates those around him like pieces on a shogi board. Years earlier, while first training in the Akodo school, he begins cultivating a circle of loyal allies who are willing to do anything to win his support and approval; he calls them his "anniki" (brothers) and as the years pass he adds to their numbers. Once he becomes family daimyo, the anniki soon attain positions of prominence throughout the Lion Clan.

However, Gintaku must move cautiously. The Clan Champion, Matsu Hoketsaku, is a canny and skillful leader who keeps close watch over his underlings. As Gintaku's plans and ambitions grow, he begins developing plans to dispose of Hoketsaku.

Year 1494

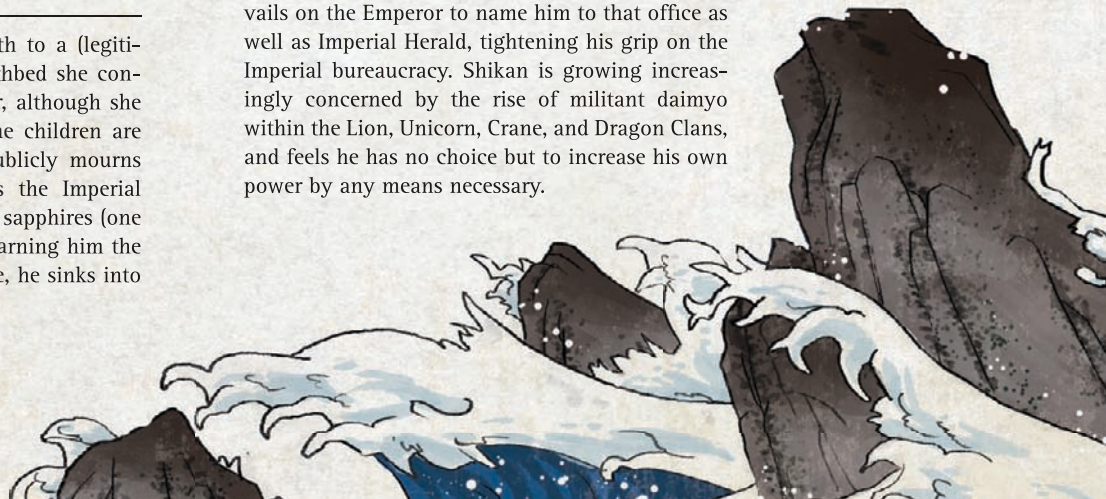
- The Empress dies while giving birth to a (legitimate) daughter, Chisa. On her deathbed she confesses her infidelity to the Emperor, although she does not reveal which of their nine children are actually Jinzaki's. The Emperor publicly mourns his "faithful Empress" and orders the Imperial throne be inlaid with nine hundred sapphires (one hundred for each child she bore), earning him the title 'the Sapphire Prince.' In private, he sinks into gloom and near-despair, coming to believe that honor is dead and the Empire is doomed.
- Five-year-old Toturi Kobe utters a scream at the moment of his mother's death. He does not speak again for ten years.
- In the wake of the Empress' death, Scorpion advisors persuade her third daughter, Toturi Hisako, to train with the Scorpion in honor of her late mother. Shosuro Hido hopes this will allow him to resume his efforts to gain power over the Imperial line. Unfortunately, Hisako's headstrong declaration violates a previous agreement for her to be fostered to the Mantis Clan, and the Mantis threaten war against the Scorpion. Miya Shikan succeeds in negotiating a peace settlement, arranging an extensive exchange of hostages and child-fosterings between the two clans and arranging for Hisako's younger brother Toturi Hizatoru to train with the Mantis Clan.
- Miya Shikan recruits twin brothers Miya Hanzu and Miya Kageko to serve as his personal agents and enforcers. Initially he uses them mainly as spies.

Ironically, Miya Shikan's peace treaty actually creates further danger to the future of the Empire. During the extensive negotiations, Shosuro Hido comes into contact with the ambitious Mantis sensei Yoritomo Ogawa. Each of the two men senses the ambition in the other, and over the coming months they begin to cautiously sound each other out. By the following year Hido and Ogawa are partners in conspiracy, allying with Sven Oldarsson to place a puppet Emperor on the throne.

The Three Old Men work tirelessly to subvert Shikan's peace and undermine the Toturi dynasty. Their plan is to eventually destabilize the Empire sufficiently to allow the installation of Toturi Hizatoru as Emperor, backed by Mantis and Thrane troops. However, all the while each of the Old Men is plotting to double-cross the other two. Yoritomo Ogawa plans to oust the Thrane and betray the Scorpion as soon as Hizatoru is secure on the throne. Oldarsson plans to keep his troops in the country and reduce it to a colony, massively enriching himself in the process. And Hido intends to replace Hizatoru with Hisako as soon as the Thrane have been dealt with.

Year 1495

- Imperial Advisor Doji Matsura retires. Shikan prevails on the Emperor to name him to that office as well as Imperial Herald, tightening his grip on the Imperial bureaucracy. Shikan is growing increasingly concerned by the rise of militant daimyo within the Lion, Unicorn, Crane, and Dragon Clans, and feels he has no choice but to increase his own power by any means necessary.



Year 1496

- Miya Shikan decides he will have to employ violence to enforce the peace. He dispatches his two agents Hanzu and Kageko to the Burning Sands to learn foreign assassination techniques. While they are there, they make contact with a khadi sorcerer named Al-Azar. Shikan is uneasily attracted by the prospect of gaining a khadi's power and immortality.

Year 1497

- The Imperial Chancellor, Bayushi Hakuranai, dies—apparently of heart failure. In reality he is poisoned by Miya Kageko, the first of many assassinations which the twins carry out for Miya Shikan. Shikan influences the Emperor to not name a new Chancellor, leaving the office vacant.
- Toturi Gendo suffers a prophetic vision, followed by a violent seizure that leaves his hair white and his body partially paralyzed. After much private debate the Imperial authorities decide to send him to live with the Brotherhood of Shinsei, where his strange fits and ominous mumblings can be kept out of the public eye.

Year 1498

- The Daidoji daimyo, Daidoji "Iron Serpent" Hayaku, forges an alliance with the Dragon, with the long-term goal of avenging the War of Bleeding Flowers.

Year 1499

- The Lion Champion Matsu Hoketsaku is murdered by a Tsume ronin while attending the Topaz Championship, where his teenage son Matsu Nimuro is competing. Unknown to almost everyone, the ronin's presence was actually arranged by Akodo Gintaku. The death of Hoketsaku leaves Gintaku as regent of the clan while Nimuro undergoes further training and preparations to assume his office.

Rokugan in the Year 1500

The main Heroes of Rokugan storyline begins in the year 1500. The Empire stands at a turning point. Miya Shikan's enforced peace has allowed dangerous tensions to build up between almost all the clans, while the burgeoning trade with the gaijin is undermining Rokugan's moral and social structures. The corrupting influences of prolonged peace and social transformation have given rise to ambitious lords who have abandoned honor: the warlords Moto Temujin and Akodo Gintaku both dream of seizing the Throne for themselves, while the conspiring old men Shosuro Hido, Yoritomo Ogawa, and the gaijin ambassador Sven Oldarsson plot to put a puppet Emperor on that same Throne. Meanwhile, Miya Shikan's obsession with maintaining "peace at all costs" has driven him over the edge into madness and treason: he has launched a series of assassinations against militarist daimyo and is plotting to make himself into a khadi, allowing him to maintain peace over Rokugan... forever.

By contrast, the authorities who are supposed to hold Rokugan together are weak, corrupt, and divided. The Emperor has never recovered from the discovery of his wife's infidelity and takes no action to maintain stability in the Empire, preferring to live within the cocoon of his sadness. Many of the other Clan Champions and daimyo are flawed individuals, lost in sinful excess or personal ambitions.

All these failings and evils within the mortal world have metaphysical consequences as well. The decline of Honor and the tremendous growth of greed, corruption, and sin has created a severe imbalance within the Celestial realm. The Obsidian Moon, the Dragon of Sin, has become so powerful that he has literally gone mad, intervening in the mortal realm in random and destructive ways. Conversely, the Jade Sun, the Dragon of Virtue, has become so weak that she will soon become vulnerable to death at mortal hands.

Year 1500

- After months of effort, the Lion forge an alliance with the Crab aimed at countering the already existing Dragon-Crane alliance and working together to weaken Miya Shikan's influence. Unexpectedly the Lion also manage to improve relations with

the Phoenix Clan; the Phoenix disagree with the martial path of the Dragon and Crane, and while they approve of Shikan's goals they disapprove of his monopolization of political power. In response, the Crane and Dragon seek alliance with the Unicorn.

- Miya Hanzu arranges the assassination of Daidoji Hayaku, the aggressive and militaristic daimyo of the Daidoji.
- A long-lost Dark Moto, Moto Yoshi, escapes his imprisonment in a shrine near the ruins of Otosan Uchi. He travels across the Empire in secret, using his shapeshifting powers to avoid notice while exploring the world of the sixteenth century. A few months later he approaches Moto Temujin, lord of the Unicorn Clan, and offers his services. Temujin, confident in his own power and intellect, agrees to this dangerous alliance and arranges for Yoshi to replace Shinjo Kotoku, the ineffectual daimyo of the Shinjo.
- The Empire suffers a drought, creating the risk of possible famine in the coming year.
- A Dragon sensei is poisoned while attending the Bon Festival in Ryoko Owari, and initial suspicions fall on a Crane who is the nephew of the Daidoji ruling line. The murder is actually carried out by the Scorpion at the behest of the Mantis, and is intended to provoke a Crane-Dragon war. However, the Unicorn know the truth behind the crime and try to expose the Scorpion in hopes of shattering the friendship between Dragon and Scorpion. The Scorpion are forced to hurriedly shift the blame, framing a Badger samurai for the crime.
- Miya Kageko discovers a Tsuno pack hiding in the Spine of the World Mountains. He promises to bring them Toturi blood.

By this time, Miya Shikan's honor has long since given way before his fanatical need to maintain peace at any price. In an attempt to strengthen his position and goals he has prevailed on the Emperor to create a new set of Imperial magistrates, the so-called Sapphire Magistrates, to help enforce Empire-wide peace. However, he can tell even this will not be enough once the Emperor is succeeded by one of his sons. Toturi Hatsu and Toturi Kobashi are both bold, aggressive young samurai who embrace the Empire's most traditional views on war, and Shikan fears that once one of them becomes Emperor all his work will be undone. Even worse, he fears his own death will leave no one willing to follow in his path with the same dedication he has shown. If peace is to endure, Hatsu and Kobashi must die, and Miya Shikan must live forever...

Thus does the Imperial Herald take the final irrevocable step from idealism to treason.

- Miya Hanzu attends the Unicorn Clan's annual military maneuvers, held on the edge of the Burning Sands during the first month of winter. While he is there Hanzu makes contact with a Senpet gaijin sorcerer, learning the secrets of the khadi ritual.
- The Hare Clan undertakes a political campaign to start its own shugenja school. The clan seeks help from the Crab, Scorpion, and Phoenix, but this leads to an unexpected diplomatic crisis when the Crab take offense at the involvement of the other two clans. The Phoenix quickly withdraw rather than insult their Crab friends, but Shosuro Hido sees the Crab outrage as the chance he has been waiting for, an opportunity to shatter the Empire's peace for good. He instructs Scorpion diplomats to encourage the Hare to defy the Crab.
- During the Imperial Winter Court, in response to demands from the clans and encouragement from Miya Shikan, the Emperor announces the construction of a network of new high-quality roads across the Empire. The new "Imperial Throughways" will enhance trade and commerce throughout Rokugan. As a side effect of their construction, Beiden Pass is to be repaired and re-opened for the first time in hundreds of years.
- In the wake of a severe drought and with potential famine looming in some parts of the Empire, the disposition of Miya's Blessing becomes a major political issue. The Crane, enjoying one of the few food surpluses in the Empire, use this leverage to negotiate non-aggression pacts with the Lion and Crab. Due to political maneuvers among the clans and Imperial families, Miya's Blessing is bestowed on the Unicorn, Dragon, and Scorpion, shutting out the Phoenix in retaliation for their alliance with the Lion. Although Miya Shikan sees this as a favorable result (punishing the Phoenix for their friendship with the warlike Lion) it actually sows the seeds for future conflict: Akodo Gintaku orders the Lion to share their own limited resources with the Phoenix, who thereafter feel honor-bound to maintain their alliance at all costs.

Year 1501

- The Obsidian Dragon, driven mad by the imbalance in the Celestial order, begins seeking a mortal vessel to serve as his avatar in the mortal world and allow him to intervene directly in mortal affairs. His initial attempt to possess a young monk who is a *tamashii* is thwarted, but soon after he takes possession of the Dragon Clan Champion, Togashi Imasu, a man whose soul and honor are weakened by a forbidden love for a tattooed woman.
- Miya Shikan undergoes the gaijin ritual to become a khadi, an immortal heartless sorcerer. He initially hides his heart in the Miya Palace. Recognizing this is not a safe location, he promotes the construction of a shrine to a new Fortune of Peace, planning to hide his heart beneath it.
- The Toturi princes Hatsu and Kobashi undertake a tour of the Empire, accompanied by their youngest sister Chisa along with an entourage that includes Miya Hanzu. While they are traveling through Seikitsu Pass, Miya Hanzu kidnaps Chisa and uses her to lure the princes into a lethal confrontation with the Tsuno pack his brother discovered the previous year. Both princes die protecting Chisa, who is rescued by other samurai accompanying the tour.

The loss of Hatsu and Kobashi is a major blow to the already shaken Emperor. Aside from Chisa, they are the only children whose legitimacy he believes in with complete confidence. Toturi XII withdraws into himself even further, refusing to involve himself in the Empire's affairs and even ceasing his earlier support for Miya Shikan's policies.

To the ambitious and dishonorable men of the Empire—Akodo Gintaku, Moto Temujin, and the Three Old Men—the Emperor's decline and the deaths of his eldest sons are welcome gifts. Temujin and Gintaku both look for every opportunity to take aggressive action against their neighbors, and Shosuro Hido steps up his efforts to destabilize the peace. Yoritomo Ogawa and Sven Oldarsson accelerate their plans as well, for Toturi Hizatoru is now the Emperor's eldest son, an important thing in an Empire where sons are still often the favored heirs.

- Toturi Kobe is fostered to the Crab Clan for training. The choice is a major and surprising political victory for the clan of Hida, resulting primarily from the more politically powerful clans canceling out each other's efforts. Miya Shikan is deeply displeased with the decision, which strengthens one of the Empire's most belligerent and warlike clans.
- With the cooperation of Moto Temujin, the Dragon Clan stages a secret raid on the Badger lands, retaliating for the death of their sensei the previous year. Although the attack is not announced publicly, rumors about it spread across the Empire and undermine the sanctity of Miya Shikan's peace.
- Mirumoto Jinzaki is stricken with guilt as he realizes the deaths of Princes Hatsu and Kobashi means the next Emperor will likely be his illegitimate child. He announces his impending retirement and, since he has no legal heirs, proclaims a kenjutsu tournament to choose the next Mirumoto family daimyo.
- The Crab hold a Twenty Goblin Winter—not out of necessity but to swell their army's ranks. Midway through the winter the Crab Clan Champion, Hida Masakazu, chokes to death during a celebratory feast. He is succeeded by his warlike and violent son Hida Gojiro, nicknamed "the Beast," a thuggish young man known for his bitter hatred for the Crane and Scorpion.

Year 1502

- Princess Yukihime marries Daidoji Kowaru, a major political victory for the Crane. However, during the wedding celebrations a vengeful ghost forces Crane Champion Doji Sarutomo to privately confess the murder of his first wife. He commits seppuku, leaving the clan in the hands of his pregnant wife, Doji Akane (formerly a Kitsuki). Sarutomo's mother O-Doji Koneko likewise privately confesses her own complicity in concealing her son's crime and retires to join the Brotherhood of Shinsei.
- Scorpion manipulations and the intransigence of new Crab Champion Hida Gojiro bring about war between the Crab and the Hare, with the Scorpion Clan directly supporting the Hare. Miya Shikan frantically tries to keep the conflict contained, but with the Emperor still in isolation and unwilling to intervene, Shikan is for the first time unable to stem the relentless tide of war. Few samurai wish to stand on the sidelines for the first major war in over four decades; as the fighting escalates and Crab troops close in on Shiro Usagi, the other Great Clans send troops to support one side or the other.
- The Mirumoto hold the tournament to choose their next family daimyo. The winner is Mirumoto Daikabe, a cheerfully militant samurai who looks for-

ward to war with the Lion and winning back the lands lost in the War of Bleeding Flowers. With a new leader in place, Mirumoto Jinzaki quietly commits seppuku; he leaves a secret confession to his infidelity with a few trusted Dragon samurai.

- On the orders of Miya Shikan, his agent Miya Kageko attempts to assassinate Mirumoto Daikabe. The assassination is thwarted and Kageko is killed, further weakening Shikan's power.
- **The Battle of Shiro Usagi.** Crab and Lion troops, with passive support from the Lion Clan's Phoenix allies, clash with the Hare and their Scorpion and Dragon allies. The Crane, outraged by the Crab aggression, violate their own earlier nonaggression pact and support the Hare. The Unicorn and Mantis also make token gestures of support for the Hare, mainly to encourage further conflict for their own purposes. The Crab win the battle, razing Shiro Usagi to the ground, but the cost to both sides is high.

The Battle of Shiro Usagi is not a large engagement in itself—it pits a mixed force of about 8,000 defenders (mainly Scorpion, Dragon, and Hare with small contingents from other factions) against 13,000 Crab and Lion (with a few Phoenix assisting with medical care and similar support roles). However, its impact is profound. Much of the strength and persistence of Miya Shikan's peace came from its seemingly inviolate nature—once armies clash at Shiro Usagi and hundreds of lives are lost, the full collapse of the peace is inevitable.

Although the Hare suffer a heavy blow from the loss of their castle and a large portion of their military strength, they retain several lesser holdings and the daimyo's family is smuggled out by the Scorpion before the end of the battle. However, the tiny Minor Clan is still militarily crippled and politically indebted to the Scorpion. In order to avert further conflict, the Hare agree to a series of concessions to the Crab, including making the Crab the sole sponsors of their shugenja school.

- The Hare War's weakening of Miya Shikan's apparent power quickly draws the attention of rival groups. At the urging of multiple clans, the Emperor finally bestirs himself to appoint a new Chancellor, Otomo Kazuma, the retired uncle of the reclusive Otomo daimyo. Kazuma is an old man but a skilled politician who is utterly opposed to everything Shikan believes. He quickly moves to build political alliances and dismantle Shikan's power base.
- Samurai from many clans report encounters with a strange dark figure: the Avatar of Obsidian. Due the relentless growth of the Three Sins within the Empire, the maddened Obsidian Dragon is now powerful enough for his avatar to begin intervening directly in human affairs, and he no longer possesses enough sanity to resist the chance to do so. The Avatar delivers prophecies of doom and proclaims the impending certain death of his counterpart, the Jade Sun.

Alternate Paths: The Bloodsword and Moto Yoshi

It is the acquisition of the Bloodsword Ambition that finally drives Akodo Gintaku to cast off caution and fully embrace his goals of conquest, and it is the subtle whispers of the sword which lead him to the monstrous actions of the years 1503 and 1504. However, if the sword had gone to another man—such as Temujin or Hido—its influence would have been no less destructive. GMs who wish to explore alternate versions of the HoR timeline can easily do so by arranging for another of the Empire's villains to gain the Bloodsword and step over the line from ambition to madness.

Moto Yoshi is an *akutenshi*, an extremely powerful Lost warrior, but in this era the denizens of the Shadowlands are divided and weak. When Yoshi looks around for a suitable master, the Empire's ambitious and powerful warlords—Temujin and Gintaku—strike him as far more promising than anyone he can find within the Shadowlands, especially since he has little interest in serving an Oni Lord. The cause of Jigoku is best advanced through destruction and chaos, and Yoshi believes these human warlords are the ideal masters for this purpose. However, there was no guarantee that Yoshi would make that decision or that he would stay loyal to his human masters after he organized the Shadowlands on their behalf. Here again, the GM can change things to add new ingredients to the story. What if Yoshi decides to betray his human masters and attack the Empire with Shadowlands forces? What if he stays loyal to Temujin after Gintaku gets the Bloodsword?

- A Kaiu researcher, Kaiu Sumata, uncovers a sword in the ruins of the long-abandoned ronin settlement of Nanashi Mura. He believes the blade is the wakizashi of the legendary hero Takuan. In actuality, it is the Bloodsword Ambition, and its siren call has attracted the attention of Shosuro Hido, Moto Temujin, and Akodo Gintaku. Their agents clash violently in the remote ruins of the ancient ronin village. Gintaku's men prevail, bringing the cursed sword back to the Lord of the Akodo.
- The Tsume ronin gather in the Crane coastal settlement of Jukami Mura to renew their vows of vengeance against the Lion. Even as they meet, however, a Crab raiding force assails the Crane port, burning much of the town and slaughtering the majority of the Tsume, apparently in retaliation for the Crane breaking their non-aggression pact in the Hare War. However, the "Crab" are actually

hand-picked Lion troops led by Akodo Mako, one of Gintaku's anniki, and disguised as Crab bushi. Accusations fly between the Crane and Crab, making war all but certain.

- Moto Yoshi, sensing the power of the Bloodsword, abandons the Unicorn and offers his services to Akodo Gintaku instead. Gintaku readily agrees and arranges for Yoshi to kill and replace Akodo Mako. Moto Temujin is alarmed by Yoshi's disappearance but does not know where the faithless *akutenshi* has gone; to cover the apparent disappearance of Shinjo Kotoku, Temujin spreads the false tale that Kotoku has gone traveling in the Burning Sands to "find his roots."
- The winter season sees frantic negotiations all across the Empire, in many cases extending into the spring, as the clans maneuver and prepare for the wars everyone can see coming. The Scorpion go to considerable effort to drag all the other clans into conflict with each other, even managing to provoke hostilities between the Unicorn and Phoenix by arranging for a Shosuro actor masquerading as a Phoenix to slaughter a troop of Utaku warhorses. Unfortunately, the Scorpion machinations draw the attention of Temujin and Gintaku, both of whom begin looking for an opportunity to crush the Empire's Underhand.
- Samurai from several clans visit the High House of Light to witness a winter's-end duel between the Mirumoto family's greatest Swordmaster and the Kakita daimyo, Kakita Saburashi. Saburashi is defeated and realizes his lifelong quest for perfect swordsmanship has ended in failure. He announces his retirement.
- At the orders of Akodo Gintaku, Moto Yoshi spends much of the winter in the Shadowlands, organizing the scattered forces of the Lost. By spring he has assembled a sizable army, helped along by the defeat of two other aspiring Shadowlands warlords by Rokugani samurai. Yoshi returns to the Empire and resumes his "Akodo Mako" guise to inform Gintaku of his success.

In the official Heroes of Rokugan storyline, the PCs destroy two other minor villains who are trying to reunite the forces of the Shadowlands: a Lost bushi from the Unicorn Clan and a corrupted Naga abomination. However, there is also the potential that the PCs could have discovered Moto Yoshi's activities and averted them, either directly or by reporting them to the Crab Clan. This would change subsequent events considerably, so GMs should be prepared for extensive modifications of the storyline before offering the PCs this potential.

Year 1503

- The Crab unleash a full-scale war with the Crane, withdrawing almost half of their Wall garrisons in order to bring enough strength to bear against their foe. They are supported by the Lion, who ferociously attack the northern Crane border. The Crane suffer heavy casualties from the unexpectedly strong joint attack.
- With the Crab-Crane War well and truly shattering Shikan's peace, the new Mirumoto daimyo sees a chance to finally avenge the War of Bleeding Flowers. After a pause for mobilization and a brief attempt to lure the Lion into making the first attack, the Dragon march on their former lands. A Dragon rikugunshokan named Mirumoto Jintei wins a dramatic initial victory at Toi Koku, slaughtering the small Lion garrison to the last man.
- The Unicorn Clan's Baraunghar Army marches across the northern Empire to confront the Phoenix and avenge the horse-slaughter incident. The Khan is fully aware the situation was manipulated by the Scorpion, but is happy to seize an opportunity to damage or perhaps even destroy the Phoenix Clan. A major battle is fought on the Phoenix border; Clan Champion Shiba Ninto dies, but the Baraunghar suffers heavy casualties and is forced into a lengthy siege of the Phoenix city of Nikesake.
- Akodo Gintaku slips false information to the Unicorn implicating the Scorpion in several recent incidents, including the attack on Jukami Mura the previous year. The Khan recognizes the game Gintaku is playing but willingly cooperates for the chance to smash the Scorpion; troops of the Khol Army push through the Seikitsu Pass and seize the northernmost Scorpion provinces.
- Heading south from Toi Koku, the Dragon army under Mirumoto Jintei is caught and utterly destroyed by two Lion armies under the personal command of Akodo Gintaku and his sinister assistant 'Akodo Mako' (a shapeshifted Moto Yoshi).
- The Mantis and Sven Oldarsson prepare to make their play for the throne of Rokugan, intending to use the chaos of war to justify Toturi Hizatoru's claim on the throne of his aging and inactive father. Shosuro Hido promises support, but with the Unicorn threatening his northern border he is unable to deliver. Oldarsson arranges for a Thrane fleet with 10,000 soldiers to be diverted to Rokugan, and Ogawa sails to a gaijin port to meet the corrupt commanders of the Thrane force and make final plans. Unknown to any of the Three Old Men, however, their schemes have drawn the attention of the Tortoise Clan.

The Empire Shatters

In the late summer of 1503, after three months of war, two events take place which shatter the remaining unity of the Empire and open the door for Akodo Gintaku's final assault the following year.

The first of these is Moto Yoshi's attack on the Crab. At Gintaku's command Yoshi unleashes a massive Shadowlands army against the Kaiu Wall, spearheaded by over 20,000 Lost—nearly the entirety of the Lost, carefully gathered during the preceding winter. Under normal circumstances even this mighty assault could not prevail against the Crab, but due to the war against the Crane over half the Wall's normal garrison is absent. Consequently, Yoshi's armies overwhelm the Wall and go on to overrun much of the Hida lands. Hida Gojiro himself dies in the fall of Kyuden Hida along with the Kuni daimyo and many others. A small force under the Hiruma daimyo escorts several thousand civilians and guests (including Toturi Kobe, his crippled brother Toturi Gendo, and Hida Gojiro's sister Junko with her two infant children) from the Crab lands.

In the wake of the catastrophe the remaining Crab armies hurriedly withdraw from Crane lands and attempt to form a defensive line along the Twilight Mountains. With so much of the clan's strength already lost and the mighty fortifications of the Kaiu Wall no longer available, the odds are stacked against the Crab. They send out frantic requests for aid from the rest of the Empire—requests which Akodo Gintaku will eventually be happy to answer, albeit not in a way beneficial to Rokugan.

Even as the first news of the disaster in Crab lands is reaching the rest of the Empire, the second blow hits: a joint Mantis-Thrane fleet sails up the Drowned Merchant River and unloads an army, occupying the capital of Toshi Ranbo. Their intention is to seize the Emperor and force him to abdicate in favor of Hizatoru, but a last-minute warning from the Tortoise Clan allows the Emperor, the Chancellor, and other key figures to slip out of the city ahead of the occupation force and reassemble at the Imperial estates outside the capital. Clan and Imperial forces hastily gather to confront the Mantis and Thrane. The Emperor, still unable to pull himself free from his uncertainty and despair, permits Oldarsson and the Mantis to send diplomats and advocate for Hizatoru's claim. However, representatives from the Dragon decide Hizatoru's actions have forced them to reveal their clan's shame: the affair of Mirumoto Jinzaki with the late Empress, and with it the possibility that Hizatoru might be illegitimate.

Confronted at last with a choice between Regret and Honor, the Emperor chooses Honor: he publicly confesses the infidelity of the Empress. Shocked by the realization his clan is supporting an illegitimate pretender, the Mantis Clan Champion switches sides and reaffirms his clan's loyalty to the Toturi Dynasty, ordering Yoritomo Ogawa and his family to commit seppuku. The Scorpion quickly offer their support to the dynasty as well. Sven Oldarsson, determined to play out his gambit to the end, refuses to withdraw his troops from Toshi Ranbo. The Emperor leads the limited number of available samurai in an attack on the Thrane and dies under musket fire; the Thrane are defeated.

In the aftermath of the battle, the Thrane government disavows Sven Oldarsson's actions. Oldarsson is arrested by an agent of the Thranish king and taken back to his own lands for execution. Tensions with all gaijin remain high and the Foreign District within the Imperial capital

Alternate Paths: The Emperor Dies in Despair

In the end, Toturi XII finally recovers his honor, stands up to the Thrane, and admits the shameful truth he has hidden for so long. However, there was no guarantee of this outcome; his soul and spirit were weakened by years of isolation and despair, and the confrontation with the Dragon could just as easily have driven him to final collapse rather than forcing him to a redemptive act of courage. Likewise, in the official timeline the Mantis gain little support from the other clans for Hizatoru's claim, but fear or desperation could easily have driven the Crane, the Crab, or even the Phoenix to support Hizatoru, which would have provided an opening for the Scorpion to expose their hand and support him openly as well. The realization that so many clans were willing to put an illegitimate boy on the throne might have been enough to break the Emperor's spirit.

If the Emperor had lost hope, his most likely response would have been a public denunciation of Hizatoru followed by seppuku. However, he might also have simply committed suicide without ever revealing the truth of the Empress' infidelity—leaving it up to the Dragon Clan to decide whether to expose Mirumoto Jinzaki's shame before the world. Either way, a united effort to expel the Thrane would be impossible, since the Mantis would likely continue their gambit and Sven Oldarsson would support them, possibly backed by other clans as well. This would lead to a general civil war, an environment of chaos and destruction in which the warlords Gintaku and Temujin would be even more powerful and the Empire would have an even harder time uniting against their military campaigns. GMs who wish to push the Heroes of Rokugan timeline to the most apocalyptic extreme may wish to explore these alternatives.

is kept under strict guard. However, with the Empire now highly dependent on the profits of foreign trade, few samurai are willing to repeat the policy of the White Stag era and actually expel the foreigners.

Of course, any concerns about gaijin are as nothing compared to the political impact of the Emperor's public confession of the late Empress' infidelity. The future of the Toturi Dynasty is thrown into doubt and Hizatoru is suddenly politically all but untouchable—which also strikes a heavy blow to Shosuro Hido's secret scheme to put Toturi Hisako on the throne. Some clans begin to advocate supporting the youngest child, Toturi Chisa, but others counter that if the Empress was unfaithful once she could have been again. The Crane support the eldest child, Yukihime (who is married to the Daidoji daimyo), while the Crab support Toturi Kobe. The Imperial families push for the clans to simply recognize one of the children as heir and end the crisis, while the leaders of the Lion and Unicorn Clans refuse to endorse any of them—since this leaves an opening for their own ambitions.

- The Crab researcher Kaiu Sumata discovers evidence of some kind of hidden tunnel network beneath the shrine to the Fortune of Peace in Phoenix lands. He leads a group of samurai into the secret chambers and locates Miya Shikan's hidden heart, killing the assassin Miya Hanzu in the process. Shikan collapses in open court, seemingly the victim of a heart attack.
- Shosuro Hido, desperate to salvage his plans after the collapse of the Thrane-Mantis power-play, imprisons Toturi Hisako within his secret chambers beneath Nihai Tower. A group of loyal Scorpion turn on Hido and rescue Hisako from Nihai Tower, taking her to Kyuden Bayushi to meet with the Scorpion Clan Champion, Bayushi Tamoru. Tamoru belatedly realizes he has allowed control of the Scorpion Clan to slip from his fingers; he orders Hido executed and his followers quietly purged. Toturi Hisako returns to the Imperial capital.
- Matsu Nimuro prepares to undertake the final rituals that will affirm him as Lion Clan Champion. Since Akodo Gintaku cannot carry out his plans once he is no longer regent, he arranges for one of his anniki to assassinate Nimuro. Unknown to him, however, Nimuro has been growing increasingly suspicious of the Lion regent's plans and goals. Nimuro arranges with Kitsu Shuji, the Kitsu family daimyo, to falsify his own death, then goes into hiding while he gathers support. Shuji commits seppuku to protect the secret of Nimuro's survival. Gintaku proclaims himself Lion Clan Champion, taking the title of "the Steel Lion."
- Troops of the Unicorn Khol army capture the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari. When the local population riots against the heavy-handed Unicorn occupation, Khan Moto Temujin orders the city burned.
- Winter Court is held in the Imperial capital. Chancellor Otomo Kazuma struggles to unite the clans in supporting one or another of the remaining Toturi children, and while the Crane proposal for Yukihime to become Empress seems to have the strongest backing, the Lion and Unicorn delegates undermine any hope of unity. Further confusion arises when some Imperial and Scorpion samurai claim to have discovered an illegitimate son of the late Toturi Kobashi living among the Scorpion. Ultimately no unified decision can be made and the winter ends largely in futility. In a desperate attempt to forge some kind of unity, Chancellor Kazuma proclaims Toturi Kobe to be the Shogun of the Empire. Soon after, Kazuma suffers a fatal stroke.
- Although the question of the Imperial Throne remains deadlocked, a few other achievements do come out of the disastrous Winter Court. Several

clans pledge troops to support the Crab in their hour of need—including the Lion, although Akodo Gintaku points out he will have to march through Scorpion territory to reach the Crab lands. The Dragon, having lost over half their strength in the last year, abandon their attacks on the Lion and withdraw into defensive positions, while dispatching hundreds of tattooed men to help the Crab. And with the Lion clearly planning to confront him in Scorpion lands, the Unicorn Khan agrees to a peace treaty between his clan and the battered Phoenix so that the Baraunghar Army can redeploy to join his Khol Army.

- In the final weeks of winter, the remaining Toturi children suffer a bitter falling-out when a delirious Toturi Gendo utters a series of prophecies proclaiming doom to Hizatoru and Chisa. In the aftermath of the incident, Gendo secretly tells Toturi Kobe he is the legitimate son of Toturi XII, then begs for death to release him from his visions. Kobe agrees and mercifully ends Gendo's life.

Year 1504

- The Unicorn Baraunghar Army and the main strength of the Phoenix—including four out of five members of the Elemental Council and all of the Elemental Guard—meet at a shrine in the Dragon lands to sign their peace treaty. A handpicked Lion army led by Moto Yoshi (in his guise as "Akodo Mako") stages a surprise night attack and slaughters both clans' armies along with all four Elemental Masters. The Lion blame the massacre on the Unicorn, claiming they arrived only just in time to avenge their fallen Phoenix allies.

The attack on the Unicorn and Phoenix is the first blow of Akodo Gintaku's final push to break all opposition and seize the rule of Rokugan for himself. By this time the combined influence of the Bloodsword, the counsel of Moto Yoshi, and Gintaku's own relentless desire for power has driven him to embrace truly insane ambitions. Having learned of the weakness of the Jade Sun from Yoshi, he plots a massive ritual to sacrifice the great dragon and steal its power, making himself unstoppable. The ritual will require mass human sacrifice, so he re-arranges the Lion armies to concentrate all of the most honorable and traditional Lion into the First Matsu Army, under the command of his eldest son Akodo Soto. They will pay the price for his ambition and his victory.

- The Khan receives word of the Baraunghar's destruction and unleashes his Khol Army in an all-out attack, trying to overrun the Scorpion lands before the Lion armies can breach Beiden Pass. He reaches Kyuden Bayushi, burning the city and castle after a brief siege. The Scorpion forces, unable to withstand the Unicorn directly, go underground and use sabotage and harassment tactics.
- Toturi Hizatoru kidnaps his sister Chisa and flees to the Scorpion lands, hoping to bargain for support from the Khan. Both Toturi heirs are discovered and murdered by agents of Akodo Gintaku, fulfilling the prophecy made by Gendo the previous winter.
- Akodo Gintaku leads three Lion armies through Beiden Pass. He confronts and destroys the Khan's forces just south of Kyuden Bayushi. Temujin himself dies in an ambush set by Scorpion shinobi while fleeing the catastrophic defeat.
- Gintaku takes his armies south, ostensibly to support the Crab, whose depleted forces are crumbling under the continuing onslaught of the Shadowlands Horde. In reality, of course, Gintaku intends to carry out the terrible ritual he has been plotting for months. In the critical moment of confrontation with the Shadowlands forces, Gintaku sacrifices his son Soto and the entire First Matsu Army in order to call down the Jade Dragon from the Heavens. He murders her with his Akodo dagger, stealing her power. The Shadowlands forces answer by swearing fealty to Gintaku, and he marches them and his remaining two loyal armies on the Imperial Capital.

Using the Original Adventures

Heroes of Rokugan ran as an active campaign from 2005 to 2010, with over 1,200 players worldwide at its peak. The story depicted in this chapter's timeline was played out over those years through a total of 76 adventures and 10 live-action role-play (LARP) events. Many of the major political events and plots of the HoR timeline—such as the origins of the Hare War, the Bloodsword going to Akodo Gintaku, and the Crane breaking their nonaggression pact with the Crab—were the result of actions and choices by the players.

GMs who wish to present the original HoR storyline to their players can download the adventures for free from the "Heroes of Rokugan II Archive" at www.heroes-of-rokugan.com. The adventures were written for the previous 3rd Edition of the L5R RPG rules, but can be updated to 4th Edition rules with relatively little effort.

The Death of Jade

Gintaku's actions here are profoundly blasphemous, but only a few loyal samurai actually witness them and live to tell the tale. The First Matsu Army, carefully staffed with all of the most honorable Lion (those least likely to follow Gintaku in his march on the Throne), is slaughtered almost to a man by Shadowlands forces, unleashing the power to draw down the Jade Dragon and sealing the allegiance of the Shadowlands Horde to Gintaku. The other two Lion armies know only that the First Matsu has perished but Gintaku has somehow forced the Shadowlands to yield to his command. A handful of traumatized survivors do escape the disaster, however, and their stories undermine the loyalty of the remaining honorable Lion.

In truth, Akodo Gintaku has gone mad with ambition and lust for power, and no longer recognizes any limitations on his actions. Moreover, he believes—with some justification—that there are no longer any forces within Rokugan strong enough to oppose him. All of the other Great Clans have been crippled by war, most especially the Lion Clan's military rivals: the Unicorn, Dragon, and Crane. The Shadowlands invasion has wrecked the Crab armies and left them too weak to do more than hang on to their remaining lands. Gintaku believes he can make the Empire submit to his rule by sheer force.

Of course, his actions have consequences at the Celestial level as well: the death of the already gravely weakened Jade Sun throws the Heavens into turmoil. Gintaku knows enough about the Celestial Order to expect the Jade Dragon to be promptly reincarnated, much in the way the Air Dragon was replaced after the War Against the Darkness. However, the imbalance between Jade and Obsidian is so strong that it is over a month before direct intervention by the now utterly crazed Obsidian Dragon allows the Jade Sun to be reborn.

- Akodo Gintaku seizes the capital, but leaves his Shadowlands allies outside the city in an attempt to gain legitimacy. He imprisons Toturi Yukihime, planning to marry her and further cement his claim to the throne. However, in order to limit political resistance he initially leaves the other major political offices and important officials (such as the Jade and Emerald Champions) unmolested.
- Matsu Nimuro emerges from hiding and condemns Akodo Gintaku. He joins forces with the Shogun, Toturi Kobe, and the two call on all loyal samurai to oppose the usurper Gintaku. The Lion Clan splits; the majority stays loyal to Gintaku, but thousands of Lion join Nimuro and swell the ranks of the Shogun's army. The other clans send what forces they can spare, numbering anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand.
- Kobe proclaims himself Emperor, speaking aloud for the first time in a decade. His half-sisters Maihime and Hisako, both of whom escaped the capital, support his claim. Representatives of the Shogun wage political warfare in the courts of Toshi Ranbo against Gintaku's supporters, badly weakening Gintaku's political base and persuading many Lion bushi to forsake their mad lord and follow Nimuro and Kobe instead.
- **The Battle of Toshi Ranbo.** Toturi Kobe's army, 25,000 strong, clashes with Gintaku's 38,000 loyalists and a Shadowlands force estimated at over 90,000. Massively outnumbered, Kobe and Nimuro choose to launch a wedge attack with the goal of reaching Akodo Gintaku and killing him. During the attack, Moto Yoshi is finally slain, albeit not before taking the lives of many samurai. Casualties throughout the army are gruesome, but a handful of samurai manage to fight their way through to Gintaku's command tent. The Akodo House Guard commits seppuku rather than continue to fight for Gintaku, and Kobe's samurai manage against all odds to kill the Steel Lion.

In the aftermath of Gintaku's death, the rest of the Lion Clan is freed from its conflict of loyalties and pledges itself to Toturi Kobe. The combined armies of Rokugan crush the remaining Shadowlands forces, which are left scattered and leaderless after the deaths of Yoshi and Gintaku. Toturi Kobe becomes Emperor Toturi XIII, "Toturi the Silent," and spends the three decades of his reign rebuilding the Empire from the ruins of his father's failure.

Of course, GMs who do not wish to send their PCs into the meat-grinder of the Battle of Toshi Ranbo have other options. Gintaku can win, instituting a reign of terror over Rokugan and forcing the PCs to struggle with their own sense of honor and duty. Can they obey an Emperor who took the throne through force rather than divine sanction? Or will they wage war and tear the Empire even farther apart?

Clans and Factions at the Dawn of the Sixteenth Century

Although Rokugan's eight Great Clans seem outwardly little different at the turn of the sixteenth century from their past forms, in truth all of them are feeling the pressures of the Empire's nature shifting beneath their feet.

The Crab Clan

The Shadowlands is quiescent for most of the fifteenth century, and consequently the Crab Clan has begun to exhibit a certain excessive confidence and even perhaps complacency comparable to what it exhibited in the Pre-Coup era. The Crab Clan has been able to build up its strength and resources without serious opposition, even to the point of proclaiming "20-Goblin Winters" every ten years or so. By the year 1500 the Crab are among the strongest of clans in military terms, and many in their ranks believe it is long past time that they flexed their new-found muscles elsewhere in the Empire, especially toward the hated Crane and Scorpion. However, Clan Champion Hida Masakazu is not terribly interested in starting a war—he is a large and cheerful man who enjoys sake and war stories. In truth, Masakazu drinks to excess, but for the most part the Crab forgive him and love him, bestowing the nickname of "the Jovial Bear" on their boisterous lord. After all, in many respects he epitomizes the Crab attitude toward life, and in an era of relative peace even for the Crab Clan his foibles can be overlooked. Masakazu seldom leaves the Crab lands and in fact spends most of his time in Kyuden Hida, only occasionally going forth to tour the Kaiu Wall.

The principle exception to this affectionate attitude is none other than Masakazu's eldest son, Hida Gojiro, a grim, brutal, and thuggish young man, filled with barely suppressed rage and bitterly resentful of his father's weakness. In the year 1495, at the age of sixteen, Gojiro is sent to Kyuden Doji as part of a diplomatic team. When a Scorpion courtier makes a gibe about uncouth Crabs, Gojiro tries to drown the man in a koi pond in the Fantastic Gardens. It takes five Daidoji bushi to pull him off. Thereafter he earns the sobriquet of "the Beast" and is forbidden from leaving the Crab lands; he spends most of his time on the Wall and leads frequent raids into the Shadowlands. In late 1501, however, the unexpected death of Masakazu puts the brutal Gojiro in command of the Crab Clan; it is no surprise that he soon hurls the clan into war, first the Hare War and then a full-scale war with the Crane. Most other lords in the Crab are unwilling to resist Gojiro's relentless drive toward conflict, although the lesser Hida daimyo do their best to mitigate the damage of his commands.

The only Crab lord willing to stand up to Gojiro in any meaningful way is Kuni Yuriko, the Kuni family daimyo, who by the year 1500 is an ancient woman, seventy-one years old. In the Crab manner she stubbornly refuses to retire, although her tenure is prolonged even by the standards of her clan. Vigorous and unbowed despite her age, tall of stature and fierce of intellect, Yuriko attends the Imperial Winter Court every year and has quarreled more than once with O-Doji Koneko (see the Crane Clan section below). She is just as fearless toward Gojiro as she is to everyone else, and the angry young Clan Champion sometimes backs down in the face of her sharp tongue.

The price of Gojiro's foolishness and temper is paid in 1503 when Moto Yoshi's Shadowlands army overruns the Wall. When the news reaches Kyuden Hida, Yuriko is so furious and shamed by the defeat of her clan that she commits jigai in the midst of court. Her action finally stuns Gojiro into recognizing his own failure, and he chooses to remain behind and die fighting the Shadowlands forces, ordering the Hiruma lords to evacuate his family and the clan's allies and guests.

With Gojiro's death, his official heir is the infant son of his sister Junko. Leadership of the Crab passes temporarily to Hiruma Tsukan, lord of the Hiruma family and the eldest of three brothers—the middle of whom, Satsu, dies during the retreat from Kyuden Hida. Tsuken is a dead-eye berserker famous for his battlefield ferocity, but he has the discipline which Gojiro lacked, and it is only through his leadership that any Crab survive the long, desperate autumn and winter in which they face the Shadowlands army alone.

After the defeat of Akodo Gintaku and the destruction of his Shadowlands allies, the Crab face the daunting prospect of rebuilding from their greatest defeat since the time of the Maw's attack. However, with a new Emperor who was trained in their dojo they are able to call on greater Imperial favor than most times in the past. The clan has paid a bitter price for its arrogance and the foolishness of its lords, but it has survived, just as the Empire has survived.

The Crane Clan

The Crane are traditionally among the strongest of clans both politically and economically, but by the year 1500 they have fallen on hard times. Toturi XII's impulsive decision to marry a Scorpion weakened their influence in court, and the lucrative and rapidly expanding gaijin trade—the principle source of new wealth at the dawn of the sixteenth century—is largely controlled by the Unicorn, the Mantis, and the Tortoise. Militarily, the Crane have never been able to avenge their defeat two generations earlier in the War of Bleeding Flowers, which cost them Shiro Kyotei, the Kintani Valley, and the Tsume vassal family. The beauty and political and artistic skill of the Crane remain undiminished, but their influence is not what it once was.

At the upper level of leadership the clan has also been troubled. Doji Koneko, called the O-Doji, rules the clan after a plague takes her husband's life in the year 1468. She is a brilliant politician who does her best to retain the clan's influence despite the Scorpion Empress. However, after her son Sarutomo comes of age in 1485 his interference soon reduces her own efforts to little more than damage control. Sarutomo is Koneko's one great failure: a selfish and shallow young man who imagines himself worthy to stand alongside the greatest of Crane heroes. In 1490 he marries for the first time, but when his wife Doji Mikuko privately mocks his claims of greatness he loses control of himself and murders her. Koneko is horrified but cannot bring herself to condemn her own son; she helps Sarutomo cover up the crime. Mikuko's vengeful spirit haunts Sarutomo for the next twelve years, cursing his second wife to die in childbirth.

Little help is available to Koneko from the other top family of the Crane, the Kakita. Daimyo Kakita Saburashi, the senior sensei of the Kakita Dueling Academy, is an aging man obsessed with the need to perfect his swordsmanship, to find the ideal "perfect strike." His famous and notorious refusal of the position of Emerald Champion in 1489 does significant damage to Crane prestige and political power. Revered by his students but looked down on elsewhere in the Empire for his eccentric single-minded attitude, Saburashi finally gives up and retires after losing a duel to a Dragon Swordmaster in the winter of 1502.

As the Empire begins to slide into chaos after 1500, O-Doji Koneko does her best to strengthen the clan despite her son's blundering ineptitude. Her greatest achievement is to arrange the marriage of Toturi Yukihime to the Daidoji family daimyo. However, in early 1502 a confrontation with the vengeful *goryo* of Doji Mikuko finally forces Sarutomo to confess in order to save the life of his third wife, Doji Akane, and her unborn son. Sarutomo commits seppuku and Koneko, her life a failure, retires to a monastery.

Regent Doji Akane is a former Kitsuki, married to Sarutomo to strengthen the Crane-Dragon alliance, and while she is an intelligent and skillful woman she lacks the traditional Crane expertise in political coalition-building and court maneuver. With both the conspiracy of the Three Old Men and the agents of the ruthless warlords Temujin and Gintaku manipulating the realm of politics to their advantage, the Crane find most of their initiatives blocked and their allies unreliable. Moreover, Akane comes to power just as the Empire is careening toward all-out war. The Crane armies are unusually strong in 1500, due to the long buildup after their defeat in the War of Bleeding Flowers, but in that year Daidoji Hayashi, the "Iron Serpent," is killed through the manipulations of Miya Kageko. Hayashi is succeeded by his younger brother Kowaru, a handsome and capable man but one trained as a Kakita Artisan, not a warrior. Unsurprisingly, Kowaru is not equal to the military challenges that ensue when the Crab and Lion unleash all-out war against the Crane Clan. The Crane suffer heavily throughout the war, crippling their military strength and leaving them unable to effectively oppose the ambitions of Akodo Gintaku. After their efforts to promote Yukihime as Empress come to naught, they ultimately throw all their support behind the Shogun, Toturi Kobe, and commit what remains of their

armies to his cause. Crane bushi are among the most prominent heroes at the Battle of Toshi Ranbo.

In the aftermath of Toshi Ranbo, the Crane set to work rebuilding their clan and their position in the Empire, helped along by the prestige of being one of Kobe's most dedicated supporters. However, the economic changes wrought by expanding gaijin trade remain a problem, and as the Empire continues to transform the clan must seek a new role for itself.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon in the year 1500 remain as enigmatic and mysterious as ever, if not more so, living in their mountains and limiting their contacts with the rest of the Empire. Due to the changed history of the Empire, the Dragon are still officially ruled by the Togashi lord, the descendent of the Kami, although in practice most day-to-day policy is set by the Mirumoto.

In the year 1465, Togashi Imasu becomes the new Champion of the Dragon Clan. He is afflicted with an inappropriate romantic obsession with a young woman in the tattooed order, a woman who eventually commits seppuku rather than succumb to her dishonorable passions. Imasu is shattered by the tragedy and becomes an unusually distant and isolated Clan Champion, even by the standards of the Dragon, leaving his clan confused and disharmonious. The spiritual disruption caused by Imasu's decisions brings deep dissension within the Togashi "family" of tattooed monks, with the *tsurui zumi* and *kikage zumi* re-emerging as major rivals to the *ise zumi* order. Imasu himself eventually succumbs to his sins of Desire and Regret and becomes the Avatar of Obsidian. Although he is rescued from the clutches of the Obsidian Dragon by a group of brave samurai in the winter of 1502, the experience leaves him deeply weakened and he retires from leadership of the clan soon after.

With Imasu distracted and later possessed, the other families of the Dragon are largely left to pursue their own goals. The Tamori spend their time feuding with the Phoenix (due to lingering resentment over the ancient Agasha break), the Kitsuki focus on investigating the criminal underworld and opposing the Scorpion (disrupting the friendship which the rest of the clan tries to maintain with the Underhand), and the Mirumoto and Tonbo obsess over the potential to avenge the War of Bleeding Flowers. Of course, the Mirumoto family has issues of its own, since its lord Mirumoto Jinzaki is guilty of concealing a long-term affair with the late Empress Amika. Jinzaki allows the more militant Mirumoto provincial daimyo to set policy, and ultimately steps down to be replaced by one of the most militant of these daimyo, the boisterous Mirumoto Daikabe.

The Dragon do get an unexpected political boost in 1500 when Kitsuki Jiro wins the contest of the Emerald Champion. Unfortunately, while Jiro is a handsome and stylish man with superb skills of dueling and rhetoric, he is also notorious for his pride, arrogance, and self-regard. His tenure as Emerald Champion is undistinguished, although he does finally speak out against Akodo Gintaku at the climax of the Steel Lion's push for power.

The Dragon war of revenge against the Lion, launched in 1503, starts promisingly but soon leads to disaster. More than half the clan's strength is destroyed at the Battle of the Drowned Merchant River, forcing the clan into a defensive posture and leaving it unable to support its Unicorn and Crane allies and unable to directly oppose Akodo Gintaku's later march to the Throne. Several hundred tattooed men go south in 1504 to support the Crab against the Shadowlands invasion, but they are betrayed and slaughtered by Gintaku's armies.

The Dragon do play a key role during the Mantis-Thrane action of 1503, however, when they finally reveal the late Jinzaki's actions and convince the Emperor to proclaim the truth. Without this action by the Dragon Clan, the Emperor might well have submitted and allowed Hizatoru to become a puppet Emperor. Thus, it is no surprise that when Toturi Kobe proclaims himself the true Emperor the following year, the Dragon support him to the best of their ability. Although their remaining army is bottled up in the Dragon mountains by the Lion, several hundred Dragon samurai do manage to reach Toshi Ranbo in time for the final battle, and it is a Tamori shugenja who strikes one of the final blows that brings down the Steel Lion.

The Lion Clan

In the decades leading up to the year 1500, the Lion Clan enjoys an era of unusual wealth and influence, not matched since their glory days in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. Their crushing victory in the War of Bleeding Flowers, including the capture of extensive farmlands from the Dragon and Dragonfly, is "frozen" by the peace-making efforts of Miya Shikan, allowing them two full generations to exploit their new territory and the associated prestige. Even better, the controversial actions of Kakita Saburashi at the Emerald Tournament of 1489 result in the Lion Clan Champion, Matsu Hoketsaku, being appointed to the office of Emerald Champion.

All that being said, however, the Lion are in a state of uncertainty as the sixteenth century dawns. The rapid evolutions of Rokugani society and the Rokugani economy brought about by the expansion of gaijin trade have deeply unsettled the traditionalist Lion, who would be far happier if the Emperor simply sent all the foreigners back where they came from. Moreover, the enduring peace imposed by Miya Shikan leaves the Lion chafing and frustrated. Although the clan coffers are unusually full and their armies are large and well-supplied, the Lion worry they are in danger of going soft in this placid era, and wonder if the changes in the Empire may leave their role increasingly irrelevant.

This underlying unease provides a perfect environment for the ruthless and dishonorable Akodo Gintaku to recruit his followers, slowly building up his support within the clan during the two decades leading up to the year 1500. He even lures the Ikoma daimyo, a hero-worshipping young man named Ikoma Toroku, to his side. After the assassination of Matsu Hoketsaku in 1499, Gintaku becomes the effective leader of the Lion Clan, taking over the Clan Championship officially in 1503 after the apparent death of the heir, Matsu Nimuro.

Nimuro is only fourteen years old when his father dies, and although he shows great promise he does not yet have the experience or education to lead the clan. Moreover, there are many specific duties he must undertake before he can truly become Clan Champion, such as spending a year fighting alongside the elite Lion's Pride. By the time he is ready to actually take office, Gintaku controls the clan and has an assassination plan in place. However, Nimuro is no fool—despite his youth, he realizes Gintaku is plotting something and pre-empts it by falsifying his own death. A year later, he emerges from hiding to ally with Toturi Kobe and stand against the Steel Lion.

Gintaku leads the Lion Clan to repeated crushing victories over the Crane, Dragon, and Unicorn, all the while manipulating the Empire to encourage division and chaos. But as Rokugan comes apart in late 1503 and early 1504, more and more Lion begin to feel doubts about the Steel Lion's leadership. Gintaku's final move, forcing fealty on the Shadowlands and seizing the Imperial Throne by force, leads to a crisis for the clan. Despite all of Gintaku's efforts to place his trusted "anniki" in positions of leadership, despite his careful promotion of the most ruthless and pragmatic Lion and his purging of the clan's most honorable elements through the sacrifice of the First Matsu Army, the clan is still deeply divided by his actions. Gintaku argues that with the Toturi line's legitimacy cast into doubt by the revelations of the Empress' infidelity, the only choice is to re-found the Dynasty from the Akodo bloodline—his own bloodline. But for many Lion the call of Honor makes such orders impossible to obey, especially after Matsu Nimuro re-emerges to challenge Gintaku. Although a majority of the Lion continue to reluctantly serve Gintaku, thousands switch sides and fight for Nimuro and Emperor Kobe. Hundreds more commit seppuku, including the Akodo House Guard, caught between loyalty and honor.

After the death of Gintaku at the Battle of Toshi Ranbo, almost all of the remaining Lion on the field immediately swear fealty to Emperor Kobe; only a small minority of die-hard loyalists, led by Ikoma Toroku and the other "anniki," fight to the last. After the war, Matsu Nimuro faces the difficult task of re-forging the clan's honor and unity, but thankfully the victory in 1504 ushers in a period of peace in which his efforts can proceed uninterrupted.

The Mantis Clan

In the year 1500 the Mantis hold an effective monopoly on the Empire's extensive and lucrative trade with the Ivory Kingdoms, and this has allowed their famed wealth to swell to unprecedented levels with a corresponding boost in political power. Although they remain hampered by their traditional lack of numbers (and the vulnerability of their limited territory on the mainland) they are nonetheless in a far stronger position than in earlier centuries, and Miya Shikan's peace protects their far-flung territories from military pressure. The successful resolution of the crisis between them and the Scorpion in the year 1494 also greatly improves their relations with the clan which has traditionally been among their fiercest enemies.

For all this, however, the Mantis are sailing into dangerous waters. The revered sensei Yoritomo Ogawa, master of Dojo Raiden and descendent of Gusai, is obsessed with fulfilling the ancient prophecy of a Mantis Emperor, and he persuades the Clan Champion Yoritomo Rinsei to back his ambitions and his conspiratorial alliance with the Thrane and the Scorpion. After Toturi Hizatoru is fostered to the Mantis, Ogawa is assigned as his personal sensei and spends years subtly urging Hizatoru down a path suitable to the Mantis ambitions, ultimately pushing him into marrying Rinsei's eldest daughter and openly supporting the Mantis-Thrane power-play. Meanwhile, Mantis diplomats who have previously worked to maintain the (highly profitable) peace of Miya Shikan now switch their tactics and join the Scorpion in undermining the peace and pushing the clans into war, creating the chaotic and disrupted conditions they believe are necessary for Hizatoru to claim the Throne from his father. In particular, the Mantis actually back differing sides in different conflicts around the Empire, supporting the weaker side in each case so as to maximize the amount of damage and disruption to Rokugan.

Not all within the Mantis Clan are pleased with this shift in policy. The clan's merchants are upset by the sudden diminishment in their profits; although Rinsei is able to ease their concerns somewhat by breaking the Tortoise monopoly on trade with the Thrane, the clan's commercial interests remain uneasy with his policies. The Moshi, led by the aged but capable Moshi Ritsuko, are far more deeply concerned and privately urge Yoritomo Rinsei to find another path, although honor and loyalty require them to remain publicly supportive. The Tsuruchi, long known as enforcers of law and order, are also quite uneasy with Rinsei's alliance with the Scorpion, especially given the heavy Scorpion involvement with Rokugan's burgeoning criminal underclass.

After the disastrous revelation of Hizatoru's illegitimacy, Rinsei finally realizes just how misguided he was to listen to Ogawa's ambitions. The Mantis army immediately turns on Sven Oldarsson's forces and helps defeat them. Ogawa and his entire bloodline are forced to commit seppuku, ending the Gusai line forever, and the Mantis Clan goes out of its way to prove its loyalty to the Throne. When Akodo Gintaku makes his push for absolute power the following year, the Mantis are among his most prominent and determined opponents, offering food, money, and soldiers to strengthen the army of Shogun Toturi Kobe. Many Mantis bushi and shugenja perish fighting against Akodo Gintaku, purging the shame of their clan's past actions with blood.

After the defeat of the Steel Lion and the ascension of Toturi Kobe as Emperor, the Mantis are the only clan whose economic and financial position remains strong, and they contribute extensively to the rebuilding of the Empire.

The Phoenix Clan

Of all the Great Clans the Phoenix are the least changed by the passage of centuries, and in the year 1500 they remain much as they have been in the past: a clan of pacifists and scholars, dominated by the quest for knowledge and concern over the dangers of *maho* and the Taint. The *maho-tsukai* cult attack on the Hare lands in 1470 is taken by the Phoenix as proof that the threat of *maho* is unabated even in this era of prosperity, and the clan focuses much of its political and mystical energies on hunting for this threat. This tendency becomes even more pronounced after Asako Heishi, the Master of Air, becomes Jade Champion in 1491. Heishi is a multi-Element prodigy who trained with the Kuni family as well as the Isawa, and believes his purpose in life is to root out the Bloodspeaker Cult and all other *maho-tsukai* in the Empire. His obsessive pursuit of this goal, to the point of often perceiving sinister plots where there are none, makes him the object of hurtful gossip and damages the clan's overall image significantly.

Due to their focus on something the rest of Rokugan views as unimportant, the Phoenix are politically weak at the dawn of the sixteenth century, and their extremely traditionalist ways also mean their clan has been bypassed by much of the new prosperity that accompanies the expansion of the gaijin trade. It is not an accident that the new Imperial Throughways constructed in 1501-1502 barely link to the southernmost edges of the Phoenix lands. Only the equally traditionalist Lion are respectful toward the Phoenix, forging an alliance that endures against all expectations of the other clans. Of course, the Lion alliance proves a double-edged sword once Akodo Gintaku takes control of the Right Hand. Gintaku is more than willing to manipulate and then betray the honorable Phoenix in order to advance his own ambitions.

In addition to the problems wrought by the Lion, the Phoenix also find themselves plagued with internal prob-

lems of a most unusual sort, very different from the *mahotsukai* they are constantly trying to root out. An odd and heretical religious sect called the Sons of Destiny, probably an off-shoot of ancient Kolat ideology, wins many converts within the Phoenix lands and even succeeds in getting one of its number into the Elemental Council: Isawa Akima, the Master of Void. Akima's true nature is exposed, however, during a visit to the legendary City of Empty Dreams, and thereafter the clan quickly purges the sect from its ranks.

The true disaster for the Phoenix is the war with the Unicorn, a conflict manipulated by the Scorpion in order to weaken both clans. The Baraunghar Army's assault on the western borderlands of the Phoenix causes extensive damage and takes the life of the Clan Champion, Shiba Ninto. Even worse, the war creates the opening for Akodo Gintaku's murderous betrayal, slaughtering the Baraunghar, the remaining Phoenix forces, and most of the Elemental Council. In the wake of this catastrophe the Phoenix are too weak to actively oppose Gintaku's march on the Imperial capital, but Asako Heishi does finally bestir himself from his personal obsessions to condemn Gintaku's actions. Scores of Phoenix shugenja and yojimbo join the army of Toturi Kobe for the Battle of Toshi Ranbo.

Much like the Clan War era, the end of the Heroes of Rokugan timeline sees a badly depleted Phoenix Clan beginning the slow and painful work of rebuilding from a very low ebb. Fortunately, Kobe's successful reign offers them the chance to do so.

The Scorpion Clan

Few clans are more badly damaged by the catastrophes at the beginning of the sixteenth century than the Scorpion, but in their case much of the damage is self-inflicted. By the year 1500 the Scorpion have enjoyed a generation of unprecedented political influence, thanks to the marriage of Shosuro Amika to the Emperor, but their internal affairs are consumed with a covert power struggle between the Bayushi and the Shosuro as the sinister Shosuro Hido works to take control of the clan. The Clan Champion, Bayushi Tamoru, is handsome, charming, and talented, well-known for his vindictive nature, but also arrogantly oblivious to the problems within his own clan; by the time he wakes up to the realization that Hido has largely subverted his rule, it is almost too late.

Hido's actions as one of the Three Old Men, conspiring to place a puppet on Rokugan's throne, are well documented in the timeline earlier in this chapter. He also recreates the clan's shinobi into his own personal covert force, renaming them the Spider's Fangs, and secretly purges the Shosuro vassal family known as the Kochako who are normally tasked with suppressing internal disloyalty. Only a handful of Kochako survive, and it is they along with a few other true Scorpion loyalists who ultimately betray Hido and rescue Toturi Hisako from his grasp.

Economically the Scorpion are one of the strongest clans in this era despite not having a share of the gaijin trade. This is because they have made huge inroads into Rokugan's rapidly growing criminal underclass. Large-scale, Empire-wide criminal gangs first begin to appear during this era, and the Scorpion make it their business to control these gangs through covert sponsorship and infiltration. Many Kitsuki investigators and Unicorn magistrates pursue rumors of Scorpion control over the gangs, but none ever deliver proof to the courts... and many pay with their lives. Further, much of the power struggle between the Shosuro and the Bayushi is actually played out at this underworld level, as Shosuro-backed gangs wage war against those sponsored by the Bayushi. The later purging of Hido and his loyalists leaves many of the Shosuro gangs independent, a source of considerable trouble in the years after Toturi Kobe takes the throne.

Militarily, the Scorpion have never been an especially strong clan and this is no different in the year 1500. Miya Shikan's enforced truce prevents them from paying any military price for their political victories in the late 1400's, but after Shikan's power collapses the Scorpion find themselves suddenly facing a massive invasion from the Unicorn Clan. Although their bushi fight bravely and the Spider's Fangs employ all the methods of sabotage which the clan has honed over 1500 years, they are simply not strong enough to hold back the Khan's legions, and when Akodo Gintaku invades their lands from the other direction they have no choice but to cease open resistance and go underground, hiding their remaining strength. When Gintaku seizes the throne, Bayushi Tamoru initially thinks it best to remain covert and await the outcome, but eloquent efforts by Toturi Kobe's supporters ultimately convince him to

take action, and the remaining military strength of the clan—little though it may be—joins Kobe for the Battle of Toshi Ranbo.

The Unicorn Clan

Few clans are more frustrated by the enforced peace of Miya Shikan than the Unicorn, and few lords regard Shikan with greater resentment than Moto Temujin, the Khan of the Unicorn. Unlike the Lion, the Unicorn did not gain a position of advantage prior to Shikan's ascension, and the inability to convert their mighty cavalry into territorial or political gains weakened their standing in the Empire throughout the decades leading up to 1500. However, their control of trade with the Burning Sands and especially the Senpet and Mekham cultures has brought them immense wealth, allowing them to retain significant influence within the Empire despite their inability to deploy military force. The clan is especially concerned in the late 1400's by the rise in power of the Scorpion, and Unicorn magistrates fret endlessly over the growth in crime, gambling, smuggling, and opium addiction all across the Empire. In their view such villainy thrives because Miya Shikan's peace prevents them from chastising the treacherous Scorpion on the battlefield.

From Moto Temujin's viewpoint, of course, such concerns are only to be encouraged. Temujin is a terrifyingly capable and fiercely temperamental man with limitless goals and appetites, and while his early political missteps teach him to reign in his temper they do not in any way blunt his ambitions. Temujin, like Gintaku, dreams of taking the Throne and is willing to do anything to attain his dream, including fomenting war, assassinating rivals, and exploiting the forces of Jigoku. He takes pride in his gaijin name and has the skill to defend it, killing more than one samurai—including Kakita duelists and Mirumoto Swordmasters—who are foolish enough to mock it. An intense student of the art of war, he begins a custom of taking Unicorn armies into the desert each winter to practice maneuvers and strategies. The daimyo of the Unicorn obey Temujin without question, usually motivated by a mixture of fear and respect. (In the case of Utaku Xiuling, daimyo of the Utaku, the strongest motive is Desire—Temujin seduces her and the two carry on a covert affair for several years.) When he pushes the clan into wars with the Phoenix and the Scorpion, they follow willingly.

Much like his rival Gintaku, Temujin is also perfectly willing to coldly sacrifice his underlings if he thinks it will benefit him. When Moto Yoshi approaches Temujin and offers fealty, the Khan is happy to let Yoshi murder Shinjo Kotoku, the lord of the Shinjo family, and take his place. Kotoku, after all, is a casual and undisciplined young man, never expected to hold any position within the clan; he was only forced to take office after his older (and much higher-regarded) brother Shinjo Rokaro died in a duel in 1496. Yoshi kills Kotoku and conceals the body in the deserts of the Burning Sands. When the Dark Moto abandons Temujin for Akodo Gintaku two years later, the Khan feels no regrets at his earlier decision, only wrath at the betrayal.

The wars of 1503 and 1504 start well for the Unicorn but end in disaster. Utaku Xiuling and the Baraunghar Army are slaughtered by a Lion surprise attack while meeting the Phoenix for a peace treaty. The Khol Army and the Khan himself are defeated by Akodo Gintaku a month later. Fleeing the defeat, Temujin runs afoul of an ambush set by Scorpion shinobi, and dies in a massive blast of concealed gaijin pepper.

The death of Temujin and Xiuling, along with Yoshi's defection to Gintaku, leaves the Unicorn effectively without central leadership, and individual Unicorn lords and generals take whatever path seems best to them. For the most part they oppose Gintaku, and almost two thousand Unicorn cavalry from the Junghar Army manage to reach Toshi Ranbo in time to fight on Emperor Kobe's side. After Gintaku's defeat, with the Khan's bloodline apparently at an end, the clan chooses a scion of the Shinjo lineage to serve as Clan Champion, restoring the Shinjo to power after five centuries.

The Status of the Fox Clan

In the original Heroes of Rokugan timeline, the Fox Clan remains independent of the Mantis and largely keeps itself out of the terrible wars and disasters which tear the Empire asunder at the dawn of the sixteenth century. However, there is no requirement for this to be true in every campaign set within the HoR timeline. The events in the twelfth century which led to the Fox joining the Mantis were largely independent of other incidents at that time, so they could still have happened even with the survival of the Toturi Dynasty. Ultimately, it is up to individual GMs which way they want to go with the Fox Clan.

The Minor Clans

In the year 1500 the Minor Clans' place in the Empire remains little different than in past times, although their ranks have changed somewhat. The catastrophic War of Bleeding Flowers has forced the Dragonfly to merge with the Dragon Clan in order to survive, while the struggles to retake the ruins of Otosan Uchi from the Spider Clan centuries ago resulted in the Yotsu ronin family being elevated to a new Minor Clan, the Tiger.

The most notable difference between Rokugan in 1500 and earlier eras is the immense wealth of the Tortoise Clan and its ally and neighbor, the Tiger. The Tortoise control trade with the Thrane, which runs through the rebuilt port in the ruins of Otosan Uchi. This trade is enormously profitable, so much so that the Mantis and Crane Clans are both bitterly jealous of the Tortoise and work to break their monopoly. The Tiger, who protect Otosan Uchi itself, also benefit hugely from the Thrane trade and go from being one of the poorest Minor Clans to one of the wealthiest.

The true mission of the Tortoise, of course, is to keep tabs on gaijin activities and prevent any recurrence of the disasters of White Stag from a millennium before. The expansion of the Thrane trade gives them many opportunities to keep covert watch over gaijin activities, and they catch wind of the Thrane-Mantis conspiracy just before it is ready to execute. Kasuga Magoro, the reclusive daimyo of the Tortoise, dispatches agents to the foreign ports where the Thrane and Mantis are meeting, and their reports ensure the Emperor and other Imperial officials are evacuated from Toshi Ranbo just ahead of the Thrane-Mantis invasion. Subsequently, Tortoise contacts with the Thrane government ensure the actions of Sven Oldarsson are properly punished, allowing the lucrative foreign trade to continue without interruption. The Tortoise even manage to arrange for a single shipload of two hundred Thrane soldiers to join Toturi Kobe's army for the final battle with Akodo Gintaku.

Aside from the Tortoise, the other Minor Clan which features prominently in the events of this era is the Hare. An ambitious attempt to found a shugenja school—motivated in part, at least, by dreams of following the Mantis path to becoming a Great Clan—leads the Hare to a series of poorly-considered alliances with the Crab, Scorpion, and Phoenix. These alliances in turn lead to tensions between those clans and ultimately to the outraged Crab declaring war on the Hare and the Scorpion. Although the Hare manage to survive the war, they suffer terrible damage including the complete destruction of Shiro Usagi—the second time in its history that the Hare castle has been razed.

The Imperial Families

"All demand the Son of Heaven bring them prosperity, peace, victory, and justice. All rests on the Emperor's shoulders. Yet who is it who enforces peace, spreads trade, ensures justice and harmony? Not I. I am a man in a palace, and I speak words and give commands, yet can never know if they are obeyed."

—Toturi XII

By the end of the fifteenth century the Toturi Dynasty has enjoyed many generations of stability, having long since overcome the challenges and chaos of its early years. The three Imperial families also continue to carry out their traditional roles in support of the Emperor, but their relative balance of authority and influence is distorted by the vigorous reign of Miya Shikan, who holds the offices of both Imperial Herald and Imperial Advisor. By contrast, the Seppun daimyo, Seppun Munemori, is a bland, forgettable man who is officially a general of the Imperial Legions but spends most of his time redesigning their banners and uniforms. Otomo Norito, the Otomo family daimyo, is a reclusive writer and poet, and it is rumored that many of the most popular pillow-books of recent years are written by him and published under false names. In reality, though, he is afflicted with mental deficiency, and the plays, books, and poems published under his name are actually written by a dedicated family manservant.

Miya Shikan is a dedicated peace-maker whose treaties, agreements, and other diplomatic accomplishments keep the Empire from war for more than a generation, but his fanatic dedication to the cause leads him to embrace increasingly extreme measures, ultimately including assas-

sinations and the blasphemy of making himself a khadi. He only grows more desperate and ruthless when his precious peace begins to crumble in the early 1500's, but his dire path is cut short when samurai discover his hidden heart beneath the shrine to the Fortune of Peace.

Aside from Shikan, the only truly notable Imperial of the era is Otomo Norito's aged uncle, Otomo Kazuma, who becomes Imperial Chancellor in late 1502. Retired until the disasters of the early 1500's convince him to re-enter politics, Kazuma pursues an aggressive policy of restoring the traditional Otomo role and undermining Miya Shikan's peacemaking efforts, with considerable success. Unfortunately, he dies of a stroke at the end of winter 1503.

Of course, the central figure in the disasters of the 1500's is Toturi XII, the Sapphire Emperor, once called the "Joyous Prince." By the year 1500 he has reigned as Emperor for nineteen years, and his tenure has largely been one of tranquility and prosperity, with full support for Miya Shikan's peace-making efforts. However, much of this is actually the result of the misery and confusion brought on by learning of his wife's betrayal. For a time he is able to comfort himself with the thought that one of his capable (and legitimate) twin sons, Hatsu and Kobashi, will reign after him. Their deaths in 1501 throw him into a state of true despair, threatening to consume him, and only at the last moment does he pull himself back from the brink enough to prevent Hizatoru from taking the throne.

Prior to their tragic deaths, Toturi Hatsu and Toturi Kobashi are impressive young men, trained with the Crane and Lion respectively. They are close friends as well as brothers and travel together frequently, showing no sign of real rivalry. Both brothers were handsome and charming, considered to be among the most sought-after bachelors in the Empire, and if they had lived the Empire would doubtless have enjoyed a far more stable history.

Most of the other "Toturi" children—many of whom are actually the children of Mirumoto Jinzaki—play relatively little role in the events of the 1500's except insofar as they become political bargaining chips between the different clans and factions. Toturi Yukihime, the eldest daughter, marries Daidoji Kowaru and the Crane make an effort to have her named heir after the Emperor's death; later she is captured by Gintaku, who hopes a marriage to her will tighten his claim to the throne. Her younger sisters Maihime and Hisako, both of whom are aware of their mother's secret affair with Jinzaki, abdicate their claims in favor of Kobe. Hizatoru, unable to confront the reality of his failure and illegitimacy, kidnaps his youngest sister Chisa and takes them both to their deaths in the Scorpion lands.

It is Toturi Kobe, "the Silent," who ultimately emerges as the one heir who can unite the Empire against Akodo Gintaku. Kharmicly tied to his mother and his younger sister Chisa, Kobe refuses to speak for a decade after Empress Amika's death; it is the death of Chisa that makes him speak again, and the final words of his prophetic brother Gendo that lead him to proclaim his right to the Throne. Kobe trains with the Crab for almost two years, and the ferocity and determination which they teach him stands him in good stead at the Battle of Toshi Ranbo.

Miya Shikan: Ideological Fanaticism in Rokugan

Miya Shikan is an unusual villain for an L5R campaign inasmuch as he firmly believes he is a noble man pursuing the greater good of the Empire—even when that means assassinating inconvenient daimyo and Imperial princes, or using a gaijin ritual to rip his own heart out of his body. This sort of threat is rare in Rokugan, but it is not wholly unknown; the most obvious canonical example is Bayushi Shoju, who launched the Scorpion Clan Coup in the belief he could save the Empire from prophesied destruction. (Arguably the original Gozoku Alliance was at least partly driven by this sort of impulse as well, although Bayushi Atsuki was probably never motivated by anything but ambition.)

However, there are some fundamental differences here. Bayushi Shoju believed overthrowing the last Hantei was actually fulfilling his family's ancestral duty to protect and serve the Empire. Miya Shikan is in a somewhat different mental space, closer to that of the original Gozoku: he is driven not by duty (which he betrays) but by belief. He believes he knows what the Empire needs—eternal peace—and that only he is capable of achieving and maintaining it. Shikan is willing to do whatever he must to achieve his dream, even if it means betraying every aspect of his honor, duty, and loyalty as a samurai. Indeed, from Shikan's viewpoint as a fanatical believer in peace, samurai duty and loyalty are actually bad things: they get in the way of his imagined utopia.

It is worth pointing out that Shikan is not motivated by any sort of personal experience or emotional trauma. The War of Bleeding Flowers was fought at the time of his birth and was long over by the time he was old enough to understand current events and politics. He grew up in the safety and luxury of Kyuden Miya, trained in the court chambers of the Otomo, and never even witnessed so much as a minor border skirmish until long after he launched his crusade for peace. His concepts of the evils of war and the Empire's need for peace are intellectual conceits, the product of reading and study rather than actual experience. Likewise his searing, bitter contempt for the

The Hidden Heart

Any campaign involving a khadi villain should at some point feature a hunt for the abomination's hidden heart, the source of his power and immortality. Heroes of Rokugan is no exception: Shikan's heart is concealed in a network of tunnels beneath the shrine to the Fortune of Peace, along with the hearts of any followers who earn his ultimate "reward." The place is full of traps, locks, and decoys, and intruders must risk their lives to locate the central chamber where the hearts reside. However, some GMs may find this an overly predictable or clichéd plot device. There is no real requirement for Shikan to conceal his heart in the traditional maze of traps and locked doors—he could just as easily hide it in Kyuden Miya, in a remote wilderness location, or even "in plain sight" within a museum, library, or temple.

Empire's warriors and warlords is an emotional and intellectual response rather than the result of personal experiences; it is ultimately born from an arrogant, unwarranted sense of moral superiority. It is up to the GM to decide how this obsessive attitude emerged. Perhaps it was the result of interaction between high intelligence, an indulgent upbringing, and poor relations with his passive and selfish father. Perhaps it was an embittered reaction against the swaggering warriors of the clans and the sneering arrogance of the Otomo family, all of whom often expressed open contempt for the Miya family's pacifistic ideals. Or perhaps it was simply an internal flaw of Shikan's soul that had no source save himself.

Whatever the cause, by the time Shikan inherited the rule of his family and the office of Imperial Herald he was already a fanatic, determined to impose and maintain peace at all costs and for all time.

Shikan can offer the GM a number of interesting alternatives to the conventional scheming villain. Although he has a pair of secret assassins and embraces the blasphemy of the khadi ritual, in public he also works tirelessly in the courts to convert honorable samurai to support his cause. He creates an organization called the Sapphire Magistrates to help enforce peace, and he uses appointments to their ranks to reward those who listen to his words. Moreover, while Shikan may not be the most pleasant of men—he comes across as cold, humorless, and driven—his intensity and sincerity are unquestionable, and more than a few idealistic samurai find his message compelling. Phoenix and Crane samurai are especially susceptible to Shikan's ideals, but he gains followers from almost every clan and family, even a few Crab and Unicorn. A skillful GM can use Shikan's ideals to recruit PCs into his cause, then confront them later with the horrible reality of what Shikan is doing to achieve those ideals. At what point do the PCs turn against Shikan for his vile deeds? Do they turn at all, or do they convince themselves—as he has done—that even murder and blasphemy can be excused by the "greater good"? This is the stuff of quintessential samurai drama, asking the PCs how far they are willing to go for a dream.

Even if the PCs do realize they must turn against Shikan, their decision will be neither easy nor free of consequences. Shikan is one of the most powerful political figures in the Empire and he will not hesitate to crush anyone who betrays him. Even if the PCs have personally witnessed assassinations or other crimes, it is highly unlikely they have the status or political power to make their accusations stick against someone like the Imperial Herald. Unless the PCs can literally walk into the Imperial Court holding Shikan's hidden heart, he will be able to dismiss their accusations easily. Thus they will most likely be forced to make a decision on their own with little to no hope of gaining any allies or even anyone willing to believe their stories.

A GM who truly wants to up the dramatic ante of the story can have Shikan offer his most faithful followers the chance to become khadi as well, serving the cause of peace forever. In the canonical story he does this for his assassin Miya Hanzu, but there is no reason for him to stop there. Any suitably loyal follower could be offered this sinister "reward." How does a PC respond to the lure of such forbidden power? And if one PC does succumb, where does that leave the rest of the party? (Obviously, there's the possibility here for some nasty inter-party conflict that could spill over into the real world, so GMs should tread carefully.)

PCs who stick to their principles and reject Shikan's offer will likely be marked for lethal attention from his assassins, not to mention feeling the full political and social weight of Shikan's displeasure. This can make for a very effective underdog scenario, as the PCs and their handful of allies struggle to stay alive, protect their reputations, and find some way of revealing the truth. Since Shikan is a fanatic who will not tolerate opposition, he will be completely ruthless and unscrupulous in his efforts to discredit the PCs and ruin their lives.

On the other hand, PCs of a more pragmatic or conspiratorial bent may decide to join Shikan's crusade in order to undermine it from within. This can lead to a scenario not unlike a Cold War spy thriller or an undercover police drama, with the PCs forced to perform deeds they find reprehensible while they struggle to learn Shikan's secrets and subvert his plans.

The Death of Jade

The ground shudders and lurches, and all across the battlefield men and monsters alike tumble and fall. A terrible roar fills the world and the soil erupts, unleashing vast black chains as thick as tree-trunks, hurtling upward, lengthening infinitely, reaching toward the Heavens. The Sun seems to shrink and fade, and the sky grows dark, the blue of day draining out of it like water from a gourd. Something is pulled from the sky, something vast and serpentine and glowing green, writhing in the grip of black chains. The Jade Dragon falls to the earth with the force of an earthquake, smashing hundreds of mortals and beasts alike beneath its thrashing bulk.

—"The Fall of Jade," Otomo Hiroshi

Akodo Gintaku's murder of the Jade Dragon, stealing its power to make himself strong enough to dominate the Empire and the Shadowlands alike, is the pivotal moment where the Heroes of Rokugan storyline escalates into a world-threatening epic. But how can a Celestial Dragon who holds the position of the Sun itself, who epitomizes the power of Honor and virtue, an entity who transcends the very concept of mortality, be slain by a mortal?

In fact, this sort of thing happens in at least two different eras of Rokugan's official history: the Second Day of Thunder (when Fu Leng is finally killed) and the Hidden

Emperor era (the death of Onnotangu at mortal hands). The L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* includes a section discussing the birth and death of gods (pages 200-201). As outlined there, there are a number of ways for Fortunes and Dragons to perish. One of them is a Celestial imbalance so severe that it weakens the powers of divine beings until they become vulnerable to mortals. During the Hidden Emperor era, Lord Moon has been driven mad by his own jealousy and the whispers of the Lying Darkness; by acquiring mystical items crafted from Onnotangu's own flesh and blood (the Obsidian Hand, the sword known as Lord Moon's Bones, and so forth) Hitomi was able to confront and destroy him. In the Heroes of Rokugan era, the rise of the Three Sins and the decline of Honor within the mortal world has become so severe that it creates a massive imbalance between the Jade Sun—the Dragon who represents honor—and the Obsidian Moon, who represents sinfulness and selfishness. This allows Gintaku to capture and murder the Jade Dragon by sacrificing the First Matsu Army—symbolically sacrificing Honor itself in order to destroy the Celestial being who symbolizes Honor.

Engineering the death of Jade does not merely win Gintaku the fealty of the Shadowlands Horde. It also imbues him with tremendous, almost godlike power, able to withstand blows that would kill a normal mortal and to dominate the minds and spirits of the weak-willed around him. Much of the reason why so many Lion remain loyal to Gintaku even after his grotesque actions is the very palpable aura of divine power that clings to him. In the final battle with Kobe's forces, Gintaku shrugs off over two dozen mortal wounds before he is finally dragged down and slain.

An Empire Without the Sun

Both the canonical Hidden Emperor era and the alternate-universe Heroes of Rokugan setting feature the death of the Sun, plunging Rokugan into a period of terrifying darkness until a new Sun can be born and restore the Celestial Order. This environment is a superb setting for a GM who wants to run a game themed around horror, whether supernatural or mundane in nature.

In a world without sunlight, monsters and evil creatures such as the Goju run wild, while peasants live in terror and even noble samurai are shaken to the depths of their souls. The land lies under a dark red-tinged sky and the air is chill as the ground slowly gives back the warmth of life. The sky is empty of stars, the heavens hiding their light from the earth. Daimyo will try to keep whatever assets they have close at hand, denying their bushi any right of travel. The peasants are in a deep panic with only the armed force of samurai keeping them from fleeing their homes in blind terror. Most merchant businesses are closed, their patrons hiding, but teahouses and inns remain open as the anxious people seek solace in sake. Local authorities post guards on roads and at inns, to keep order and watch for strangers. Violent riots, mass suicides, and entire villages burning to the ground will be common sights.

A creative GM can potentially run a whole series of adventures, or even an entire campaign, set within a single month in which the Empire lives without the Sun in the sky.

The Crisis of Modernity

"These gaijin are a curse upon us, yet they are a curse we cannot escape. Wealth flows wherever they go, and the daimyo come to me and demand more, more! More trade, more wealth, more gaijin. Yet if one of these creatures insults a samurai, they protest the Son of Heaven has allowed foreigners to profane the Empire."

—Toturi XII

One of the underlying themes of the Heroes of Rokugan setting is the looming presence of a gaijin world that is beginning to modernize and that the Empire can no longer shut out. How will the Empire deal with this challenge? The Thrane, the most prominent gaijin group trading with Rokugan, are emblematic of this modernization and the mixture of threat, opportunity, and change which the gaijin world presents. Ultimately, the Empire must find some way to modernize as well, or be overthrown or colonized—the threat posed by the ambitious Sven Oldarsson. Not all Thrane are like Sven, of course, but enough of them exist that Rokugan cannot avoid the challenge they represent.

Of course, the threat posed by modernization extends far beyond the direct challenge of would-be colonial lords. The burgeoning gaijin trade brings a massive influx of wealth, boosting the power and influence of merchants and undermining the traditional dominance of the samurai caste. Massive shifts of wealth also lead to the rise of organized crime on a scale never seen before, with Empire-wide criminal gangs subverting justice and gaining unprecedented wealth and power. In the normal history of Rokugan, organized crime is generally a local activity, or one controlled by a larger organization such as the Kolat. In the HoR era, however, the massive expansion of wealth gives rise to far larger and more powerful gangs; the Scorpion Clan attempts to manage the problem by sponsoring some of the gangs and supporting them against their rivals, but this effort is only partially successful, especially since the gangs backed by the Bayushi and Shosuro often spend more time fighting each other than anything else.

The rise of these gangs is accompanied, inevitably, by massive growth in corruption. Criminals awash in money find they can bribe magistrates and city guards to ignore their crimes or quash investigations. By the year 1500, many large towns and even entire cities within Rokugan are effectively run by the gangs, with entire city districts taken up with gambling and opium dens, while the samurai officials grow wealthy by turning their backs to the criminals' activities. For those samurai who still follow the path of Bushido, the burgeoning power of the gangs is both shocking and bewildering. This sometimes leads to spasms of violence as outraged samurai clash with arrogant criminals. Moreover, even when the authorities do crack down on the gangs, their efforts seldom have much long-term effect. Crushing a gang in one city does not affect its chapters in other cities, and order can only be maintained for as long as the honest authorities remain in control. Sooner or later, they will be replaced by more malleable samurai—either due to reassignment, or because the gangs assassinate them.

Setting aside the explosive growth of crime, the overall rise in wealth and trade has many other effects which are unsettling to the normal social order. Merchants, traditionally the despised bottom of the heimin caste, become hugely powerful and influential. Countless samurai, even many daimyo, become dependent on the wealth which the merchants bring in. Of course, openly acknowledging this is socially impossible, but it is true nonetheless, and that

How Much Gaijin Involvement?

The role of the Thrane in the Mantis power grab, and in the Empire more generally, is more complex than may initially appear. L5R traditionally depicts the Thrane as a sort of fusion between the English and the Dutch: a culture of freebooters, explorers, and aggressive traders, always looking for opportunities to profit. This makes them severely alien to Rokugan, of course, but it does not automatically make them villains. This sort of culture can certainly produce ruthless imperialists and exploiters, and the ambassador Sven Oldarsson fits that mold quite well. However, it can also produce admirable men, adventurers and heroes, and the GM can use such characters to undermine the simple clichés of "wicked gaijin" that PCs may be using as crutches.

In the original HoR campaign, the "positive" side of the Thrane was represented by Daniel Hatcherman, an agent of the Thranish king who came to Rokugan to investigate rumors of corruption and improper behavior by Oldarsson. The GM may use a similar character or characters to show the PCs different sides of the gaijin presence. Alternatively, the GM can use other gaijin cultures to show the diversity of the people from outside the Empire—a charming but fatalistic Merenae nobleman or a cultured, friendly prince from the Ivory Kingdoms can serve as useful tools to undermine the assumptions of xenophobic PCs.

Of course, some GMs may prefer to keep their game simpler and put the gaijin into a straightforward role as strange, disgusting outsiders and villains. The HoR era can support this approach as well, especially using the Thrane—Mantis plotline. It all depends on what sort of game experience the GM and players are looking for.

knowledge subtly undermines every samurai's view of the world. It is not a coincidence that so many great lords and Clan Champions succumb to the lure of treasonous ambition—the social order of the Empire is shifting beneath everyone's feet, creating an environment where the most basic traditions seem to lose their force. Even the Emperor wonders if honor and loyalty truly mean anything.

In game terms, this theme of the campaign is expressed through adventures in which the PCs tangle with corrupt officials and ruthless commoner gangs. PCs who have been conditioned by traditional L5R play to expect all commoners to shrink away from any confrontation with samurai will doubtless be startled and unsettled by criminal gangs who behave with fearless insolence, accustomed to getting their way. PCs who are used to ignoring merchants will be made uneasy by the discovery that their lord is almost pathetically dependent on the trade revenue running through his province, and is willing to do nearly anything to protect that revenue. All of this together should create a sense of an Empire that is "fraying at the edges," an Empire in which the old certainties are no longer so certain, in which samurai can no longer quite trust the social order. This can be especially appealing to GMs who are fans of Akira Kurosawa's dark, cynical take on samurai drama in films like *Yojimbo* and *Throne of Blood*. Kurosawa's movies deconstructed the mythology of honorable samurai, showing the flawed and often tormented human beings who lay beneath the popular image. PCs in the HoR setting must do the same; they must confront what it means to be a samurai in an Empire where wealth trumps tradition, where honor stands on the shakiest of foundations, and where great lords think nothing of conspiring for the Throne.

In the midst of all this, of course, are the gaijin. It is the Empire's expanding trade with foreigners—the Ivory Kingdoms, the peoples of the Burning Sands, the Thrane and their rivals the Merenae—which has brought this vast flow of new wealth. Rokugan's samurai do not like the changes this trade has brought, and especially do not like having gaijin walk freely in their lands... but they find themselves unable to do without the money and prosperity brought by foreign trade. As a result, the Empire is caught in a strange, uncertain middle ground with respect to the gaijin, unable to accept them yet unwilling to face the heavy price of exiling them once more. This is seen most clearly in the aftermath of the failed Mantis–Thrane gambit to place a puppet Emperor on the Throne. In the era of White Stag, a similar disaster (the death of Empress Hantei VII) was followed by a ruthless purge of all gaijin influence. But in the sixteenth century, Rokugan depends too much on gaijin coin to take the same step. Instead, the Empire accepts the apology of the Thrane government and the execution of Sven Oldarsson as sufficient, and trade continues unabated. How do samurai deal with such a world? How do they handle their own xenophobia when their lords demand good relations with gaijin merchants?

Obviously, not every GM will want to inject themes of modernization, economic transformation, and social upheaval into a fantasy setting like Rokugan. The HoR era can still work perfectly well without these elements, since the central challenges—the fanaticism of Miya Shikan, the treacherous plots of Yoritomo Ogawa and Shosuro Hido, and the murderous power-lust of Moto Temujin and Akodo Gintaku—are essentially "internal" and can be presented with only the most limited mention of trade, gangs, corruption, or the gaijin. But by adding these elements, the GM can introduce a new layer to the setting and a new set of challenges for the PCs, ones which are not amenable to the clean strike of a sword.

Prominent Figures in the Heroes of Rokugan Era

There are a great many notable figures within the HoR era, many of whom have already been described earlier in the chapter. The following section presents game statistics for a few of the more prominent and interesting NPCs of this time period. Much as with the NPCs presented in other chapters, these may be used as part of a campaign set within the Heroes of Rokugan era or simply inserted into any campaign where the GM finds them useful.

Akodo Gintaku

Akodo Family Daimyo

The Steel Lion is a man of dire emotions and sinister motivations, concealed beneath a surface of iron self-control and icy hostility. From his childhood he has been consumed with an implacable lust for power and control, but in contrast to his rival Moto Temujin he has never allowed that desire to control him; instead he has conquered it and used it as a source of power. Gintaku is, at the most basic level, a sociopath. To him other people—even his own blood kin—are merely tools to be used, controlled, and discarded as necessary. He does not acknowledge honor or duty at all, except insofar as he recognizes other people are motivated by such values.

All that being said, it cannot be denied that Gintaku possesses a chilly but compelling charisma. During his youth he attracts several dedicated followers, the men who call themselves his "anniki" (brothers), and he continues to recruit additional followers throughout his life, including major figures like the Ikoma family daimyo. Perhaps it is simply Gintaku's absolute ruthlessness that attracts their devotion, or perhaps they allow themselves to see more in him than is really there; regardless, the anniki play major roles in Gintaku's campaign to take control of the clan.

Gintaku is highly intelligent and a brilliant commander, and several times crushes powerful enemy armies. However, what truly makes the Steel Lion such a terrible threat is that he recognizes no moral limit or constraint on his goals and actions. To Gintaku, sacrificing one of his own loyal followers is more than worth the price to gain the allegiance of Moto Yoshi. Slaughtering an entire Lion army and murdering his own eldest son are easy prices to pay if it gains him the fealty of the Shadowlands Horde and the power of the Jade Dragon. For that matter, Gintaku feels no hesitation at killing the Jade Dragon itself, an act which most Rokugani would view as the most appalling blasphemy. To him, the very ruler of the Celestial Heavens is just one more asset to use.

The stats here depict the Steel Lion in his mortal form as Akodo family daimyo, before he usurped rule of the clan and before he stole and absorbed the Jade Dragon's power.

Akodo Gintaku, the Steel Lion, Murderer of Jade

Air: 4	Earth: 5	Fire: 6	Water: 4	Void: 5
Reflexes: 5		Agility: 7	Strength: 5	
Honor: 0.5		*Status: 7.0*		*Glory: 6.8*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 5/Akodo Tactical Master 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Combat) 8, Courtier 2, Defense 6, Etiquette 3, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 6, Intimidation (Control) 6, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana, Wakizashi) 9, Knives 5, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology 2, Spears 4, Stealth 2, War Fan 6

Kata: Disappearing World Style

Advantages: Allies (many), Apparent Honor (3 Ranks), Leadership, Social Position (Akodo family daimyo), Tactician

Disadvantages: Dark Secrets (many), Driven (to gain power), Heartless

O-Doji Koneko

Matron of the Crane Clan

Doji Koneko was once a young woman, a skillful courtier happily married to the Crane Clan Champion, but after his death the combined effort of ruling the clan and trying to raise (and later contain) her troublesome son Doji Sarutomo wore her down, year by year. Although her relentless labors in the courts earned her the respectful title of "O-Doji," her private life was a failure. Her son proved to be a weak and morally flawed young man who murdered his own wife when she mocked his pretensions. Unable to face the prospect of her son's death, Koneko concealed the crime and continued to try to rule the Crane Clan from behind Sarutomo's back.

By the year 1500, Koneko is a decrepit old woman, always elaborately dressed and made up despite her advanced age. Her eyes are rheumy, her swollen face sags unevenly, and her mouth contains only a few stubs of teeth. Despite her outwardly frail appearance, she remains perceptive and sharp-witted. She has a viperish tongue and an acidic temper, and exploits the deference owed to age to indulge both. Beneath her harsh exterior, however, is a miserable old woman haunted by the sense of her own failure and the futility of all her efforts to protect the clan. When she finally realizes her son's past crime has spawned a goryo (vengeful ghost) who threatens to doom the Crane bloodline, she confesses the truth and forces her son to do the same. Sarutomo commits seppuku and Koneko shaves her head and retires to a monastery.

However, this tragedy is not quite the end of O-Doji Koneko's story. While living in the Shrine of Benten in Crane lands, she comes across an odd, secretive young monk who turns out to be Matsu Nimuro living in hiding. Koneko uses her remaining political contacts and allies to recruit support for Nimuro, helping him to issue his challenge to Akodo Gintaku for rule of the Lion.

O-Doji Koneko, Crane Clan Matron

Air: 1 Earth: 1 Fire: 1 Water: 1 Void: 4

Awareness: 7 Willpower: 5 Intelligence: 5 Perception: 4

Honor: 3.6 *Status: 7.5* *Glory: 8.5*

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 5

Skills: Artisan: Dance 3, Artisan: Ikebana 3, Artisan: Painting 2, Artisan: Poetry 5, Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation, Rhetoric) 6, Seduction) 5, Etiquette (Conversation, Courtesy) 7, Games: Go 6, Games: Sadane 6, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: History 4, Lore: Theology (Shintao, Fortunes, Ancestors) 6, Meditation 2, Perform: Storytelling 4, Sincerity (Lying) 5, Tea Ceremony 3, Temptation (Seduction) 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many), Higher Purpose (rebuild the Crane Clan's power), Perceived Honor (1 rank), Precise Memory, Sage, Servants (many), Social Position (Clan Champion's widow), Wealthy

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (viper's tongue), Dark Secrets (many), Dependent (her son), Lost Love (her dead husband).

Shosuro Hido

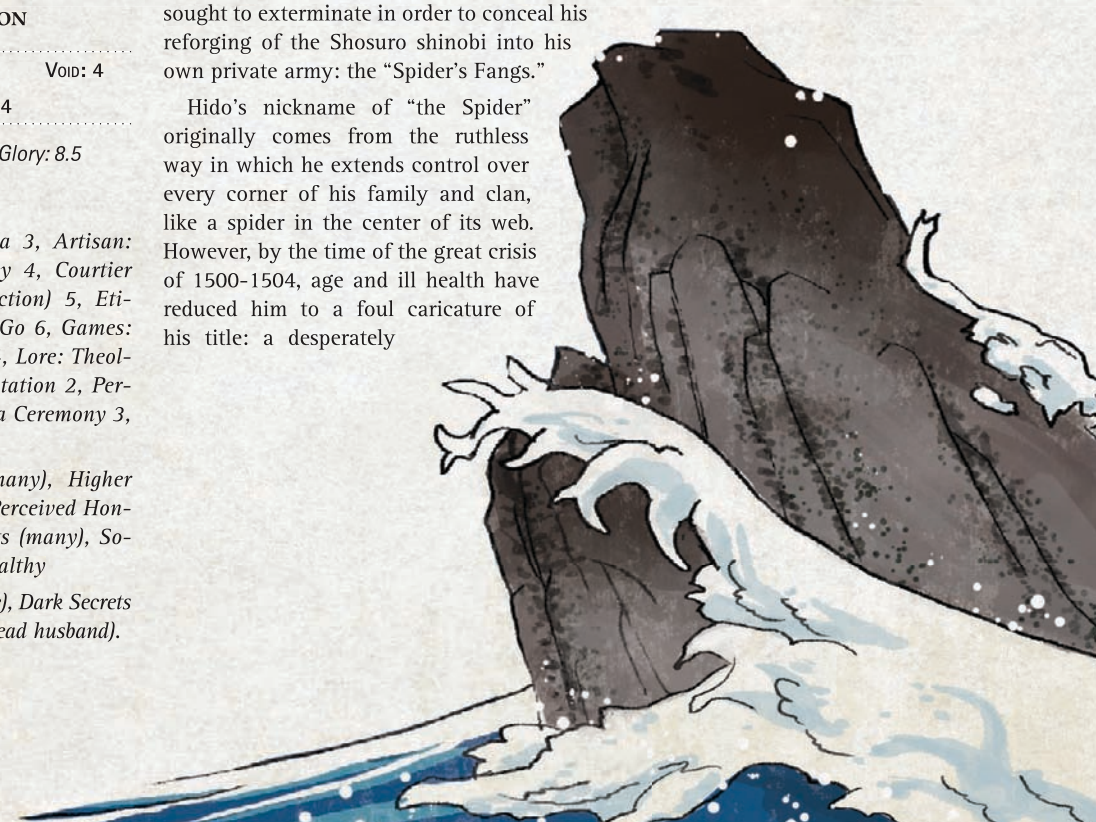
"the Spider," Lord of the Shosuro

Although Miya Shikan's attempt to impose a perpetual peace on the Empire was probably doomed to eventually break down in war and violence, the sheer ferocity of the chaos which breaks loose in the years 1501-1503 is caused in large part by the machinations of the ruthless conspirators known as the Three Old Men: Shosuro Hido, Yoritomo Ogawa, and Sven Oldarsson. Of these, Shosuro Hido is the most important and powerful. He spends most of his long life dreaming of power, slowly subverting the authority of the Bayushi lord until the Scorpion Clan becomes his own instrument. In Hido's twisted mind, Honor is a joke, the world is governed by power and deception, and nothing he does can be wrong because there is no such thing as morality, only power and its lack.

However, for all his cunning and subtle planning, Shosuro Hido is a man who never quite reaches his goals. His first attempt to maneuver into control of the Imperial line—the marriage of his niece Amika to the Imperial prince—fails when she falls in love with Mirumoto Jinzaki. After Amika's death, Hido tries to salvage something from the debacle by luring her daughter Hisako into training with the Scorpion. The ensuing diplomatic crisis with the Mantis brings Hido (whose health, while failing, still allows travel at the time) into contact with Yoritomo Ogawa, the cunning sensei of Dojo Raiden, and from there to Sven Oldarsson. Although the three are allies in the goal of placing a puppet on the throne, their machinations seldom lead to the success they imagine—in part, of course, because all the while they are planning to double-cross and triple-cross each other in the end.

Ultimately, Hido's grand schemes come to naught, and he is reduced to imprisoning Toturi Hisako in the tunnels beneath Nihai Tower. He is ultimately betrayed by the survivors of the Kochako vassal family—the very samurai he sought to exterminate in order to conceal his reforging of the Shosuro shinobi into his own private army: the "Spider's Fangs."

Hido's nickname of "the Spider" originally comes from the ruthless way in which he extends control over every corner of his family and clan, like a spider in the center of its web. However, by the time of the great crisis of 1500-1504, age and ill health have reduced him to a foul caricature of his title: a desperately



old and grotesquely fat man, with skinny arms and legs whose muscles have long since wasted away to nothing. His face is pale and bloated, with red lips that glisten with saliva, and dark beady eyes stare from above deep, heavy bags. He seldom leaves his dark, dank chambers beneath Nihai Tower and dresses only in old, musty, sweat-stained yukata in Scorpion red. Even his menacing rasp of a voice, which once made underlings tremble, is reduced to a thin, gasping whisper.

Shosuro Hido, "the Spider," Lord of the Shosuro, Traitor to the Empire

Air: 1 Earth: 2 Fire: 1 Water: 1 Void: 5

Awareness: 5 Willpower: 6 Intelligence: 7 Perception: 3

Honor: 0.0 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 3.8*

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 5/Scorpion Instigator 2

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 10, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 9, Defense 2, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Courtesy) 9, Games: Go 5, Games: Shogi 10, Intimidation (Control) 7, Investigation (Notice, Interrogation) 10, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: History 5, Lore: Imperial Families 5, Lore: Law 5, Lore: Scorpion Clan 5, Lore: Theology 2, Lore: Underworld 10, Meditation 1, Perform: Storytelling 3, Sincerity (Lying) 10, Stealth 3, Temptation (Bribery) 5

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many), Crafty, Social Position (family daimyo)

Disadvantages: Bad Health, Dark Secrets (many), Driven (gain power), Sworn Enemies (many)

Kagekaze

Ronin Assassin

"I am supposed to kill this man. And anyone who stands in my way. I have done this many times, times beyond counting. And I still ask: What are we? Why were we born? Is there hope for us? How should we live? Life is a farce, and I have seen no path but the one I could carve with my sword. But that is a path of ashes and blood, and it has no ending save despair."

—Kagekaze

In another age, the man called Kagekaze might have founded a Minor Clan, or invented a new fighting school and sworn fealty to a Great Clan. In this age, he became an assassin, a supremely skilled killer willing to take on any commission... for the right price. Clean-shaven and well-kept, with a thin frame and long, lean limbs, he seldom impressed people as dangerous on first sight; with or without his swords, he always behaved with great restraint and decorum.

Like all too many samurai in this era, Kagekaze did not believe in Bushido. He regarded it as a pleasant myth which was effective only when all Rokugani believed in it—now that the Empire was corrupt, it no longer had any power, and he could see no reason for it to have any control over his own life. However, he retained a certain wry respect for those samurai who still believed in Bushido and tried to live their lives honorably. Although what they believed in was ridiculous, in his view, their courage and faith in it were admirable.

That being said, Kagekaze did try to develop his own peculiar code of "Honor" to govern his actions. He only took contracts to kill people he considered morally flawed (though in his view most adult human beings fell into that category). Once he took a contract, he carried it out regardless—even if he learned he had been duped into an improper contract, he kept his word and carried it out (though he would then remorselessly hunt down and kill the patron who tricked him). He always killed his opponents with weapons, never using poison, deception, or other such cowardly tactics. Kagekaze never enjoyed death for its own sake and never killed without need, preferring to avoid unnecessary confrontations.

Ultimately, for all his skill Kagekaze could not sustain his personal code and his personal cynicism in the face of the world's pressures. When a contract to kill Matsu Nimuro forced him to slaughter his way through a monastery full of innocent monks, he realized his "code" was a failure, and committed suicide in despair.

Kagekaze, Conflicted Ronin Assassin

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 4 Water: 5 Void: 5

Reflexes: 7 Agility: 6

*Honor: 0.0** *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 3.0* *Infamy: 2.9*

**Effectively 5.5 due to personal code of conduct*

School/Rank: Gaze of Sun Tao/ (Insight Rank 7)

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 2, Calligraphy 4, Commerce 3, Courtier 3, Defense 8, Etiquette 6, Games: Go 3, Horsemanship 4, Hunting 5, Iaijutsu 8, Intimidation 4, Investigation (Interrogation, Notice) 5, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu 10, Knives 4, Kyujutsu 6, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: History 3, Lore: Law 2, Lore: Theology 2, Lore: Underworld 5, Meditation 3, Sincerity 3, Spears 3, Stealth 5, Tea Ceremony 2

Advantages: Bishamon's Blessing, Bland, Combat Reflexes, Higher Purpose (fulfill his assassin's creed), Quick, Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (ronin assassin), Disbeliever, Social Disadvantage (ronin)

New Game Mechanics

The following section depicts new mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition RPG. These mechanics are intended for depicting the Heroes of Rokugan era, but some of them are also usable in earlier eras and GMs can always adapt them to the needs of specific campaigns.

Ronin Family Names

Ronin family names are rare, but they are not wholly unknown. They are most often created when the Emperor chooses to reward a ronin for an exceptional deed, such as Usagi helping to defeat the Bloodspeaker, Tsi creating a magnificent weapon for the Imperial house, or Yotsu rescuing the Emperor's son. Usually, these families quickly gain the right to create a Minor Clan (such as Usagi becoming the Hare Clan) but on some occasions they continue as ronin families for many generations. Eventually such families either die out, become a Minor Clan, or get absorbed into another clan or family. For example, the Tsi eventually become the Oriole Clan and the Kaeru become a vassal family of the Ikoma. The Yotsu in the canonical L5R timeline have sworn fealty to the Seppun family and may be on their way to being absorbed by them.

A ronin family can also be created when a samurai family is officially disbanded but its members refuse to accept the judgment, clinging to their name and traditions while living as wave-men. The Akodo and the Usagi during the Clan War and Hidden Emperor eras are examples of this phenomenon, as are the Tsume in the Heroes of Rokugan era. Unless they can restore their reputation, these sorts of ronin families tend to die out within a couple of generations, both due to loss of faith among their members and enmity from clan samurai who consider their behavior improper.

Mechanically, a ronin PC who belongs to a ronin family must spend 5 Experience Points on Social Advantage: Ronin Family. This grants him the ronin family's Trait bonus as well as social connections to the rest of the family—the GM may award a variety of bonuses and obligations in play based on such connections. Such characters still technically have Status of 0.0, but their name grants them a certain degree of respect from clan samurai that other ronin do not receive.

Notable ronin family names include:

- **Kaeru** (+1 Awareness): Rulers of the City of the Rich Frog. Become a vassal family of the Ikoma in the mid-twelfth century.
- **Tsi** (+1 Willpower): A family of extremely skilled smiths and weapon-makers, granted a name by the Emperor in the tenth century. Become the Oriole Clan in the twelfth century.
- **Tsume** (+1 Reflexes): Heroes of Rokugan era only. A former Crane vassal family, disbanded after losing the War of Bleeding Flowers.
- **Yotsu** (+1 Intelligence): Founded at the end of the eleventh century, and appointed to govern several districts in Otosan Uchi.

New Ronin Path: Tsume Pikemen

The Tsume vassal family prided themselves on being masters of the spear, teaching their bushi to specialize in defensive tactics and rely on a wall of spear-points to break enemy charges. After the Tsume ruling bloodline is exterminated in the War of Bleeding Flowers, their samurai become ronin but do their best to preserve their traditional fighting methods, passing their Technique down from parent to child. The process is further enhanced by their tradition of meeting annually to renew their sense of loyalty and identity.

Tsume ronin often hire themselves out as guards or escorts, using their spear tactics to defeat bandit raids. In keeping with their legacy as former Crane samurai, they are trustworthy and reliable soldiers and refuse to ever betray their employers. This makes them quite popular among merchants and others in need of reliable guards.

New Ronin Path: Tsume Pikemen [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Requirements:** Spears 3+, Polearms 3+, Honor Rank 3 or higher
- **Special Notes:** Within the Heroes of Rokugan setting, this Technique is normally only available to ronin descended from the retainers of the deceased Tsume vassal family, or to close allies of that family. In other eras of play, GMs may use this technique to represent any honorable, trustworthy ronin band that replies primarily on spears or polearms.

The Tsume Pikemen as a Crane Alternate Path

Prior to the Heroes of Rokugan era, the Tsume family are a normal vassal family of the Doji. They first rise to prominence in the eleventh century, when they capture Shiro Kyotei from the Lion Clan and go on to seize Toshi Ranbo itself, triggering a long series of wars over that unhappy castle. The Tsume are known for their aggressive and ambitious policies (especially under the daimyo Tsume Retsu) and for their use of tough, effective spearman tactics.

GMs who wish to explore the Tsume in other eras may opt to make the Tsume Pikemen Path available as a Crane Alternate Path. In this case, it should be treated as a Rank 3 Crane Path, available to members of the Tsume vassal family and to other Doji-family samurai with connections or alliances with the Tsume. Subject to that restriction, the Pikeman technique may be learned by a bushi from any of the Crane bushi schools.

Technique: Wall of Pikes

The Tsume Pikemen are taught to use defensive tactics, luring the enemy into a charge and then impaling them on their spears. While you are in the Defense posture and wielding a spear or polearm, immediately after an opponent makes a melee attack against you or one of your allies within ten feet (whether or not the attack hit), you may spend a Void Point in order to take a Free Action to attack that opponent with your spear/polearm.

You may also use this Technique in the Full Defense posture, but making the attack will require spending two Void Points instead of one.

New Minor Clan: The Tiger Clan

The Tiger are descended from the Yotsu, a ronin family created during the eleventh century. The daughters of the family founder were appointed as governors of city districts in the Imperial capital, Otosan Uchi, and after the destruction of the city by the Dark Lord Daigotsu during the Four Winds era the growing family assumed responsibility for the ruins.

In the Heroes of Rokugan alternate timeline, the Spider Clan is eventually cleared from the ruins of Otosan Uchi and the Yotsu fight in the vanguard of that effort, hunting Lost and Shadowlands monsters through the streets of the wrecked city. Afterward they are proclaimed the Tiger Clan and given permanent responsibility for protecting the city and ensuring the power of Jigoku can never again be unleashed within its boundaries. Sadly, the process of cleansing the city of Taint also makes it unable to support crops or animal life, so in order to live and fulfill their duties the Yotsu are forced to hire themselves out as mercenaries across the Empire. This allows them to earn enough koku to scrape by, especially since their skills at hunting foes through cities make them quite popular as yoriki to magistrates.

The Tiger Clan's fortunes change in the mid-fifteenth century when the Emperor agrees to allow the gaijin known as Thrane to resume trade with Rokugan. The Thrane are ordered to operate only through the port of Otosan Uchi under the supervision of the Tortoise Clan. The Tiger and Tortoise quickly developed a symbiotic relationship, the Tiger offering military protection to the port in exchange for a share of the Tortoise profits. Within two generations the Tiger vault from one of the poorest Minor Clans to one of the richest, able to provide their bushi with fine homes, clothing, and equipment. Despite their new-found wealth, the Tiger continue to guard the ruins of Otosan Uchi carefully, watching for any sign of Bloodspeakers, Ninube, or Lost, and some of their number still hire out to magistrates in order to explore the rest of the Empire.

The clan colors of the Tiger Clan are yellow and black. Their mon shows a stylized image of a tiger springing from ambush.

- **Family Name:** Yotsu (+1 Intelligence)

New Basic School: Yotsu Bushi School

The original Yotsu technique was based on the family's self-appointed role as protectors of the common people in Otosan Uchi. The later evolution of a full-scale bushi School happened as a result of the family's experiences fighting the Spider Clan in the ruins of Otosan Uchi. The Yotsu were forced to fight with stealth and ruthless aggression in an environment where the dominant terrain feature was ruined buildings. Although the resulting school was not one which more rigidly honorable samurai would admire, it suited the Yotsu well and they have maintained its techniques ever since.

- **Trait Bonus:** +1 Agility
- **Starting Honor:** 5.5
- **Skills:** Commerce, Hunting, Kenjutsu, Kyujutsu, Lore (either Gaijin or Shadowlands), Stealth (Sneaking), one Low or Bugei skill.
- **Outfit:** Daisho, Light or Ashigaru Armor, two other weapons, Sturdy Clothing, Traveling Pack, 4 Koku

Techniques

Rank One: The Tiger's Tread

The Yotsu are taught to stalk and attack their enemies with the same mixture of stealth and speed displayed by the tiger when it hunts its prey. You lose half the normal amount of Honor (rounded down) for using the Ambush or Shadowing functions of the Stealth skill so long as you are using them against enemies of the Empire. When operating in an urban environment (including a ruin or other

ancient relic of such an environment), you gain a +1k0 bonus to Stealth Skill rolls and add your Stealth skill rank to your Armor TN.

Rank Two: The Tiger's Pounce

The Yotsu are taught to strike with uncanny speed, catching their opponents by surprise. On the first Round of a skirmish, you may add your Stealth Skill rank to the total of your Initiative roll. (This bonus ends on the Reactions stage of the first Round.)

Rank Three: Rending Claws

The Yotsu strike with the speed of a pouncing tiger. When fighting with a Samurai weapon you may make attacks as a Simple Action instead of a Complex Action.

Rank Four: Shelter the Blameless

The Sword of Yotsu draw strength from their duty to protect others. During any Round when you are actively defending or protecting another (GM's discretion), you gain one bonus Void Point for use during that Round. Unspent Void Points gained from this Technique are lost at the end of the Round (after the Reactions stage).

Rank Five: The Tiger's Fangs

The final lesson of the Yotsu is to emulate the Tiger's pounce, striking the opponent so fiercely with one's first attack that he has no opportunity to fight back. On the first Round of a skirmish, you may declare Maneuvers for one less Raise.

The Yotsu in the Canon History

Although the Heroes of Rokugan story elevates the Yotsu into a Minor Clan, their history as a ronin family begins long before then, and they appear in the canonical history of Rokugan from the pre-Coup era forward, sometimes playing a significant role in the events in and around the city of Otosan Uchi. GMs and players can make use of the Yotsu in many different eras of play, and they can also serve as a template for the depiction of ronin families in other eras of play as well.

In eras where the Yotsu are a ronin family, they have only one Technique: Shelter the Blameless. It is a Rank 4 ronin Technique (described in Chapter Ten of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*) that is only available to members of the Yotsu ronin family. The GM may, of course, also use it to represent the technique of any other ronin band that focuses on protecting the innocent and helpless.

The Thousand Years of Darkness

"This is the last camp, Toturi," Hida Yakamo said. "After today, we'll have to find our supplies elsewhere."

Akodo Toturi shook his head and resisted the urge to place his hand over his remaining eye. He could not afford to look confused or insecure. His followers were always watching him, and they had little hope to spare. After a moment, he answered: "We will find a way, Yakamo. We may need to take more risks in the future, but we will survive."

Yakamo spat on the ground. "We've been lucky so far," he rumbled. "The Obsidian Legionnaires haven't caught on to our pattern. There'll be Jigoku to pay when they realize we've been raiding the hideouts the Scorpion Clan used during their exile. They have plenty of former Scorpions in their army, and sooner or later one of them will remember."

"So you've told me countless times," Toturi said, his lips twisting in an echo of his old smile. "The alternative is worse. If we run out of supplies, we must disband."

"It will not come to that," Bayushi Hisa said. His hands caressed the knives in his belt as he stared at the two Thunders. "This refuge lies within the heart of Shinomen Forest itself. I personally saw to its creation a year before the Day of Thunder, and it was never used by my brethren."

"As far as you know," Yakamo growled. He peered ahead with untrusting eyes. "It could have been exploited by one of your brothers years ago."

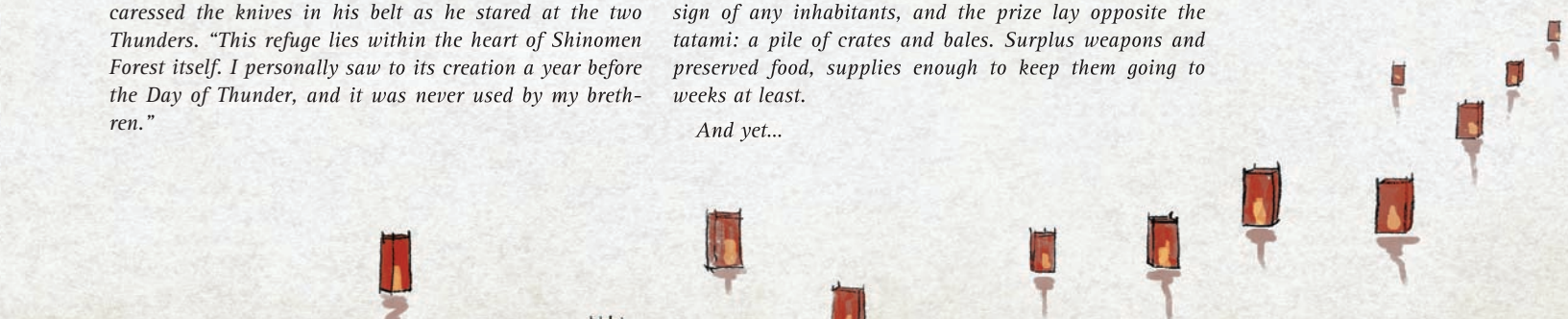
"We must have hope," Toturi said, a tiny bit of weariness creeping into his voice. He had said the same phrase too often since the Day of Thunder.

****

A cunningly woven barrier of brush and vines covered the abandoned entrance. They lifted it aside and began their descent into the old Scorpion refuge. Bayushi Hisa and Hida Yakamo led the procession, weapons in hand. Toturi walked right behind the Crab, and five of the Twelve Ronin finished out the group. The others were not happy with Toturi's position near the front—they always protested his reckless actions. Toturi was adamant. He could not expect others to maintain trust in his leadership if he never took risks of his own.

Yakamo's torch illuminated a dark stone chamber, heavy beams bracing the low ceiling. Untouched tatami mats were stacked along the eastern wall. There was no sign of any inhabitants, and the prize lay opposite the tatami: a pile of crates and bales. Surplus weapons and preserved food, supplies enough to keep them going to weeks at least.

And yet...



"Something is wrong," Toturi whispered. His hand tightened its grip on his katana an instant before the room plunged into darkness.

The metallic rasp of swords leaving sheaths rang through the air as the Twelve Ronin leaped forward to defend their master, forming a circle around Toturi and Yakamo with the ease of long practice.

A pair of glowing red eyes appeared in the darkness. "The Black Lion, leader of the rebels," a voice rasped, echoing unnaturally off the stone walls. "The Dark Emperor will be pleased. He will reward me well when I bring him your head."

"I recognize that voice," Hisa said into the darkness. "Marumo... you traitor."

"Bayushi Hisa?" Laughter barked. "You are a fool for turning against the Emperor. And now you will die as a fool."

Hisa drew his knife from his belt. Its crystal blade flared with the blue-white light of pure spirits, bathing the chamber in its glow, and Toturi could finally see his opponents. Bayushi Marumo stood against the far wall, his undead gray flesh pulled tight against the desiccated muscles beneath. A trio of heavily armored humanoid demons towered over him.

"A quick assault, then we retreat," Toturi whispered. "We cannot win if he calls for reinforcements."

"I warned you this would happen," Hida Yakamo whispered back, but his smile softened the harsh words. He lifted his massive tetsubo, and the sacred light of jade flared from his right hand.

"For Rokugan!" Toturi shouted. He charged, the other rebels following with desperate courage.

A World of Evil

In the true history of Rokugan, the Second Day of Thunder saved the Empire and ushered in a new era of change and transformation, both good and bad. The death of Fu Leng and the defeat of Jigoku's massed forces proved the Rokugani could destroy gods, if only they banded together as one. However, the Second Day of Thunder brought the Hantei Dynasty to an end, ushering in the tragically short-lived Toturi Dynasty in its place. The Mantis Clan ascended to become an equal to the other Great Clans, Shinsei's descendent the Hooded Ronin wrote the New Tao, and countless other changes shook the Empire from top to bottom.

The battle against Fu Leng seemed unwinnable until a single fateful moment. Mirumoto Hitomi opened the Twelfth Black Scroll, triggering Isawa's ancient trap and bringing Fu Leng completely into the mortal realm. This brought his power to its greatest strength, but it also turned him fully mortal. The Thunders slew him, albeit not without cost, and sent his corrupted soul to Meido.

...but it need not have been so.

Emma-O, the Fortune of Death and guardian of the Realm of Waiting, imprisoned Fu Leng in the depths of Meido. With the dark god safely imprisoned, Emma-O reasoned, Ningen-do would be safer from the corruptive influence of Jigoku. Fu Leng raged and fought with all his strength, but he could not escape Emma-O's grasp. Trapped, he waited, brooded, slumbered... and dreamed. Dreamed of what could have been if a single fateful moment had turned in his favor.

The dreams of a god are powerful, and the passions of a rebuffed god are doubly so. Fu Leng's influence seeped into the threads of reality in the Realm of Dreams, slowly influencing it, and a portion of Yume-do twisted into a complete world that reflected Fu Leng's dream, a dream of a Thousand Years of Darkness. As Fu Leng's dream gained in power, Yume-do formed powerful borders around it to contain its corruption. This made it nearly impossible to enter or leave Fu Leng's playhouse, but also helped the nightmare grow.

The setting depicted in this chapter never happened in the canon history of Rokugan, but instead reflects the maddened fantasies of the defeated champion of Jigoku. However, this does not mean it cannot happen in your campaign. Like Heroes of Rokugan in the previous chapter, the Thousand Years of Darkness is an example of an alternate reality setting, a world where the customary and comfortable certainties of

Rokugan's history have been cast loose. It is a tale of what might have been, a world where heroism is tested beyond endurance by triumphant evil, where even the greatest hero may not be able to do more than delay the onrushing tide.

The Broken Day of Thunder

"If we fail because of her," Yakamo whispered, "I'll kill her."

On the ninth day of the Month of the Ox, nine warriors marched into the Imperial Palace. At their head was the Dragon Clan Champion, Togashi Yokuni, who had revealed himself as the original founding Kami of the Dragon Clan. The Hooded Ronin, descendent of Shinsei, stood by the mortals as they prepared to face their destiny. As the Seven Thunders entered the Emperor's courtroom, Hantei XXXIX—possessed by Fu Leng—impatiently waited for them, for the final battle that would confirm him as the eternal ruler of Rokugan.

Togashi began the fight, changing his form into that of a Celestial dragon to fight his brother. Fu Leng easily snapped the Dragon Clan Champion's back and tore his chest open, laughing as he tossed his fallen brother aside. He turned to face the Thunders as they approached. Togashi lay on the ground, his heart exposed to the room, and Mirumoto Hitomi stared at the Twelfth Black Scroll, hidden until now within the god's heart. Togashi stared at his Thunder and urged her to fulfill her destiny. "Solve the riddle," his mind whispered to hers. "You are the answer to my question." She must rip open his heart and open the Black Scroll.

In another time, another world, Hitomi did as her Kami commanded. But here, disgust filled Hitomi's heart as Togashi's thoughts poured into her mind. Everything was planned, everything was predestined, she realized. Togashi had foreseen his own death and stepped forward willingly. It meant that Togashi had seen her beloved brother Satsu's death and allowed it to happen.

She could not serve the bidding of her brother's murderer. Hitomi walked out of the room and left her god bleeding on the floor. The Hooded Ronin, realizing her action had doomed the Thunders and the Empire, bowed his head and left the palace.

With the Twelfth Black Scroll unopened, Fu Leng was nigh-divine and completely invincible. The Thunders could not defeat him no matter what they did. The Dark Kami imprisoned Yakamo with chains of black iron. He stabbed his hand through Doji Hoturi's chest and ripped out his heart. He flung Otaku Kamoko across the room, breaking her neck and killing her instantly. He struck Bayushi Kachiko unconscious and stalked forward to finish Toturi and Yakamo.

Isawa Tadaka knew Rokugan needed Toturi if it there were to be any chance after this day. He turned to Toturi and said, "You flee. I die." Focusing all his power, he exploded in a blaze of flames and jade magic. It was only a momentary setback to Fu Leng, but it bought enough time for Toturi to break Yakamo's chains and flee the palace.

Jigoku had taken the day.

The Foundation of the New Empire

"Kill the Daidoji," said Hoturi, pointing at the castle. The Ashura gladly complied.

Even before the battle had ended, Fu Leng appeared in front of the combined Rokugani armies. He announced the Thunders had failed. Exuding divine power and perfect confidence, he declared himself the true and eternal Emperor of Rokugan, and commanded that those who had served his brother Hantei must now serve him or be destroyed.

The first to respond was Ikoma Ujiaki, general of the Imperial Legions. Before the battle, he had been the foremost among those Lion who insisted that the clan must continue to serve the Throne even if the Emperor was possessed by Fu Leng. Now he immediately embraced the divinity of Fu Leng and fell to his knees, swearing allegiance on behalf of the Lion Clan. Half of the Lion Clan army followed suit. When Ikoma Tsunari protested, Ujia-

ki instantly struck her down as a traitor to the Emperor. Standing at the head of Fu Leng's armies, he drove the remnants of Rokugan's pure forces away from the Imperial capital.

With the battle won, Fu Leng turned his attention next to governing the Empire he had claimed at last. Ikoma Ujiaki was rewarded for his heartfelt allegiance by becoming the Rikugunshokan of the new Obsidian Legions. Fu Leng used his foul magic to resurrect the corpses of Doji Hoturi, Otaku Kamoko, and the Lost shugenja Isawa Tsuke. These undead abominations led Shadowlands armies to their former homelands, destroying castles and slaughtering those who would not submit to the Reign of the Dark Emperor. Few survived, and fewer still held any resistance in their hearts. The Unicorn retreated from the chaos, abandoning Rokugan to rejoin their cousins in the Burning Sands.

The citizens of the Empire struggled under the heavy yoke of Fu Leng's authority and reacted in different ways. Some submitted in public while quietly aiding those who had the courage to fight back. A few were openly rebellious, following the Black Lion as he struggled to fight back. The Obsidian Legions chased Toturi's Army across the mainland and burned out any safe haven they found.

One area remained openly defiant to Fu Leng's forces. A visible fog rolled over the mountains of the Dragon Clan. Mirumoto Hitomi opened the crystal prison deep within Kyuden Hitomi and released Shosuro into the world. She made a pact with Shosuro and Goju Adorai, pledging the Dragon Clan to serve the Lying Darkness in return for protection against Fu Leng's reach. Anything that approached the mountains became consumed by the shadows, and the Lying Darkness grew steadily in power...

Year 1129

- Fu Leng uses his mastery of dark magic to resurrect the ravaged body of Doji Hoturi. The undead creation is even more dangerous and powerful than he was in life. Fu Leng appoints the abomination as his new Obsidian Champion. He resurrects Otaku Kamoko and Isawa Tsuke as well, perverting them to his allegiance.
- Fu Leng turns his crippled brother Togashi into a trophy of his victory over Rokugan. He rips off Togashi's arms and legs and nails him to a wall deep within the Imperial palace, but refuses to let him die. The Dark Emperor hides his brother behind impenetrable wards that will kill anyone but himself, then visits once a month and gloats over his victory.
- The Obsidian Champion, Hoturi the Heartless, marches to the Crane lands and declares they must submit to his will. His brother Doji Kuwanan challenges the undead creature to a duel. Hoturi easily wins and then burns the Crane castles to the ground. Almost the entire Crane Clan is wiped out, but Daidoji Uji manages to escape, swearing vengeance.
- Mirumoto Hitomi returns to Kyuden Togashi and renames it Kyuden Hitomi. She ransacks Togashi's papers and finds evidence of a crystal prison deep within the castle. She opens it and releases Shosuro, the original Scorpion Thunder corrupted by the Lying Darkness. After a night of discussion, Hitomi decides to ally with the Darkness. The power of the Shadow consumes the mountains of the Dragon Clan, hiding all in visible darkness.
- Fu Leng appoints his own Dark Council of Five. Yogo Junzo becomes the Dark Master of Air. Kuni Yori assumes the title of Dark Master of Earth. The undead Isawa Tsuke resumes his post of the Dark Master of Fire, and a young Kitsu Okura accepts the Shadowlands Taint to become the Dark Master of Water. A young man named Daigotsu, actually a son of the Hantei line who was stolen by the Bloodspeakers, arrives at Fu Leng's side and becomes the Dark Master of the Void.
- The Dark Council marches on the Phoenix lands and defeats the already badly-depleted Phoenix Clan. They capture Naka Kuro, the Grand Master of the Elements, and drag him before their Dark Emperor. Fu Leng imprisons the former Grand Master's soul in a shard of Tainted crystal, tormenting Kuro's soul for eternity.
- Akodo Toturi and Hida Yakamo rally the true Rokugani for a battle that might turn the tide. When the Obsidian Legions march toward the north to subjugate the Yobanjin, Toturi seizes the initiative.

The remaining forces of the Crab Clan, the Scorpion Clan, the Unicorn Clan, Toturi's Army, and the Naga march against the undefended Imperial Palace. However, Fu Leng reaches into the heart of Jigoku and summons powerful new creatures to the battlefield: the ashura. These entities are stronger, faster, and deadlier than any oni the Rokugani have ever seen, and the battle is a complete rout. Isawa Kaede gathers the survivors and uses her power to transport the heroes off the battlefield.

- Horiuchi Shoan leads the remnants of the Unicorn Clan out of Rokugan. She reunites with the Moto tribes at the city of Medinaat al-Salaam. Once she recognizes the noble souls burning in her long-lost cousins, she abdicates the leadership of her clan to the Moto leader, Moto Gaheris.
- The Water Dragon returns to the mortal realm and appears in a remote peasant village in the Scorpion lands. The Dragon leaves the geisha Hatsuko and her baby in the village where he will grow up in safe obscurity.
- The Celestial Dragon recognizes that Fu Leng's rule over Rokugan could extend Jigoku's influence to Tengoku itself. He severs all ties between Ningen-do and Tengoku and leaves the mortal realm unprotected by any heavenly influence. In response, the Thunder Dragon leaves Tengoku and descends to Ningen-do to stay alongside the humans.

Total Reign

The Celestial Dragon suddenly roared, shaking the Heavens. "It no longer matters! There is no more balance! A thousand years of darkness will consume Rokugan! We must close the hole in the sky and turn our backs upon the mortals."

The rulers of Tengoku did not wish to abandon the mortal realm, but they realized there was nothing they could do without risking corruption of Tengoku itself. Ningen-do was lost to Jigoku's influence. The Celestial Dragon severed all ties between the mortal realm and the Celestial domain, hoping one day the turning of fate would allow a chance to repair the connection. However, the Thunder Dragon—the patron of heroes, and the one dragon who loved humanity above all others—chose to stay in Ningen-do, giving up its own immortality in order to be able to inspire those few heroes who might yet be able to reclaim a better future for mortals.

Fu Leng had initially considered exterminating humanity and ruling solely over the forces of the Shadowlands, but the prospect of tormenting humanity forever ultimately held more appeal. He created a large standing army of mixed human and Shadowlands forces to crush rebellion. The god also realized he would retain his divinity until the Twelfth Black Scroll was opened, so he ripped it out of Togashi's body and hid it within the Empire. Rumors of the Twelfth Black Scroll's location spread quickly among the survivors, and many brave or foolhardy samurai chased these rumors with forlorn hope, perishing to numerous traps and ambushes set by Fu Leng's followers.

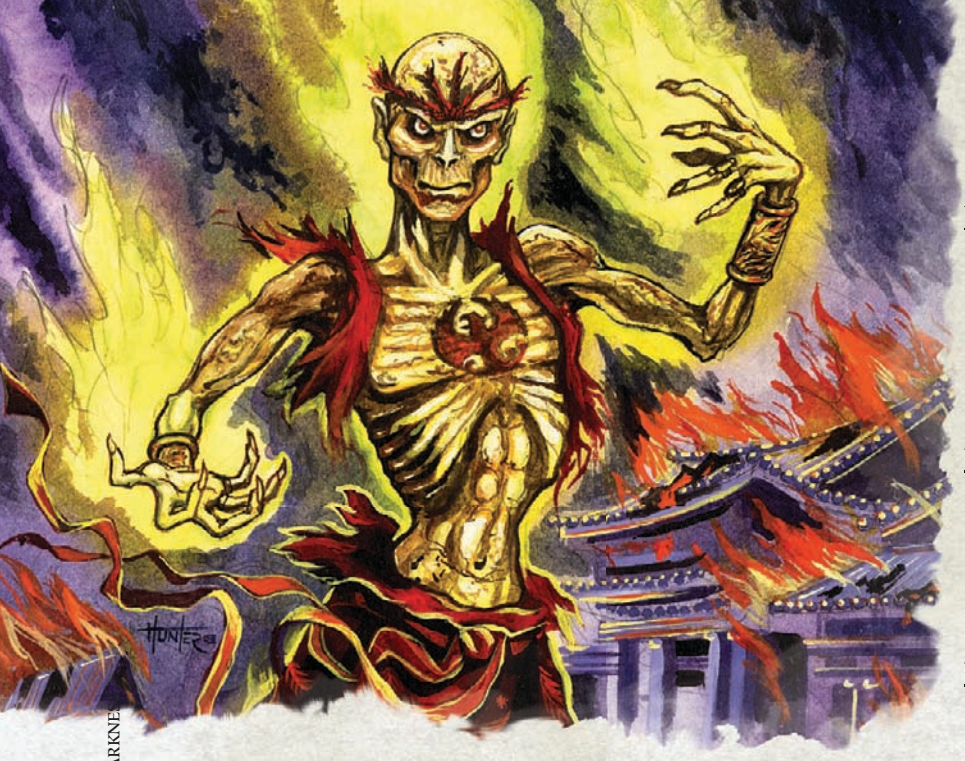
With his divinity secured, Fu Leng set his followers against any who might oppose him. His new Dark Council of Five made it their highest priority to hunt down Shinsei's descendent; they eventually killed the Hooded Ronin, but the crafty monk had already passed the mantle of Shinsei's wisdom to another. The Dark Emperor also sent vicious oni to track the Oracles of Light, who had lost their powers and were hiding from carnage besetting the Empire. Without the protection of Tengoku, each Oracle fell to the ravenous hordes. Only Isawa Kaede survived, for she had gained the patronage of the Dragon of Thunder in place of the absent Void.

The Bloodspeaker Cult had always been strong (if usually unknowing) allies to Fu Leng's cause, but now that he was in power the Dark Kami knew he could no longer trust them. He decided to eradicate the organization before it could betray him. His crazed Council of Five was eager to do his bidding and gleefully scourged out every hidden branch of the Cult of the Blood Red Moon. However, in this case Fu Leng's paranoid countermeasure proved more expensive than he could have anticipated. Iuchi Shahai was one of the Bloodspeakers murdered in the massacre. When Daigotsu, the Dark Master of the Void, heard his secret lover was dead, he swore eternal vengeance against the Dark Emperor. Daigotsu went into hiding, intent on creating an organization stronger and more powerful than the Bloodspeakers ever were, dedicated to the destruction of Fu Leng.

While Daigotsu's treachery posed a threat for the future, in the present Fu Leng had exterminated almost all threats to his reign. Only Toturi's Army remained to oppose the Dark Emperor.

Year 1130

- The creature called Shokansuru destroys the Maw's purified skull. Fu Leng immediately summons the Oni Lord to the mortal realm and unleashes it to terrorize the world. The Maw attacks the Crab



lands, seeking revenge for its previous defeat. The Obsidian Legions destroy every Crab castle and slaughter all remaining Crab samurai who have not gone into hiding. Hida O-Ushi leads the survivors out of the Crab lands. Without the presence of the Kaiu Wall, Shadowlands creatures pour into Rokugan.

- Fu Leng decides to keep the Rokugani free of the Shadowlands Taint so they will remain weak, frightened, and powerless.
- Toturi leads his army through the mountains of Rokugan's western border, taking supplies and striking out whenever he can. Despite his efforts he does only minimal damage to Fu Leng's Empire.
- Fu Leng senses that the Heavens are retreating from the world. He sets his monsters loose with orders to hunt down the Oracles of Light. The creatures' first victim is Hida Osuno, Oracle of Earth. The Oracle is powerless without the presence of the Dragon of Earth and quickly dies.

Year 1131

- With the Void Dragon retreating from Ningendo, the Thunder Dragon gives its powers to Isawa Kaede, transforming her from the Oracle of Void to the Oracle of Thunder. She immediately uses her power to find Hida Yakamo and Daidoji Uji, bringing them to Toturi's camp.
- Romance blooms between Kaede and Toturi.
- The Dark Emperor's minions contact the countries outside of Rokugan, initially proposing trade. The foreigners accept with caution, as they have never previously been approached for official interaction. The Ivory Kingdoms, the Senpet Kingdoms, and Medinaat-al-Salaam establish limited commerce with Rokugan, running it through the Hub Villages surrounding the Imperial city.

Year 1132

- Ikoma Ujiaki tracks the vast majority of the Naga to the city of Iyotisha. He attacks the city with the Obsidian Legions, supported by a score of ashura. They rip through the Naga's defenses and annihilate the city. Only a dozen survivors escape, led by the jakla Shashakar. They join Toturi's forces.

Year 1133

- The Dark Masters finally hunt down the Hooded Ronin in the Akodo lands. Their combined might overcomes Shinsei's descendent. The ronin Sanzo, the last human to speak to the Hooded Ronin, accepts the mantle of Shinsei.

Year 1134

- Fu Leng orders his Dark Council of Five to destroy the Bloodspeaker cult. The Council eagerly complies. Isawa Tsuke, Dark Master of Fire, finds Shahai—the leader of the Bloodspeakers—hidden in former Unicorn lands. He gleefully dismembers Shahai. Her lover Daigotsu arrives shortly after the deed and crushes Tsuke with the full extent of his power. He turns his back on Fu Leng and swears to one day topple the Dark Emperor.
- Isawa Tsuke heals from his injuries several months after the battle. He returns to Otosan Uchi and reports the traitor's actions. Shokansuru joins the Dark Council of Five in Daigotsu's stead.
- Yoritomo sends an invitation to the various resistance movements still alive in mainland Rokugan: join him at the Islands of Spice and Silk, and forge a great alliance against Fu Leng. Several groups make their way across the sea to join the Mantis.

Year 1135

- The Dark Council gives the Emperor a dire warning: Fu Leng will stay immortal as long as the Twelfth Scroll remains sealed, but the physical body of Hantei XXXIX will eventually perish. He must find another Hantei body to possess to continue his reign. He orders his men to find the traitor Daigotsu, who he knows to be of Hantei blood. In the meantime he decides to sire an heir with his prisoner Hantei Kachiko.
- Bayushi Aramoro accepts the Taint and becomes the Emperor's newest bodyguard. He visits Hantei Kachiko and tells her the true reason behind Fu Leng's recent actions. Kachiko decides to counter the Emperor's desires by making sure his heir will have no Hantei blood, protecting the Empire by cuckolding Fu Leng together.

Year 1136

- Kachiko gives birth to a girl, Hantei Yakusoku. She is born with the Shadowlands Taint, satisfying Fu Leng's scrutiny. Aramoro sees his new daughter but his own Taint has advanced so much that he cannot

find joy in it. He disappears into the wilderness and is soon consumed by the madness of the Taint.

- Shiba Tsukune finds a hidden cache of scrolls that describes a legendary Phoenix creation from the dawn of the Empire: Isawa's Last Wish. She travels to the Phoenix lands to find it, hoping it can be a weapon against Fu Leng. She eventually locates the Last Wish but discovers it is incomplete. During conversation with the childlike artifact, Tsukune asks it to bring Isawa Tadaka's soul back to the mortal realm. The Last Wish merges with Tadaka's soul and completes itself, taking his outward form.
- Ikoma Ujiaki orders Kitsune Ryosei, daimyo of the Fox Clan, to cut down the sacred Kitsune Mori forest to fuel the Obsidian Legions' demands for lumber. When she refuses, he unleashes the might of the Legions against the Fox Clan. They obliterate Kyuden Kitsune, Kitsune Mori, and the Fox Clan in one swift move.

The Last Days of Toturi's Army

"How can you know who my father is?" the boy hissed.

"You share the same eyes, Kaneka," Toku answered. "I have never met another with the same eyes as Akodo Toturi."

Toturi tried everything to reverse the terrible course of events. He even sent Hida Yakamo to try to make an alliance with the Lying Darkness, for while the shadowy Goju were foul monsters in their own right, Toturi viewed them as the lesser of two evils. With the power of the Lying Darkness on his side he could become a real threat to Fu Leng's Empire. Unfortunately, Goju Hitomi had no intentions of working with the rest of Rokugan; she killed Yakamo and was struck down in return, leaving her clan wholly under the control of the Lying Darkness.

With the death of yet another Thunder, Toturi was running out of options and had no choice but to retreat to the Islands of Spice and Silk. For a time that offered refuge, but eventually word came of a massive impending assault on the islands. He devised a plan of retreat to the Ivory Kingdoms, but in his heart he knew the Dark Emperor would never let him leave the islands alive. Instead, he laid plans to evacuate as many of his followers as possible.

Fu Leng's combined forces descended on the Islands of Spice and Silk, confronting Toturi and his remaining soldiers. Hundreds of ashura descended from the air. The Dark Council of Five struck down Isawa Kaede, capturing her youngest son as a prize for their foul master. Hoturi the Heartless defeated Toturi, only to be ambushed and slain in turn by Daidoji Uji.

When the battle ended, the Islands of Spice and Silk were no more. With one fell swoop, Fu Leng had eradicated the last group of insurgents fighting against his reign. The remnants of the Mantis Clan and Toturi's son Sezaru fled across the sea to the Ivory Kingdoms, where the dark god could not follow. Still, Fu Leng believed he was safe. While the Dark Emperor finally sat back in ease, the remaining free Rokugani hid and prepared to carry on the struggle.

Year 1137

- The Legion of Jigoku destroys the mountain hideouts Toturi has used for the previous six years. There are no more places in mainland Rokugan to conceal an army the size of Toturi's force; he finally decides to take the risk and marches across the Empire, fleeing to the Islands of Spice and Silk.

Year 1138

- Hitomi defeats Goju Adorai and takes the power of the Darkness, re-naming herself as Goju Hitomi. She takes over the Dragon Clan's consciousness, reducing the entire clan to faceless slaves.

Year 1139

- Isawa Kaede discovers Daigotsu protecting a village from the gaze of Fu Leng. Though she is wary of his former allegiances, she brokers an uneasy alliance between the former Dark Master of the Void and Toturi's Army.

- One of Toturi's surviving followers, Toku, discovers the hiding Forest Killer bandit gang, whose ranks include a young boy named Razor Wind. He informs Razor Wind that he is actually Kaneka, illegitimate son of Akodo Toturi. Toku dies to protect the boy from Obsidian Legionnaires.
- Hida Yakamo travels to the Dragon lands to try to gain an alliance with Hitomi, using the protection of the Jade Hand to safely climb into the Shadow-corrupted mountains. Hitomi refuses the alliance outright and the sworn enemies kill each other. With Hitomi gone, Goju Adorai re-emerges and takes control of the Dragon Clan.

Year 1140

- Togashi Mitsu travels to the Dragon lands to find Yakamo's fate. He encounters a tattooed man named Togashi Shunsen who is still struggling against the power of Nothing. Shunsen gives him the Jade Hand from Yakamo's corpse and begs him to find a way to free the Dragon Clan.

Year 1141

- A shugenja prodigy named Kuni Osaku joins forces with the Shashakar to cleanse the Great Sea Spider of its Shadowlands Taint. Free from the Taint's corruptive influence, the huge creature patrols the seas between the mainland and the Islands of Spice and Silk. It destroys all ships led by Fu Leng's forces, protecting Toturi's forces from invasion.

Year 1143

- The Herald of Fu Leng, Otaku Kamoko, discovers the Unicorn Clan's hiding place in the Burning Sands. She leads an army of Dark Moto into the desert to destroy her former clan, but is overwhelmed by the unexpected strength of her prey; the Unicorn have quietly grown in strength and power while Fu Leng's eye passed over them. Moto Gaheris' son, also named Gaheris, strikes her down but succumbs to his own wounds soon after. His young son Moto Chagatai assumes command of the Unicorn.

Year 1144: The Battle of the City of Lightning

Daidoji Uji sends word to Toturi that the combined might of Fu Leng will soon descend on the Islands of Spice and Silk. Toturi immediately makes plans to retreat, but he is unprepared for the sheer strength of the Dark Emperor's assault. The Maw, Hoturi the Heartless, Ikoma Ujiaki, the Obsidian Legions, the Dark Council of Five, and hundreds of ashura descend on the city, easily overcoming the Great Sea Spider's resistance.

The Dark Council of Five overwhelms Isawa Kaede, but she has already passed on the mantle of the Oracle of Thunder to her eldest son Sezaru. The Dark Council captures her youngest son, Jiro, to present to Fu Leng.

Hoturi the Heartless confronts Toturi before he can reach the escape fleet. Hoturi realizes the death of the legendary Toturi will be worth more to Fu Leng's cause than the slaughter of any number of refugees, so he allows Toturi's followers to leave in return for a one-on-one duel with the Black Lion. Toturi is skilled as few mortal men can be, but the Shadowlands Taint gives Hoturi the edge against his former friend. Toturi dies, but the Heartless Crane has no time to enjoy his victory. Daidoji Uji ambushes him with a secret weapon given to him by the Kolat: a vial of ashura blood. It explodes in Hoturi's chest, killing him instantly.

The youth Kaneka appears by Toturi's side as he lies dying. Toturi is happy to finally see his son before his death and asks him to become the next leader of Rokugan; Kaneka promises his dying father he will never abandon the Rokugani people.

Yoritomo and his fleet flee the islands, carrying the remnants of Toturi's army and his son Sezaru. They are intercepted by the Dark Master of Water, Kitsu Okura, and the ashura at his command. Sezaru grants Yoritomo power from the Dragon of Thunder to repel the invaders; he slays Okura and many of the ashura, saving the fleet. The battle leaves Yoritomo on the brink of death; his vassal Matsuo takes command and leads the fleet toward the Ivory Kingdoms, hoping to find refuge.

- Daidoji Uji takes young Kaneka under his wing after the battle and decides to teach him all of his skills. The pair travel back to the mainland together and join the many small resistance movements still hidden across the countryside.

- The youngest son of Toturi and Kaede is brought to the Imperial Palace by the Dark Council. Fu Leng decides to adopt and keep the boy as a reminder of his greatest victory. Years later at his gempukku, Jiro will assume the name Hantei Naseru.
- Hakumei, Daidoji Uji's star pupil, appears on the mainland weeks after the battle. She seeks the Kolat's Master Tiger, Akodo Kage, and finds refuge among the Kolat for herself and her young charge: Toturi's daughter. Years later, the daughter will claim the name Akodo Tsudao during gempukku.
- Yoritomo finally recovers after his brush with the power of the Thunder Dragon and finds himself in the Ivory Kingdoms along with the other refugees. Toturi's son Sezaru is filled with the power of the Oracle of Thunder, but he is still a young child. Yoritomo decides to mentor the boy until he is ready to utilize his full powers.

Year 1146

- Fu Leng begins plans to conquer the other Spirit Realms. An off-shoot tribe of Tsuno dwelling in Yume-do fight his forces for months before they are defeated. Fu Leng crafts a powerful nemuranai to bind the Tsuno race to his will: a jewel that controls the boundaries of Yume-do.

Year 1150

- Akodo Kaneka recovers old texts from the Empire's ancient past. Based on the documents he assumes the title of Shogun, indicating his desire to escalate his war against the Dark Emperor.

Year 1155

- Fu Leng sends an order to the Immortal Caliph of Medinaat-al-Salaam: join the Empire or die. After weighing her options, the Caliph surrenders. Fu Leng sends the Tsuno to assist her as a reward. The Caliph immediately begins hunting down the Unicorn within her realm.

The Iron Crane's Last Fight

Daidoji Uji travels to the Shining Jewel of the Desert to find the Unicorn. He finds a city overrun by demons: the Immortal Caliph has let the Tsuno loose in the city, killing dissidents and every Unicorn she can find. Uji meets Moto Chagatai and conveys Kaneka's offer of an alliance, but Chagatai refuses to leave the city until the Caliph and her unjust reign is ended. Uji decides his only option is to kill the Immortal Caliph.

Uji and Chagatai assault the Caliph's palace. She is a khadi of great power, and the fight proves long and difficult. Finally, Uji destroys the jewel that controls the Tsuno, shattering the boundaries of his world. He is flung out of the Realm of Dreams and reappears in the Realm of Thwarted Destiny. His time in Fu Leng's nightmares world is over, and he becomes the one and only person from the Thousand Years of Darkness to enter the real world.

It may be noted that Uji's story is a product of the concept of the Thousand Years of Darkness as existing solely in the dreams of Fu Leng. However, in a campaign set in the Thousand Years era, the GM may prefer to take the more direct—and frightening—approach of depicting it as the "real" world and the canonical history of Rokugan as a dream or a might-have-been. In that case, Uji does not escape the world of Fu Leng's victory, because there is no escape—this is the only real world.

- Moto Chagatai fulfills his promise to the fallen Daidoji Uji and leads his small band back to Rokugan. It is the first time the Unicorn Clan has been in Rokugan in over twenty-five years. Chagatai soon meets the Shogun of Rokugan and promises to be a faithful ally.

The Clans and Factions During the Thousand Years of Darkness

Each Great Clan had to struggle to survive after the failed Day of Thunder. It was clear they had only two choices: surrender to their greatest enemy or run from his monsters. In an open fight, the Rokugani would simply lose again and again. Each faction reacted differently as they forged their path into the new world.

The Crab Clan

"Now that Jigoku marshals its forces around us, we must remain vigilant at all times. Luckily, we Crab have plenty of practice."

—Kuni Utagu

The samurai of the Crab Clan were once stalwart defenders against the forces of the Shadowlands. When the Day of Thunder went horribly awry, the Crab warriors were at a loss as to how to proceed. How could they defend the Empire when the Empire itself had succumbed to corruption? After weeks of uncertainty, the Crab decided to stand their ground, refusing to submit to the inevitable. They manned their fortifications, bolstered their defenses, and fought every Shadowlands creature that crossed their lands. For a year the Crab held out, interrupting communications between the Imperial Palace and the Shadowlands and disrupting Fu Leng's troop movements.

When the disruptions grew too much to ignore, Fu Leng turned his full attention toward the Crab. He resurrected the Maw from the depths of Jigoku. The Oni Lord was only

too eager to gain revenge against those who had defeated it centuries before. The rebellious Crab were caught between rampaging oni hordes from the south and Ikoma Ujiaki's corrupt samurai from the north. The campaign lasted only weeks. The castles of the Crab were razed to the ground, and the Maw gloated over the ashes.

After their crushing defeat, the remaining samurai of the Crab Clan separated into three groups. The first group believed they had to unite with the rest of Rokugan to stand a chance. These Crab followed Hida Yakamo as he joined Toturi's Army. The second group refused to abandon their homeland and waged guerilla resistance from the Twilight Mountains. Hida O-Ushi led this group for many years. These rebels had a difficult time surviving on their own, however, as they were hounded constantly by Fu Leng's demons.

The final group decided Fu Leng's armies were too strong to meet on the battlefield. Only the most insidious tactics could be effective, and in their minds the only possible source of help were the legendary masters of conspiracy: the organization known as the Kolat. Yasuki Taka revealed his affiliation with that sinister group and led those who shared his beliefs to the Hub Villages, where the Kolat had established themselves under Fu Leng's nose. These Crab quickly shed their moral scruples and did everything they could do to damage the Dark Emperor's reign.

Sadly, the Crab Clan also supplied a very large part of the Obsidian Legions' numbers. Hida Kisada's previous alliance with the Shadowlands provided Fu Leng's army with a large supply of corrupted Crab samurai. The pure Crab fought beyond their limits to correct their failure, but they did not have enough strength to overcome their dark brothers. The years of constant battle took their toll. Hida Yakamo and Hida O-Ushi both perished without any sign of possible victory.

The Crab Clan has always been defined by stubborn courage, a stalwart refusal to give in against the Shadowlands. In the year 1155, under the reign of Fu Leng, the Crab continue to fight though there seems to be no hope and no end in sight. As the Shogun Kaneka raised his banner, many of the surviving Crab flocked to his side, while others continued to fight from the ruins of the Crab lands, unwilling to ever give up on their homeland.

The Crane Clan

"The massacre of the Crane Clan was a tragedy. One man works tirelessly to make sure that their name will not disappear into the history books. Daidoji Uji is the last Crane. He is a legend and myth in the flesh."

—Akodo Toturi

The story of the Crane Clan after the Day of Thunder is defined by tragedy and revenge. Fu Leng killed Doji Hoturi during their fateful battle, ripping a hole into the Crane Clan Thunder's chest. He turned insult to injury by resurrecting Hoturi with his most powerful magic. Hoturi the Heartless retained all his skills with the blade, but none of his kindness or mercy. The undead samurai was the strongest warrior in Fu Leng's service, and the Dark Emperor appointed him as his Obsidian Champion.

Hoturi the Heartless held all of the faults attributed to the Crane Clan, but magnified a thousand times. He was obsessed with becoming perfect in form and style. His twisted mind came to the conclusion that the existence of any other Crane reflected poorly on him. There was only one possible solution. Hoturi led an army of demons and Lost to his former home, Kyuden Doji. His younger brother Doji Kuwanan challenged the undead abomination to a duel, but was immediately struck down, and the slaughter of the Crane Clan followed.

A handful of Crane samurai were able to escape in the chaos, but Hoturi's relentless hunt knew no limits. The Obsidian Champion searched for the survivors personally and took great pleasure in watching each Crane die on his blade. Fu Leng allowed his Champion to indulge himself for many months, but finally grew impatient when Hoturi showed no sign of returning. Eventually Fu Leng recalled Hoturi to his side, and the Heartless was unable to kill the very last Crane: Daidoji Uji, lord of the Daidoji, the Iron Crane.

Uji joined with Toturi's Army and took eager students under his wing to create a new Crane Clan. Uji swore to kill Hoturi and continue the Crane name, but he would only do so on his own terms. The Crane Clan had previously been defined by social grace and dueling form, but Uji's new Crane Clan was different: he trained his students in covert attacks, sabotage, and guerilla tactics.

Through Uji's efforts the Crane Clan survived into the new world, but the clan archetype of the graceful, civilized samurai soon faded into memory. Those who called themselves Crane samurai now were dirty fighters who would not hesitate at the cruelest tactic to defeat the enemy. Modern Crane samurai lamented the loss of their identity, but they also knew the truth: the world ruled by Fu Leng needed fighters, not artists, and if the Crane were to provide art and culture in the future they would first need to survive and to triumph.

The Dragon Clan

"Join us..."

—Goju Adorai

Mirumoto Hitomi's hatred toward Hida Yakamo, her brother's killer, and toward Togashi for allowing it was what brought forth the Thousand Years of Darkness. She stepped away from her destiny as the Dragon Clan Thunder and left the rest of Rokugan to die. After that fateful day, she returned to her home in the mountains and planned its defense. She knew her home had no real hope against the full might of Fu Leng's armies. She watched the Crane lands burn and knew she needed a drastic solution to keep her clan's independence.

She found her answer deep within Kyuden Hitomi. A prison of pure crystal held the original Scorpion Thunder, Shosuro. Hitomi released the creature and listened to its subtle words. The Goju could save the Dragon Clan, Shosuro whispered. The power of Nothing was strong enough to stand up to Fu Leng's armies. If the might of the Dragon Clan joined the Lying Darkness, the combination would be unstoppable.

Hitomi agreed, and the entire Dragon Clan fell to the Lying Darkness. Goju Adorai, the avatar of the Shadow, came to dwell in Dragon lands and ruled the clan alongside Hitomi. The Shadow soon grew exponentially in power, and Fu Leng decided toppling the Dragon Clan would cost too much; he pushed the problem away for another time. The years passed while the Dragon Clan grew steadily stronger, all of the Dragon acting as one consciousness controlled by Hitomi and Goju Adorai.

Despite her corruption and madness Hitomi did not lose her sense of ambition. She imprisoned Adorai and claimed full control of her clan. But when Hida Yakamo confronted and killed her, Adorai escaped and regained control of the Dragon. Once he asserted domination over the clan, there was nothing left of the Dragon... or so he thought.

Many former ise zumi did not lose their personalities completely. They retained a bit of themselves, and they knew Adorai was the doom of their clan and possibly of creation itself. While they could not do anything overt against their master, they rebelled in any way they could. They stole the Jade Hand, a powerful nemuranai that resisted the power of the Lying Darkness, which had been left behind after Yakamo died. Eventually Togashi Shunsen placed the item in the hands of Togashi Mitsu, one of the last uncorrupted Dragon. If anyone could save the Dragon Clan, Shunsen knew, it would be Mitsu.

Although the vast majority of the Dragon Clan was corrupted by the Nothing, a few travelers and wanderers escaped that fate, most prominently Togashi Mitsu himself. Most of these warriors joined Toturi's Army, but others died in remote villages across the Empire as they stood against the tyranny of the Obsidian Legionnaires.

By the year 1155, the Dragon Clan was technically the strongest faction within Rokugan that was still free of Fu Leng's influence. Shadowlands creatures guarded the border to the Dragon mountains but dared not step inside. These two evil powers stood at an impasse, neither willing to make the first aggressive move. Fu Leng's Empire grew ever stronger, but the Nothing spread its influence where the Shadowlands could not watch. The corrupted Dragon did not intend to challenge the Emperor in a straight fight, but if his great power ever faltered, they would strike without hesitation. After all, the Lying Darkness is nothing if not patient.

The Lion Clan

"The Black Lion has proven to be the best of us. We will follow him to the end of the world... which is sooner than any of us ever expected."

—Matsu Gohei

The Lion Clan had served as the Right Hand of the Emperor ever since the founding of Rokugan, and when the Emperor revealed himself as the lord of Jigoku, the samurai of the Lion were forced to a difficult and divisive decision. Did the oaths they swore bind them to the Empire or to the Emperor? Ikoma Ujiaki decided on the latter and brought thousands of Lion samurai to the service of Fu Leng. These corrupt samurai formed a great portion of the Obsidian Legions, immediately providing the Dark Emperor a force of highly trained and completely loyal samurai.

Unfortunately, those who did not bow to the Dark Emperor were thrown into disarray after their defeat on the Day of Thunder. Their Champion Matsu Tsuko had already committed seppuku, Ikoma Tsanuri was slain by Ujiaki, and Kitsu Toju perished on the Day of Thunder, leaving them no obvious leaders. Without skilled commanders their weakened armies were ineffective, and the Lion suffered many defeats in the days following the Day of Thunder. Finally, Matsu Tsuko's cousin Matsu Gohei assumed command and led the remnants of the clan to the Empire's southern provinces.

The Butcher was never a skilled commander; he had always preferred to throw himself at the enemy with reckless abandon. When he found Toturi's Army he relinquished control of his forces to the Black Lion. Toturi refused to assume the title of Lion Clan Champion, but nonetheless performed all the duties of the office without complaint. The pure Lion accepted him as one of their own and quickly learned to be effective soldiers against their new enemy.

The Lion had been a proud people before the Day of Thunder, and the loss of their pride was painful indeed. Although the priority of the remaining pure samurai was to defeat Fu Leng, many Lion remained more focused on the defense of their name, the last fragment of pride they had left. Nearly half of the Lion Clan had sworn allegiance to the Dark God; no other Great Clan lost so many to willing submission. The pure Lion found it difficult to believe so many of their brethren took their oath to the Emperor to such an extreme, perverting the meaning of it, and they fought relentlessly to defeat their fallen counterparts in the Obsidian Legion. Pure Lion took great risks and suffered many defeats to kill Tainted Lion, only stopping when to continue meant disobeying direct orders. (Ironically, many of the Lion who served Fu Leng quickly grew to hate their own existence. Their strict adherence to Loyalty prevented them from breaking their oaths, and seppuku was no answer to those who could not die except in battle.)

Though the numbers of pure Lion continued to dwindle from year to year, they remained at the forefront of every battle against the Dark Emperor. In the year 1155, the remaining Lion formed a large portion of the new Shogun's armies. Their war would never end as long as one Tainted Lion drew breath.

The Mantis Clan

"Yoritomo led us to this strange land of strange beliefs. Perhaps the kshatriya do not share our customs, but they do not hunt us for them. That is enough, for now."

—Seppun Matsuo

The Mantis Clan officially remained a Minor Clan within the timeline of the Thousand Years of Darkness, for the defeat of the Seven Thunders meant there was no way for Toturi to keep his promise to elevate them to Great Clan status. However, Yoritomo's forces still became an invaluable part of the resistance to the new Dark Emperor. After the Day of Thunder, Yoritomo ordered the Mantis to maintain their mastery of the seas at all costs. Under his command, they ruthlessly destroyed all Rokugani vessels capable of transporting troops to the Islands of Spice and Silk, and maintained a guerilla campaign for months to attack shipyards and prevent the Obsidian Legions from being able to mount an invasion of their home. Conse-

quently, the Islands of Spice and Silk remained a safe haven for rebels and dissidents for over a decade.

The sabotage of Rokugan's fleets protected the Mantis Clan for several years, but eventually the Crab prodigy Kuni Osaku and the Naga jakla called the Shashakar found a better solution. The two managed to purify the Great Sea Spider from the corruptive influence of the Shadowlands Taint. The creature destroyed Fu Leng's ships for years before it was finally subdued again by the Shadowlands. During this extended period the Mantis Clan was able to almost flourish, and certainly fared the best out of any of the clans. Their homeland remained untouched by major battles for more than a decade. Mantis samurai fought alongside Toturi's Army on the mainland, and the clan also conducted guerilla raids along the coast to continue protecting the safety of the home islands. Bayushi Aramasu, the son of Bayushi Aramoro, joined the Mantis clan and traveled to the Ivory Kingdoms in search of allies for the war. He could not rouse the foreigners to action, but his heartfelt attempts did engender sympathy for Rokugan's plight.

After Fu Leng destroyed their homeland, the Mantis Clan sailed away from Rokugan with many of Toturi's survivors, seeking a new home in the Ivory Kingdoms. Despite Aramasu's best efforts to smooth over the situation, the sudden arrival of thousands of samurai alienated the natives. It was a struggle for the Mantis and their companions as well; after centuries of self-confident xenophobia, they found it profoundly difficult to live as homeless refugees among foreigners.

Yoritomo led the Mantis Clan through the chaos and continued to do so until he finally grew too old and was forced to retire. His greatest lieutenant, Aramasu, took control of the clan. By the year 1155, Aramasu had finally managed to win real friendship from some in the Ivory Kingdoms, notably the noble family of the Singh, and prepared to return to Rokugan in force. He could only pray the combined strength of the Mantis and the Singh would be enough to overcome the monsters who ruled their homeland.

The Phoenix Clan

"I searched for a powerful weapon to bring to bear against the Dark God. Instead, I found a lonely soul... and a friend."

—Shiba Tsukune

The Phoenix Clan was on the brink of destruction even before the Day of Thunder. The Council of Five had opened the Black Scrolls and summoned an oni to learn what the Shadowlands held in store for the Empire. Their curiosity unleashed the horror of the Shadowlands Taint upon the clan. Hundreds fell to corruption and madness, and almost the entire Elemental Council died on the Day of Thunder, along with the Clan Champion. By the time the Phoenix retreated from Otosan Uchi their forces were only a pitiful remnant. The Phoenix Clan never recovered from the setback. Shiba Tsukune attempted to rally her forces together with the aid of the Grand Master of the Elements Naka Kuro. She was a natural leader but time and manpower were against her. An army of foul demons marched toward her homeland shortly after Fu Leng ascended to the throne, led by the greatest maho tsukai under the god's command. The Dark Council of Five was determined to show Rokugan that they were the true masters of the elements.

The Phoenix waged a desperate and futile defense against overwhelming opposition. The Shadowlands forces obliterated the defenses in a matter of weeks and razed every castle to the ground. Thousands died. The scant few samurai who survived dispersed into the wilderness and the organized Phoenix Clan was no more. Those who wished to continue the fight joined Toturi's Army, carrying the memory of the Phoenix in their hearts.

The Soul of Shiba sensed the withdrawal of Tengoku from the mortal realm and knew the resurrection of the Phoenix Clan would have to wait for centuries if it was to happen at all. The Soul ordered Shiba Tsukune to hide the Ancestral Sword of the Phoenix deep in the countryside. The rightful scion of the Phoenix might one day uncover the weapon and claim its birthright, but in the meantime the sword—and the Soul—fell dormant without Tengoku's guidance.

The future remained grim for Shiba's followers in the year 1155. Although Shiba Tsukune had found and completed the Last Wish, even she could only be in one place at a time, combating the Obsidian Legion and saving villagers from the predations of Shadowlands creatures. Tsukune was becoming an older woman, although the strength of the greatest nemuranai in the world kept her youthful and powerful, one of the strongest samurai in the realm. So long as she continued her quest across the land, the Phoenix Clan would not be altogether dead.

The Scorpion Clan

"Bayushi promised Hantei he would rule the shadows for his brother. The world has grown darker, but the oath still remains. We will defeat those who threaten the vision of the Empire brought to us by the Kami."

—Bayushi Hisa

The Scorpion Clan was formally disbanded by Hantei the 39th after the failed Coup against the Emperor. Most of the clan took on the trappings of ronin and continued to watch over the Empire, while waging vengeful covert warfare against those who had undone them. However, while they changed the colors they wore, the Scorpion never truly forgot the ancient duty they had sworn to uphold. Thus of all the Great Clans, the Scorpion Clan was uniquely prepared when Fu Leng ascended to the throne—they had been waging a guerrilla campaign for years, but were utterly unwilling to submit to the Shadowlands.

All the same, Fu Leng's triumph came as a terrible blow. The Scorpion had been charged with defeating hidden enemies of the Empire, they had launched the Coup expressly to prevent Fu Leng's return, and now the Dark Kami sat as usurper on the throne at the very heart of Rokugan. Worse still, it was their own Yogo Junzo who had begun unleashing Fu Leng's power by opening the first Black Scroll. They had a responsibility to redeem his actions and to save the Empire, even if that meant destroying it.

Scorpion forces were largely unchanged by the catastrophic turn of events on the Day of Thunder. They had marched onto the battlefield along with the rest of Rokugan and suffered many casualties, but their strength had never truly been measured by the numbers in their armies. The Scorpion were always the most powerful when working off the battlefield, infiltrating the enemy and controlling the flow of information. The only difference now was that the stakes were infinitely higher.

Many Scorpion appeared to submit to the Obsidian Legion and blended in to the new Empire. They told their new masters they wanted revenge for being cast aside after the Coup. Like all skillful lies, these claims had a core of truth within and were thus easily accepted. These Scorpion infiltrators passed along troop movements, important supply lines, enemy plans and tactics, and personnel changes to the resistance. These infiltrators acted with great care, often conveying their information blindly to unknown agents lest they betray the resistance. Moreover, many of these infiltrators had no choice but to accept the Shadowlands Taint in order to win the trust of their new lords in the Obsidian Legion. They did this knowing that no matter how strong-willed they might be, the overwhelming power of the Taint would grind down any resistance over time. Some Scorpion killed themselves before the Taint forced them to turn traitor. Others fled, disappearing into the wilderness and eventually turning into mindless beasts. The most notable of these tragic infiltrators was Bayushi Aramoro, brother of their famed Champion Bayushi Shoju, who submitted to the Taint to be near his true love Kachiko but ultimately became a mindless monster.

The clan's two strongest symbols of ongoing resistance were Bayushi Hisa, who acted as their leader within Toturi's Army, and the Thunder and former Empress Bayushi Kachiko. Fu Leng took the crafty woman as his bride after the Day of Thunder, and although she was horrified by the Dark Kami she knew what role she had to play. Much as with the original Hantei XXXIX, she submitted rather than die in futility. Kachiko was disgusted and horrified by Fu Leng's reign and wept when she could not stop his cruelties, allowing him to see her weakness and fear, knowing he reveled in them. In truth, though, Kachiko used every political and emotional trick she had against the Dark Emperor, working to curb his excesses even without his knowledge. She was a far harder-hearted woman than she appeared, but realized early on that Fu Leng needed her dismayed reactions as approval for his actions. Every day of her life was a constant battle of wits, struggling to contain the malign god's worst actions, and she never lost. She even managed to fool Fu Leng by presenting him with a fake heir; while the fallen Kami believed Kachiko had borne him his daughter, the child's father was actually Bayushi Aramoro. Although he did not realize it, his plan to possess his own daughter to continue his eternal life had been foiled.

In the year 1155 the Scorpion Clan continued to fight from the shadows. Many traveled to the Burning Sands to forge ties with gaijin forces, even beginning conversations with the mysterious Ashalan. Kachiko groomed Hantei Naseru in her subtle and fiendish methods, training him in the best Scorpion traditions. His mind was becoming as razor sharp as Kachiko's own, and she watched with an adopted mother's pride.

The Unicorn Clan

"Rokugan is lost to the demons of its past. We must return and be prepared for the fight of our lives."

—Moto Chagatai

The Unicorn had always felt comfortable traveling outside Rokugan's borders, especially since they were never fully accepted as a Great Clan after their return in the ninth century. All too many other samurai treated them as nothing more than uncouth barbarians. While the Unicorn restrained their resentment at such attitudes, they retained their willingness to explore the outside world, and this saved the clan once doom came to the land.

The Unicorn allied with Toturi's Army in the months after the Day of Thunder. They fought hard, using their advantages of speed and mobility to strike before the Obsidian Legion was fully prepared for them. They attacked supply outposts, camps, and even the Imperial City itself. Shinjo Yokatsu had more than one reason to support Toturi; in addition to serving as Clan Champion, he was also one of the Kolat Masters, and the Kolat saw the rise of Fu Leng as anathema. His superb tactical mind honed the Unicorn into a dangerous mobile force that left only devastation in its wake.

After a few months of guerilla combat, Yokatsu agreed to support Toturi in a decisive strike against the Emperor. The Obsidian Legion had sent half of its forces to the north to conquer the Yobanjin tribes and destroy the Dragon lands, and Toturi took advantage of this to march on the Imperial City. The Unicorn formed a large portion of his multi-clan army and for a time they allowed themselves to hope that victory might be possible. But the battle had barely begun when the skies opened and angels of death descended on razor wings: the ashura, forged from the souls of fallen samurai. They devastated the armies and drove the Unicorn away in rout. When the dust settled, Yokatsu was among the dead.

Without any military guidance, the Unicorn retreated to their homeland and tried to figure out what they could do. It was Horiuchi Shoan, the quiet shugenja-ko whose family name had begin with her, who realized what their next move had to be. "Rokugan is lost to the forces of Jigoku," she told her clansmen. "We are the people of the wind. Let us follow it and find our long-lost cousins." The Unicorn agreed, and a week later the entire clan began an exodus into the Burning Sands.

The trip was arduous. The Desert Moto tribes finally found them deep within the Burning Sands, haggard but alive. The reunion with their Moto cousins was bittersweet, the joy of meeting tinged with the horror of what they had left behind. After a long conversation, the Moto and the rest of the Unicorn merged forces, referring to themselves as the people of the Ki-Rin and adopting the Moto ways. Within a few years the Unicorn became a clan of superb desert warriors, basing themselves out of the city of Medinaat al-Salaam, the Jewel of the Desert. They regrouped, gathered their strength, and waited for the evil they knew would one day follow their tracks.

This retribution came in the form of an undead Otaku Kamoko. The Herald of Fu Leng chased the Unicorn through the Burning Sands, leading the largest Dark Moto army assembled since the Day of Thunder. Moto Gaheris, the Khan of the united Unicorn, coordinated the defense. He used the unfamiliar surroundings and strange desert tactics to confound the superior Shadowlands army. The Unicorn suffered many casualties, but they left their enemy with no survivors. Moto Gaheris and his son, also named Gaheris, were both dead, and Moto Chagatai became the new Khan at the age of six.

Although the Unicorn Clan had repelled the attack, they could not predict the Immortal Caliph's alliance with Fu Leng. The Caliph loosed the Tsuno into Medinaat-al-Salaam and turned the Unicorn haven into a deathtrap. Countless Unicorn samurai died fighting the strange Shadowlands creatures, and finally Chagatai called a retreat. He did not want to abandon his lifelong home, but he knew that something needed to change if his people were to survive. Help came unexpectedly from Daidoji Uji, who arrived in the city and swore to help kill the Caliph

if Chagatai would bring his forces back to Rokugan to aid the new Shogun, Akodo Kaneka. Chagatai agreed.

The Unicorn Clan returned to Rokugan in the year 1155. Their armies were as strong as the rest of the Rokugani resistance forces combined. Moto Chagatai swore fealty to Akodo Kaneka and promised him eternal friendship. Kaneka was happy to have a trusted ally and quickly grew to respect the desert warrior's opinions. Refreshed after their long reprieve from danger, the Unicorn Clan now prepared to help their exhausted brothers carry on the fight.

The Naga

"The humans have lost their empire. We must fight for them now or risk losing everything we have ever worked for."

—The Shashakar

The Naga fought the Foul long before humans ever walked the earth. Their Great Sleep was designed to preserve their race for when the world needed them the most, but on the Day of Thunder they could do nothing to prevent the victory of Fu Leng. The Qamar, who led the Naga armies on that fateful day, knew his dwindling race could not hide from this turn of events. The Naga would be hunted down once the humans could no longer stand against Fu Leng. The Qamar pledged his remaining forces entirely to Toturi's Army. He helped the humans continue the fight, waging hit-and-run raids across the Empire. He taught them of Naga hidden paths and secret holdings amidst many of the forests in the land, places where the rebels could escape detection even from the Obsidian Legions. He shared the Naga weapons of crystal that could wound the resilient monsters of Fu Leng. He adopted the humans as true brothers.

It was not enough. The Qamar and his armies stood with Toturi when they marched to face the Dark Emperor in his city; the skies turned blood red and the ashura flew down, summoned from Jigoku itself. The Qamar had never seen, never even imagined such foul creatures, and the Naga were unprepared for their strength. Some Naga lived to retreat from that battle, but the Qamar, the Kazaq, the Shahadet, the Radakast, and countless other heroes of their race perished. In the aftermath, though they had sworn to help their human brothers, the Naga returned to their forest homes to recover from their losses.

They had barely done so when Fu Leng unleashed his revenge. The Obsidian Legions and the monsters of Jigoku smashed through the Shinomen Mori and razed the Naga cities to the ground. Thousands of Naga died defending their homes, and uncountable others died while still under the effects of the Great Sleep. Only a few dozen warriors escaped with their lives; the jakla called the Shashakar led them, and they rejoined Toturi's Army. One Naga city remained intact: Candas, the city under the sea. It held thousands of eggs, as well as many Naga still affected by the Great Sleep. While the Shashakar helped Toturi to fight, he sent messages to Candas, urging the remaining Naga to hide and wait to defend their last bastion. But either because Fu Leng did not know of Candas, or because he no longer considered the Naga to be a threat, the underwater city survived.

By the year 1155 the Naga have little influence on the ongoing history of Rokugan. Some still fight on with the Shogun Kaneka, though the deep silence of the diminished Akasha has turned them into dour and tragic warriors. Perhaps the last beacon of hope for the race is a young half-Naga girl, named Akasha after the race's collective soul. Born from a mysterious golden pearl that concentrated the essence of the Akasha's dealings with mankind, she is a perfect balance between Naga and human, and stands strong and unbowed by the tribulations of her ancestral race. Akasha fights alongside the men and women of the Shogun's army, and she continues to prove her worth with each battle she wins.

The Imperial Families

"The Dark Emperor Fu Leng is our future, and he will lead us forever into a new prosperous era."

—Miya Satoshi

The Dark Emperor Fu Leng had no need for the Seppun, the Otomo, or the Miya. He set his forces to raze Kyuden Otomo and to kill every Seppun in their homes. The Miya scattered before a similar doom could fall upon their heads. With the Imperials gone, Fu Leng restructured the Empire in his image. He kept a few Imperial sycophants near him, weak and corrupt men like Miya Satoshi who groveled at his feet. Fu Leng often amused himself by having them tortured or executed for no reason, reveling in the torment of the victims and the terror of the survivors.

In truth, when he first took power Fu Leng had no interest in ruling and maintaining the Empire. He intended to simply unleash the wrath of Jigoku on the human world. However, power corrupts everyone, and sitting on the Emerald Throne brought the dark god the realization that he enjoyed keeping humans under his thrall. Empress Kachiko subtly encouraged this tendency, knowing it was the only way to keep humanity alive. Fu Leng decided to keep Rokugan's people powerless and utterly subservient, denying them the strength of the Shadowlands Taint. He would subvert and corrupt everything his siblings had ever created.

Fu Leng placed his own creations in the traditional support positions around him. Hoturi the Heartless served as his Obsidian Champion, much as Doji Satsume had served Hantei XXXVIII. Otaku Kamoko became his Dark Herald, much as the Miya once served. His own Dark Council of Five ensured his dominance over the Elements, and the beautiful Hantei Kachiko became his bride. His subversion of the Empire complete, he turned his attentions toward trivial matters, leaving the Empire to struggle for survival without his direct supervision.

Ikoma Ujiaki, Rikugunshokan of Fu Leng's armies, was assigned to lead the Obsidian Legions. The Obsidian Legionnaires themselves were former samurai, now turned into undead or utterly corrupted by the Shadowlands Taint, and they served with unflagging loyalty. Some of them even continued to believe in Bushido, regarding their oaths to Fu Leng as binding them in the same way as those to previous Emperors. The Legions outwardly resembled a traditional Rokugani army, and maintained strict discipline. The forces of Jigoku were another matter altogether, however. Led by the Oni Lord known simply as the Maw, these forces—sometimes called the Legion of Jigoku—embodied all the chaos and destruction of the Shadowlands Horde. Their massive numbers of oni, goblins, ogres, and trolls rampaged across the countryside at Fu Leng's bidding with no regard to human life. The rebels who fought against the Dark Emperor were always unsure which they preferred to face: the cruel, calculating brilliance of the Obsidian Legions or the raw brutality of the Legion of Jigoku.

The Dark Lord's forces did not wane with the passing years, and in the year 1155 both the Legion of Jigoku and the Obsidian Legions were as powerful as ever. They stood ready to defeat any threat to the Dark Kami's throne, and watched the Shogun's growing armies with barely restrained eagerness.

A World Changed: The Four Winds in the Thousand Years of Darkness

In the canonical history of Rokugan, the reign of Emperor Toturi I is followed by a struggle for power between his four children, each of whom was uniquely gifted and skilled. But in the Thousand Years of Darkness, Fu Leng's ultimate dream of triumph, the children of Akodo Toturi face a very different fate. The dark god rules over all of Rokugan with an iron fist, yet humanity continues to struggle to change destiny. Rebellions continue long after it seems nothing can triumph over the forces of Jigoku; the Rokugani refuse to give up hope despite decades of oppression. And Toturi's children continue their father's crusade long after his death.

Akodo Kaneka: The Bastard

The foremost among Toturi's heirs is Akodo Kaneka, Toturi's son by his geisha lover Hatsuko. The Water Dragon returned the young baby to Rokugan before Tengoku closed its connections to the mortal realm. Kaneka grew up among bandits, but never truly abandoned his honorable nature. Daidoji Uji found the young man and took him under his wing, teaching him about stealth, ruthlessness, and every sort of fighting technique.

Kaneka's natural charisma made him the perfect successor to lead the ruined Toturi's Army. Ten years after the Battle of the City of Lightning, he raised his banner and declared his intentions to unite all rebels against the Dark Emperor. He called himself the Shogun, taking an ancient and theoretical military title never actually used before. His message and Daidoji Uji's reputation drew many followers and the army grew. Although the Iron Crane eventually left Kaneka's side, countless others joined of their own volition, including the newly returned Unicorn Clan. By the year 1155, Kaneka leads the largest resistance army in Rokugan, and carries out guerilla raids against the Obsidian Legions' supply outposts much as his father did decades earlier.

Akodo Tsudao: The Sword

The eldest child of Toturi and Isawa Kaede was nearly killed in the battle that took her father's life. Tsudao only survived because Uji's student Hakumei whisked her away from the battlefield. She protected the young girl and took her to the one place no one would search for her: the Hub Villages, adjacent to the Imperial City itself. Hakumei took refuge among the Kolat. She knew Toturi would not approve of such a dubious alliance, but in her view the Kolat were at least human, making them infinitely preferable to the alternative. Akodo Kage, Master Tiger, initially was uninterested but then succumbed to his own sentimentality and took the young pair into the fold.

Hakumei began to travel across the Empire on missions for the Kolat, while Master Tiger took Tsudao under his wing. Kage molded the young girl into a worthy successor to his own title. He taught her the beliefs of the Kolat, and she learned the arts of assassination and blackmail, as well as how to manage and control covert assets across the Empire. She also mastered the use of the artifact known as the Oni's Eye, though the mysterious nemuranai's effectiveness had greatly weakened since Jigoku spread its influence in the mortal realm. Nor did Kage neglect her martial training; Tsudao learned the Akodo fighting style and Kage gifted her with his own Akodo Dagger. The lessons were difficult at first; despite her dangerous childhood, Tsudao was a kind and honorable girl. But after several raids into the Hub Villages by the Legion of Jigoku, she accepted reality and grimly adapted to her new life.

In the year1155 Akodo Tsudao lives in the Kolat's Hidden Temple within the former Phoenix lands. She bears the title of Master Steel and coordinates the defenses of the Kolat across the land. She is also next in line to replace the ailing Akodo Kage as Master Tiger, which will make her the first Kolat Master to ever wear two titles. Her honorable nature has not fully disappeared, however. She diverts supplies to the Shogun's army and assists Kaneka with anonymous tips. The other Kolat Masters do not know of her altruistic actions, and she does not know if they would approve. She does not care.

Isawa Sezaru: The Wolf

The eldest son of Toturi and Isawa Kaede traveled with Yoritomo and the Mantis Clan to the Ivory Kingdoms after the Battle of the City of Lightning. During the long voyage to the gaijin nation, he became the Oracle of Thunder and adopted his mother's family name to honor her sacrifice. Sezaru had always been a strange boy, and his character only grew stranger after his ascension. The Dragon of Thunder was always within his mind and his strength with the Elements grew exponentially with the Dragon's support. Sezaru helped the Mantis Clan acclimate to their new surroundings and blessed those he believed were becoming true heroes. Though Oracles were traditionally neutral in the affairs of the mortal world, Sezaru chose to directly aid the resistance. After all, the normal rules had been shattered when Jigoku conquered Rokugan.

In 1155, Isawa Sezaru is one of the wisest and most powerful people living in the Ivory Kingdoms. He never joins the Mantis Clan, but is one of Yoritomo Aramasu's strongest advisors. Sezaru helps the Mantis Clan maintain its ancient association with Thunder despite the absence of the Heavens (and the corresponding absence of Osano-Wo, the clan's patron Fortune). Many Mantis shugenja find it difficult to speak to the kami so far away from Rokugan, but Sezaru masters not only Fire and Void but also the power of the Thunder Dragon, teaching Thunder spells to all who can learn them. Most importantly, Sezaru's long battle with mental instability that destroyed him in Rokugan's normal history never develops in the Thousand Years of Darkness. The

constant presence of the Dragon of Thunder soothes his mind's torment and transforms him into a wise and reliable warrior-priest.

Hantei Naseru: The Captive

The youngest son of Toturi and Kaede had the most difficult childhood. He was captured by the Dark Council of Five at the Battle of the City of Lightning. They carried him back to the Imperial City and presented him to Fu Leng as a gift; the young boy believed he would die, and did his best to face his end bravely. But instead, the cruel god decided to keep him as a trophy of his victory against his most stubborn enemy. Fu Leng "adopted" the boy and gave him the Hantei name.

Naseru woke every day believing he would be executed before sunset. The task of actually raising him fell on the Empress Hantei Kachiko. She saw another rare opportunity to damage her husband's dark Empire. She taught her ward everything she knew—which was a great deal, since she had been one of the Empire's greatest political masterminds before the Day of Thunder and necessity had only honed her skills further. Naseru learned how to manipulate the actions of all the Emperor's servants. He learned to wield his emotions as a weapon against the Emperor; he feigned fright or gratitude or worship whenever required. Kachiko sharpened his mind with shogi and go and prepared him for the day that he might, just possibly, be able to strike a blow against Fu Leng.

Naseru's greatest trick, however, came as a surprise to his teacher. Three years after he first came as a captive to the Imperial City, Naseru begged audience with his adopted father. He willingly prostrated himself and swore eternal fealty to the Dark Emperor. Fu Leng was at first amused, as well as no little suspicious of the young man's motives. However, Naseru proved year after year to be a loyal servant. He enjoyed cruel displays of violence and joined in on the Dark Emperor's excessive celebrations. He executed rebels and treated their corpses with utter disrespect. Finally, a decade after Naseru came to Otosan Uchi, Fu Leng accepted the young boy as truly loyal.

In the year 1155 Hantei Naseru is the governor of Ryoko Owari, the city of sin for those loyal to the Emperor. He manages the taxes and supplies in the region with efficiency unseen in any other province. Fu Leng is very pleased with his adopted son's performance and ponders whether Naseru should receive the gift of the Shadowlands Taint. But in truth, the young man has mastered the art of deception and secretly helps the resistance to Fu Leng's reign. Naseru passes along vital information to his half-brother, making sure the Shogun's Army will never be caught by the Obsidian Legions. His continued efforts are known only to two: Hantei Kachiko and Akodo Kaneka. To all other Rokugani the name Hantei Naseru is reviled as a villain and traitor. Naseru accepts that one day a zealous rebel may reach him, but this is the price of the duty he has taken on, and he feels no fear. This role is uniquely his and he will never set it aside even if it means his death.

Rays of Hope for the Enemies of the Dark Empire

The official timeline of the Thousand Years of Darkness extends only to the year 1155, and the future of humanity after that point remains grim. However, there are several groups who still struggle to reverse their dark fortunes, fighting to deny the prophecy of the Day of Thunder and forge their own destiny even amid the triumph of Fu Leng. GMs may use one or more of these groups as the basis for campaigns set in this alternate era.

The Samurai of Rokugan

Some remnants of each Great Clan still exist, fighting against the oppressive power of Fu Leng's monstrous armies. By 1155 most of the survivors have joined forces under the banner of the Shogun, strengthening each other and covering their weaknesses. The Shogun's Army hides along the edges of the Shinomen Forest and the Spine of the World Mountains, trying to avoid detection by Fu Leng's forces. They are not yet strong enough to engage the Dark Emperor's Legions in direct fights, but they watch for the opportunity to do so with success.

Two Great Clans managed to avoid the mass slaughter that afflicted the rest of Rokugan's samurai. The Mantis Clan escapes across the sea to the Ivory Kingdoms, taking many survivors from Toturi's old army with them, but keeps close tabs on the status of Rokugan thanks to spells crafted by Kuni Osaku. The Unicorn Clan spends a generation hiding in the Burning Sands before returning en masse, infusing the Shogun's Army with thousands of willing warriors. With the Mantis returning as well, the samurai of Rokugan can still hope to field an army of real strength, united under one name and one will.

The Kolat

Fu Leng's ascension brought the Kolat's worst fears into existence. They abhor the influence of the Kami on the mortal realm and have turned the full brunt of their conspiratorial machinations against the Dark Emperor. Many of their manipulative tactics no longer work, however, for the people they seek to influence or convert have already fallen to the Shadowlands Taint. The Kolat have been forced to adopt many creative new methods to continue their fight. On the other hand, the conspiracy's infrastructure remains unharmed for the most part and the Hidden Temple is still secure. The Kolat continue to bring more into their ranks, working toward the day when they can destroy Fu Leng's rule.

Daigotsu

The former Dark Master of the Void left the Emperor's service when Isawa Tsuke murdered his lover Shahai. Since then Daigotsu has devoted his entire life to the overthrow of his one-time adopted father. He singlehandedly resurrected the power of the Bloodspeakers and uses them as his personal army, protecting villages from the Obsidian Legions and inducting the peasants into his organization. A potent maho-tsukai, he performs the most despicable actions, things the Shogun's Armies would dare not dream of sullying themselves with. Unlike the canonical timeline, in this era Daigotsu is not yet Lost and retains complete free will. He is probably the most powerful single individual in the resistance (with the possible exception of Sezaru) but he does not contact the other groups. He knows they would fear his nature and his Taint, and would never approve of his methods. But in his own way he is as dedicated as they are, and only death will stop him.

The Twelfth Black Scroll

If the final Black Scroll is ever opened, Fu Leng will come fully into the mortal realm, lose his immortality, and become forever bound to his mortal host body. This would allow the resistance to kill him and put an end to his reign. It is the one action that could completely unravel Fu Leng's victory and end the Thousand Years of Darkness instantly. Unfortunately, Fu Leng is fully aware of the possibility and has taken many precautions to prevent its occurrence.

Because of the Black Scroll's raw power, the Dark God cannot send the item into another Spirit Realm. He is too paranoid to hide it within the Imperial Palace itself, so he has planted the Black Scroll in a remote section of the Empire. He has personally expended a great deal of effort and magical energy on traps, wards, and spiritual guards to defend the Scroll's secret cache. Furthermore, he has hidden many duplicates across the land, usually in places that seem likely hiding places for important artifacts. Those who seek the Black Scroll have thus usually earned very painful deaths, assuming they do not simply give up in despair.

The few surviving samurai of the Hare Clan have vowed to find and open the Twelfth Black Scroll and continue to actively seek it across the land. Few others even bother to try anymore, convinced the quest can only lead to certain death.

Hantei Kachiko's Betrayal

Fu Leng intends to possess another body of Hantei blood to continue his reign. There are only two people with Hantei blood in Rokugan: his current host, Hantei the 39th, and the rebel Daigotsu. To counter this weakness, Fu Leng set out to father a child on his captive Empress Kachiko. Unfortunately, the Empress had seen through his plans and cuckolded him with her bodyguard Aramoro. As a result, her daughter Yakusoku has no Hantei blood within her.

Because the Black Scrolls are not fully opened, Fu Leng can only possess those of Hantei blood. If he waits too long before he tries to possess Yakusoku, his current body may be too old to live on and possess a true heir. This would leave him as an incorporeal ghost with significantly diminished strengths, although he might still be able to possess a later Hantei heir (such as a descendent of Daigotsu) and regain his power.

As of the year 1155, Kachiko's deception has not yet been revealed. She knows that she and her daughter will die as soon as the truth is uncovered, but she is prepared for this, happy to have chipped away one more piece of the Dark Emperor's armor.

The World Outside: The Gaijin Nations

The fall of Rokugan to Fu Leng has transformed the formerly isolationist Empire into an aggressive and expansionary state, ruled by a malignant god-king. As a result, the surrounding gaijin nations are being forced to pay much closer attention to Rokugan, and their actions may well shape the Empire's future.

The Yodotai Empire

The Yodotai have never met a civilization they could not conquer. In the years after the Day of Thunder, the ancient civilization sends its scouting forces toward Medinaat-al-Salaam and the Senpet Empire to survey their defenses. They find easy prey and conquer the Senpet with overwhelming force, subduing the native population. The proud Senpet are slow to lose their identity and fight back as best they can, but the rebels cannot hold out against the might of the Yodotai Empire. Soon, the gaze of the Empire of Conquest moves on eastward to riper targets.

Scouting parties sent to Rokugan have seen unspeakable horrors and monstrous creatures... yet they have also spotted a land full of natural resources, with an oppressed and fearful population. The Yodotai will require several more decades to fully absorb the Senpet into their traditions and customs, but they have already begun preparations for their next conquest.

The Yodotai Empire poses a grave threat to Fu Leng's realm. The Yodotai armies have a natural resistance against magic that would prove very useful against the powers of the Shadowlands. They are highly disciplined and fanatically enthusiastic in battle. Should they march against Rokugan, the death toll on both sides would be catastrophic, and the outcome is impossible to predict. The leader of the Yodotai is absolutely convinced he can conquer any nation and believes his god Conquest demands it. Fu Leng, for his part, cannot imagine any possibility of defeat after his victory on the Day of Thunder. Neither would back down before they were completely destroyed. A war between the two great powers will wreak unimaginable damage on both nations.

It should be noted that a Yodotai attack would not be good news for Rokugan's rebels. The Yodotai do not care about Rokugan's traditions and feel no sympathy for those in revolt against Fu Leng's regime; they will be just as likely to strike down the Shogun's Army as they are to fight the Obsidian Legions.

The Ivory Kingdoms

The overseas country known as the Ivory Kingdoms traditionally had closer ties to Rokugan than most other gaijin countries. They conducted secret trade with the Mantis Clan for centuries. Early in his rule Fu Leng extended a conciliatory hand toward them. He opened officially sanctioned trade between the two countries, routing it through the Hub Villages. For the first time in the Ivory Kingdoms' history, Rokugan seemed to be completely accepting of the differences between their two cultures. It did not matter to the Ivory Kingdoms that the open new Rokugan was ruled by an evil god. After all, the god was a thousand miles across the sea.

This goodwill melted a decade later when the Mantis Clan fled Rokugan and arrived on the Ivory Kingdoms' shores. They told tales of demonic possessions and the vile creatures that now roamed the land. They said the leader of hell itself had usurped power and controlled their former homeland. Many among the kshatriya, the ruling class of the Ivory Kingdoms, were leery of such tales. They seemed too fanciful to be true, and besides, Rokugan's new Emperor seemed more sympathetic to them than those from before. All of the kshatriya noble families rejected the Mantis Clan, except one: the Singh.

Supported by the Singh, the Mantis Clan Champions—Yoritomo and later his successor Yoritomo Aramasu—waged a vigorous political campaign over a decade, slowly convincing many of the other kshatriya families of their desperate need for help to liberate their homeland from the Dark Emperor. By the year 1155, although the Ivory Kingdoms as a whole still trade with Fu Leng's Empire, the Singh have pledged their full support for the Mantis and several other families stand on the edge of the same decision.

Medinaat-al-Salaam

The Immortal Caliph ruled in the Jewel of the Desert for centuries, quelling every revolt that dared attempt to overturn her power. Her ambition and sense of self-preservation grew with each passing decade, but so did her madness. When Fu Leng finally sent out his forces toward her land, the khadi knew she faced strength unimaginably greater than her own. She had already submitted to his greater power when he asked to initiate trade shortly after the Day of Thunder. Now she pledged fealty, joining Medinaat al-Salaam to Rokugan.

The Caliph acted as loyal servant to the Dark Emperor and unleashed her new Tsuno servants against the Unicorn Clan that sheltered in her city. The Jewel in the Desert was no longer a sanctuary to Fu Leng's enemies, and blood ran freely in the streets. But this same decision spelled her doom: shortly after she accepted Jigoku's will, Moto Chagatai and Daidoji Uji killed her, ending her centuries-long tyranny.

In the year 1155, the Jewel of the Desert is a mere husk of its former splendor. After the artifact binding the Tsuno shattered, they rampaged through the city and wrecked terrible destruction. Moreover, the leadership of the city is in flux. Adira, the daughter of the Assassins faction, has become the new Caliph but her rule is fragile and she dares not rouse the anger of Fu Leng's Rokugan. For now, Medinaat-al-Salaam remains a loyal protectorate of the Dark Emperor.

The Ashalan

The ancient race of sorcerers known as the Ashalan saw the danger in Fu Leng's rise to power as soon as it occurred. At the time Fu Leng was occupied with the subjugation of his new Empire, but the Ashalan knew that would not last. They immediately took action to hinder the god's efforts to conquer Rokugan. Several Ashalan entered the Empire covertly and met with Scorpion Clan operatives, offering to help them in any capacity. Sadly, the Ashalan help was not enough to change the inevitable course of events, for the dwindling race was unwilling to risk itself by acting as a concerted whole.

The Ashalan still remain hidden from view in the year 1155. They left Medinaat al-Salaam after the Caliph allied with Fu Leng, retreating to remote havens in the desert and watching the situation unfold. Some do supply the Shogun's Army with a few crysteel weapons, along with intelligence and advice, but their aid is miniscule. The immortal Ashalan will not risk extinction by confronting such a dominant threat. Whether that will change in the future is impossible to say.

Roleplaying in the Thousand Years of Darkness

The Thousand Years of Darkness is the most drastically different setting available in this book, far more so than even the Great Famine or Heroes of Rokugan. Its differences from the canon are simultaneously its greatest draw and its greatest challenge. It is certainly interesting to see a warped version of Rokugan, a land covered in darkness, but many players will not be expecting such a drastically different type of campaign, and they may not appreciate a storyline which casts them as such hopeless underdogs. GMs who want to use the Thousand Years should beware of losing sight of what makes Legend of the Five Rings interesting in their eagerness to use a setting which is so divergent. The following sections discuss various ways in which a GM can focus and develop a campaign using the Thousand Years.

Samurai Drama

Even in the Thousand Years of Darkness, the essential appeal of a samurai game still remains the characters' devotion to Bushido. The world has been flipped upside down with Fu Leng's ascension to the throne, yet the characters should never lose faith in the core of Bushido—at least, not without a severe internal struggle. Admittedly, the characters are waging a rebellion against the throne, but they can justify this as a reaction to the foulness of Jigoku spreading in the heart of the Empire. They must remain true to their morals while denying everything that is fundamentally wrong. Needless to say, not all samurai are able to make this distinction—see the discussion of the Obsidian Legions earlier in this chapter.

The Thousand Years of Darkness also allows the GM to confront samurai with a more unusual source of drama: the reversal of power. A samurai is normally a member of the ruling class in the land, and much of the Code of Bushido concerns a samurai's responsibilities in that role. But if a PC chooses to fight against Fu Leng he is reduced to a rebel, no longer a member of Rokugan's ruling class. How does such a samurai confront his own role now? How does he deal with peasants, who are no longer his subordinates and may be allies against the Shadowlands threat? Such questions can bedevil even the most honorable of samurai.

Red Dawn

Rokugan has lost the battle, but the war is not yet over. There are weaknesses in Fu Leng's kingdom that can lead to his destruction, as outlined in the section "Rays of Hope" earlier in this chapter. The GM can easily build a campaign around quests across the countryside as the PCs attempt to bring the dark god down. Any such campaign will of course be tinged with desperation and fear, since the PCs are complete underdogs facing an overwhelmingly powerful foe. On the other hand, such a campaign has the potential to continue for an extended period as the PCs pursue different leads and possibilities. It should be noted that in a world like the Thousand Years of Darkness, there is no guarantee that heroic effort can succeed (the GM need only read the timeline earlier in the chapter for proof of that). Thus, depending on the preferences of the GM and players, this kind of campaign can end in epic heroism or bitter tragedy, or potentially even both.

Protecting the Land

A samurai's duty is to the Empire, and the Empire is nothing without its people. But now monsters roam the land, Tainted warriors patrol the roads, and little can save the common folk from the whims and predations of Jigoku's agents. Only powerful and unflinching intervention can keep them safe. A campaign built around this theme could be centered on a small region or even a single village, as the PCs attempt to protect it from the forces of the Shadowlands. They would need to deal with attacks from mindless monsters, dangerous "official" attention from Fu Leng's armies and magistrates, the perpetual problem of needing food and supplies, and countless other difficulties. A game set in a single village could depict all

the horrors of the Thousand Years of Darkness without needing to expand into a grander epic, and such small-scale games are ideal for focusing on the human emotional impact of the setting.

Alternate Spirit Realm

The Thousand Years of Darkness is an alternate setting, a different timeline that runs concurrently with the normal timeline for Rokugan. In the official canonical L5R universe, the Thousand Years exists only in Yume-do, wrapped tightly in walls of Spirit Realm jealousy. However, it is not impossible to breach the barrier. Daidoji Uji's interference with the Caliph proved this, as the destruction of Fu Leng's gem opened a rift that sent the Iron Crane from his hellish world to the real Rokugan.

This allows for interesting possibilities. Instead of a campaign set entirely within the Thousand Years, what if the PCs are transported or "warped" into the world of Fu Leng's dream through some dastardly Spirit Realm magic? They would have to figure out how to survive in a world which was a nightmarish perversion of the Rokugan they knew, trying to adjust to the changes in reality and the necessities of survival while searching for a way to leave again. Escape should not be easy, of course, and in the meantime the PCs need to decide whether and how to help the natives of the realm. This situation could be a fun side story for an ongoing campaign, a change of pace that highlights the harshness and strangeness of the Thousand Years setting without forcing the entire campaign to focus on those features.

Notable Personalities of the Thousand Years of Darkness

Most of the heroes and villains who fight through the Thousand Years of Darkness are the same characters as those found in the canonical Clan War and Hidden Emperor settings, and many of the characters from later eras, including the Four Winds themselves, make their mark upon this alternate setting as well. The following NPCs are examples of those most drastically altered from their normal selves, as well as a few who never rose to prominence in the normal timeline but distinguished themselves in this darkened reality.

It may be noted that the Honor Rank for many normal individuals will go down in this world, as they must stoop to less than perfect actions to survive and must learn and do things they would find unthinkable in normal life. Low Skills are widespread among samurai in this setting, for example.

Hakumei

The Cheerful Ninja

Hakumei was born eight years before the Day of Thunder in a Crane village near the Scorpion border. Her parents were simple farmers who had little ambition. War had raged through the Empire ever since her birth, yet the politics and battles of samurai passed her by unnoticed.

Her village was left alone and she enjoyed a happy childhood in one of the most tumultuous periods of Rokugan's history. The ascension of Fu Leng changed things, however. Rumors began to fly after the defeat of the Thunders, and soon Hoturi the Heartless destroyed the Crane castles one by one, but his army did not touch Hakumei's remote home.

Nothing changed in her life until several years after the Day of Thunder. Fu Leng released his basest creatures into the Empire to terrorize the people. Goblins, ogres, and trolls rampaged through the countryside, killing hundreds of defenseless peasants. A pack of wandering goblins strayed into the remote corners of Crane lands and attacked Hakumei's village. The adult peasants took up improvised weapons and stood together to defend their home. The goblins ripped through them as if they were nothing at all. Hakumei's parents hid with her in their house for hours as chaos raged outside, but finally some of the goblins got into the house and murdered Hakumei's parents in seconds. The little girl picked up a knife and backed into a corner, fighting for her life... and killed each goblin as they came to her one by one.

She might have died when the next group reached her house, but by chance or providence Daidoji Uji and several samurai from Toturi's Army were passing by the village and noticed the attack. They drove the monsters back and rescued the precocious girl, the only survivor. Uji made note of her nascent skills and took her under his wing as his student. Hakumei was a fast learner and absorbed his lessons quickly, eclipsing the other surviving Harriers. Within a year she became his lieutenant despite her young age. Uji treated her like his own daughter, and she was happy to show her savior the same affection.

After the massacre at the Islands of Spice and Silk, Hakumei fled the island with Toturi's daughter Tsudao in her care. She did not know where she could go that would be safe for the little girl, and finally chose to turn to the Kolat for assistance. She did not feel a samurai's disgust for the subversive group, for she had never been a samurai. The conspiracy reluctantly agreed to house Hakumei and Tsudao, and in return she performed many covert missions for them.

Despite all the tragedies in her life, Hakumei remains an optimistic person. The dirty deeds she performs in the name of Rokugan do not dampen her spirits, especially since she views her enemies as less than human. She teaches Daidoji Uji's lessons to her own students, passing on the traditions of the Harriers. She is not a samurai, but like Toku before her, she has proven herself worth more than most who bear that name.

Hakumei, Student of Uji

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 4
Reflexes: 5	Willpower: 3	Agility: 5	Perception: 5	

Honor: 5.3 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 4.7*

School/Rank: Daidoji Iron Warrior 3/ Daidoji Harrier 2

Skills: Animal Handling 2, Athletics 5, Battle 3, Courtier 3, Craft: Traps 3, Defense 5, Etiquette (Conversation) 2, Horsemanship 2, Hunting 2, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Knives 8, Kyujutsu 3, Medicine 3, Stealth 7

Advantages: Balance, Clear Thinker, Crafty

Disadvantages: Small

Hoturi the Heartless

Scourge of the Crane

Doji Hoturi was one of the most famous samurai in Rokugan before the Clan Wars. Courtiers across the Empire admired his grace, beauty, and deadly swordsmanship. As the Crane Clan Thunder, he fought against Fu Leng... and perished in the attempt. The dark god resurrected Hoturi as a mockery of the pure warrior he had once been, imbuing the undead creature with a core of hatred and Tainted power. The resulting abomination became one of the most infamous villains in the land, ruthlessly enforcing the Dark Emperor's will.

Fu Leng's first creation was one of his best. He enhanced all of the duelist's physical skills until Hoturi held the strength of five normal men. The powers of Jigoku also warped the warrior's mind, amplifying all of his negative aspects until they dominated his every thought. In many ways Hoturi the Heartless was a perfect caricature of the man he used to be. He held the same memories and mannerisms as he did before his death, he thought in the same way, but everything was twisted into the darkest perversion of his former self. After years of bitter warfare, Hoturi's enemies began to understand the monster's desires.

His every action, they decided, was driven by his three main cravings.

First, he followed the Dark Emperor's every order. The paranoid god could accept no less from his personal bodyguard. Hoturi acted as Fu Leng's representative away from the Imperial City. He enacted the most despicable travesties in his master's name and enjoyed every moment of it.

Second, the Obsidian Champion held a hatred of his past. He reacted with intense violence whenever he met things that triggered memories from before his "resurrection." The Crane Clan bore the brunt of his anger. Hoturi the Heartless begged his master for the opportunity to destroy his former clan, and Fu Leng approved of the intensity of his Champion's desires. Hoturi unleashed his full power upon his kinsmen and slaughtered those who would not flee. Those who retreated were gleefully hunted into oblivion; those who were captured were treated to a long and painful death.

Finally, Hoturi the Heartless was obsessed with destroying the name and memory of Akodo Toturi. Toturi was one of three Thunders who escaped the Emperor's grasp, and Hoturi viewed him as the greatest enemy of his master's new Empire. Hoturi chased his former friend from one end of the realm to the other, and destroyed every refuge Toturi could find. Yet despite Hoturi's greatest efforts, Toturi escaped each time.

In the year 1144 Hoturi led the Obsidian Legions to the Islands of Spice and Silk to corner and destroy the last remnant of Toturi's Army. His troops tore through the defenders with ease, but Hoturi paid the battle no heed. He only wanted to face his former friend in combat. He cornered Toturi and challenged him to a duel for the safety of his followers. Hoturi killed his opponent easily... but he had no time to enjoy his victory. Daidoji Uji ambushed the monster and unleashed a secret Kolat weapon, a vial of ashura blood, thrusting it into Hoturi's exposed chest. The vial exploded, ending the unlife of the Obsidian Champion forever.

Hoturi the Heartless, Obsidian Champion

Air: 4	Earth: 5	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 4
Reflexes: 8		Agility: 7	Strength: 7	

Honor: 0.6 *Status: 9.0* *Infamy: 9.3*

Shadowlands Taint: 6.8

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 5/ Obsidian Warrior 3

Skills: Acting 3, Artisan: Poetry 4, Athletics 6, Battle 5, Calligraphy 3, Courtier 5, Defense 8, Etiquette 6, Horsemanship 7, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 9, Investigation (Notice) 7, Kenjutsu 9, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: Maho 3, Lore: Shadowlands 6, Meditation 3, Sincerity 5, Stealth 4

Advantages: Dark Paragon (Perfection), Heart of Vengeance (Crane Clan)

Disadvantages: Brash, Consumed (Perfection), Jealousy (Akodo Toturi), Lechery, Overconfident

Special Abilities: Undead

Seppun Matsuo

Mantis Rikugunshokan

Seppun Matsuo was born in the lap of luxury as a member of the Imperial families. He attended his favorite school among the Great Clans, the Akodo School, and never wanted for anything. His family arranged a post as an Imperial Magistrate. He wasted much of his youth reaping the boons of his Imperial status. He spent many evenings along the docks of Otosan Uchi, enjoying suspect sake houses and picking quarrels with criminals. He enjoyed pointing out every foible in their illegal acts and invoking their anger. His family protected him from any serious repercussions from illegal duels, and his lazy and carefree life continued unabated.

The time of turmoil leading up to the Day of Thunder was a wake-up call. Matsuo belatedly realized the battles erupting across the land were building up to something greater, and he began to dedicate himself more strongly to his swordsmanship. However, he did not fight in any army nor did he join a cause; he simply patrolled the same docks where he had irresponsibly frittered away his earlier time. When the Shadowlands armies descended upon Otosan Uchi, Matsuo hid at the docks, waiting and hoping for a chance to make a difference. On the Day of Thunder, he finally found his chance, leaping out of hiding to defend a commoner from the predations of an ogre. The peasant ran to safety, and the ogre flung Matsuo into the bay. He floated in the sea for hours, barely clinging to life, until Yoritomo dragged him to safety.

Matsuo adapted very slowly to his new life among the Mantis, but Yoritomo trusted the sincerity he saw in the young man. He placed Matsuo on his personal boat and taught him how to care for a crew and lead them into battle. The intense conflict against Fu Leng's demons forced Matsuo to learn very quickly, and he soon became a capable leader, abandoning the last remnants of his frivolous past. When Yoritomo fell unconscious at the last stand of

Toturi's Army, Matsuo briefly took command of the entire Mantis fleet. Under his orders, the Mantis retreated from the battle and fled to the Ivory Kingdoms.

Matsuo is loyal to a fault, and will do everything in his power to ensure his followers' survival. Though he has been living in the Ivory Kingdoms for decades, he maintains a strict adherence to Bushido and his samurai roots. He serves now as Rikugunshokan to the Champion Aramasu, endlessly training the Mantis army, and is very eager to return to his homeland. He does not know what desolation he may find there, yet he aches to see Rokugan once more, and to lead the Mantis against the full force of Fu Leng to honor the memory of Yoritomo.

Seppun Matsuo, the Pride of the Mantis

Air: 2	Earth: 3	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 3
Reflexes: 4		Agility: 5	Perception: 7	
Honor: 7.0		*Status: 7.0*		*Glory: 6.3*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 2/Yoritomo Bushi 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 6, Commerce 3, Defense 5, Engineering 3, Jiujutsu (Improvised Weapons) 7, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Knives (Kama) 4, Kyujutsu 3, Sailing 4, Sleight of Hand 4

Advantages: Higher Purpose (serve the Mantis), Multiple Schools, Tactician

Disadvantages: Contrary

Kuni Osaku

Genius Shugenja

The burden of destiny can weigh heavily on one's shoulders, influencing every action by its very existence. Kuni Osaku could never enjoy her childhood because she learned early on that her life would be one battlefield after another. She was just a girl when the whispers began. A spirit of the earth kami appeared in the corner of her eye and told her she would become one of the most important warriors in the fight against Jigoku. She would one day turn the tide when darkness claimed the rest of the world. Osaku accepted the whispers and began to prepare for her future, reading scrolls when other children were still playing.

Osaku was still a child when the Clan Wars broke out. She could sense the darkness that was enveloping the Crab Clan and the menace of Jigoku growing on the horizon, but was helpless to change anything around her. All she could do was study harder. After the Day of Thunder the Crab armies returned to their home, defeated and distraught. Osaku and her parents followed Hida O-Ushi into hiding in the Twilight Mountains. Shortly afterwards, her parents perished in a raid by the Maw's undead horde. Through it all, Osaku continued to study and hone her skills as a shugenja. Her connections to the Elements were impressive, indeed almost unparalleled among the Kuni. In saner times, she could have studied under the greatest shugenja in the realm. Instead, she learned from secret

Kuni scrolls as she fled from one hidden camp to the other. Despite the difficulties, she learned dozens of spells from dozens of Kuni shugenja. Most importantly, the earth kami from her childhood continued to remain by her side. It taught her spells that were often unbelievably complex and powerful.

Her greatest accomplishment came after she and the rest of Toturi's Army fled to the Islands of Silk and Spice. She worked together with the greatest surviving Naga *jakla*, the Shashakar, to purify the Great Sea Spider. The monstrous creature had been corrupted by the Shadowlands Taint for generations, and the spell to cleanse it took power from every Element and required many days of constant prayer. The effort nearly killed both the Shashakar and the young shugenja-ko. Its success, however, meant the Islands of Spice and Silk were unmolested by Shadowlands creatures for a decade. Osaku earned great respect from the rest of the resistance and quickly rose in rank.

Osaku is a solemn and straightforward woman; in another age she might have been called beautiful, but in this one she pays little attention to her appearance. Her every sentence is to the point and she rarely smiles. She is one of the strongest shugenja in the realm, and her mastery of Earth magic dwarfs that of the Dark Master of Earth himself. The same Earth kami that advised her in her childhood still remains by her soul, and the familiar presence reminds Osaku that the safety of the Elements themselves hangs in the balance. She serves wherever she believes offers the greatest chance of success against the Dark Emperor's machinations.

By the year 1155, the aging Osaku serves the Shogun as his magical advisor and helps him reach out to the gaijin beyond Rokugan's borders. Despite her advancing age she continues to study and innovate, creating new spells to speak to the kami. His latest spell connects the voices of the Shogun and Yoritomo Aramasu across a thousand miles, and Osaku's efforts are partly responsible for bringing the Mantis back to the mainland. Perhaps now, Osaku hopes, humanity will be able to shake off the yoke of Jigoku's oppression.

Kuni Osaku, Shugenja Prodigy

Air: 3	Earth: 5	Fire: 4	Water: 4	Void: 4
Reflexes: 4		Agility: 5	Perception: 5	
Honor: 5.3		*Status: 3.0*		*Glory: 4.7*

School/Rank: Kuni Shugenja 5

Skills: Battle 2, Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Kenjutsu 4, Lore: Shadowlands 7, Lore: Spirit Realms 4, Lore: Theology 4, Medicine 5, Meditation 4, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft 8

Advantages: Enlightened, Friendly Kami (Earth), Friend of the Elements (Earth)

Disadvantages: Driven (to defeat Jigoku)

Spells: Kuni Osaku has access to most of the Earth spells known to Rokugan and has invented many others, most of which have the Jade keyword.

New Game Mechanics

The following section provides mechanical guidelines for running games set in the Thousand Years of Darkness, as well as a new Path and a few iconic foes and creatures from the era.

Oracles in the Thousand Years of Darkness

After the year 1130, when the Celestial realm withdraws from contact with Ningen-do, most of the Oracles no longer exist in the mortal realm. Only the Oracle of Thunder, Isawa Kaede, remains in Rokugan, and her powers have changed significantly. She and her successors are no longer bound to remain impartial in the fight against Jigoku. They may choose sides and help humans should they choose to do so. Their limitation on using offensive power remains intact; the Oracles can call upon their full powers against others only if they are in personal danger.

The Oracle of Thunder may temporarily grant mortals a fraction of its power, if the mortals are willing to accept the (often grave) consequences. The recipient may perform feats of Celestial might for a short time (the time limit is determined by the strength of the mortal's soul). Afterward the recipient falls unconscious, possibly even dying if the actions were too draining.

In game terms, the blessing lasts a number of Rounds equal to the recipient's Void Ring. During that time the recipient may ignore Wound penalties, and any Void Points spent have their effect tripled (e.g. a +3k3 bonus instead of +1k1). When the blessing expires, the recipient is Dazed for the same number of Rounds and suffers 1k1 damage for each Void Point spent while under the effects of the blessing.

The Enraged Kami

Because the forces of Jigoku have slaughtered many of the shugenja who worshiped them, the kami in Rokugan have become extremely friendly to those who can still speak to them and call on their power. Shugenja casting pure (non-maho) spells within Rokugan gain a Free Raise. Shugenja who case the Commune spell may ask an additional question at no cost.

The GM may also enhance this effect further by specifically invoking the wrath of the kami in dramatic situations (especially in games following a more heroic or cinematic approach).

New Alternate Path: The Acolytes of Thunder

In the Thousand Years of Darkness, the guidance of Sezaru as Oracle of Thunder allows the shugenja of the Mantis Clan to discover new ways to call on the power of Thunder. These discoveries come too late to help the defense of the Islands of Silk and Spice, but during the later Mantis exile to the Ivory Kingdoms they offer the hope that someday the Mantis may be able to reclaim their home from the legions of Fu Leng.

New Alternate Path: Acolyte of Thunder

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Yoritomo Shugenja 4
- **Requirements:** Fire 3, Void 4

Technique: Thunder's Call

The Acolytes of Thunder can call on the power of the great Thunder Dragon to smite their enemies. You may cast the spell Fury of Osano-Wo as a Simple Action by sacrificing a spell slot in any Element. Your Raises for damage on that spell award +1k1 per Raise instead of +1k0.

The Ashura

The ashura are Fu Leng's most dangerous creations, demonic entities let loose upon the world. They are created from the souls of Lost samurai, crafted to follow their master's every order, and fueled by the power of the Shadowlands Taint. Physically, they resemble armored samurai made from opaque glass, with sharp edges where normal warriors are soft. Huge wings resembling those of a butterfly emerge from their backs, but the ashura do not seem to need these wings to fly; much like akutenshi, they seem to exist slightly outside of normal reality, and are able to glide through the air regardless of their wings. Despite their glass-like appearance, they are not fragile—indeed they can take more punishment than many oni. Even worse, when they are finally killed they explode in a violent, lethal blast of dark fire.

In battle the ashura fight in the most brutal and direct manner, without guile or trickery. They fly directly to their targets, shredding the foe with their obsidian katana and their razor-edged wings. They do not speak, but emit piercing shrieks in battle that can shock and paralyze any weak-willed warrior. By preference they are solitary creatures, but fight together in whatever numbers their master might require.

Unfortunately, the ashura are not solely limited to the dark world of the Thousand Years of Darkness. Born from Fu Leng's dream, they now exist in the depths of Jigoku where they wait to be summoned into the real world. Few have the power to even contemplate such an act (even Daigotsu has not done so), but anyone who could would gain an army of immense power. In the Heroes of Rokugan alternate timeline, the sacrifice of the Jade Dragon summons over a hundred ashura into the mortal realm.

Ashura, Dark Angels of Jigoku

Air: 4	Earth: 5	Fire: 4	Water: 4
Reflexes: 7		Agility: 5	Strength: 5
Initiative: 10k7			*Armor TN: 40*
Damage: 9k3 + poison (Katana), 5k4 + poison (Wings)			*Attack: 10k5 Katana (Simple), 7k7 Wings (Simple)*
Reduction: 10 (5 against crystal or obsidian)			*Wounds: 40: +5; 80: +10; 120: +15; 160: Dead*

Taint Rank: 9

Skills: Battle 4, Hunting 5, Kenjutsu 5

Special Abilities:

The Acolytes of Thunder in the Canon Histories

In the canonical timeline of Rokugan, the Mantis Clan creates the Acolytes of Thunder in the late twelfth century after the Dragon of Thunder leaves the Celestial Heavens and comes to dwell within Ningen-do. This Path becomes available to Mantis shugenja in that era, and is taught not only to the Yoritomo Shugenja but also to the Moshi Shugenja. GMs may of course choose to make the Acolytes available in earlier eras of play if doing so suits the style and themes of their campaigns.

- *Deathwrack: When an ashura dies, it explodes with the flames of Jigoku itself. All creatures within 5 feet, friend or foe, takes 5k5 fire damage. 9s and 10s explode for this damage roll. Other ashura do not take damage from this ability. This damage ignores all Reduction and all other forms of damage mitigation except Invulnerability.*
- *Fear 3*
- *Greater Invulnerability: Ashura are completely immune to fire (both normal and magical) in addition to the normal benefits of Invulnerability.*
- *Linked Weapon: An ashura's obsidian katana is linked to it by dark magic, and if the blade ever leaves the ashura's hand (such as through a Disarm Maneuver) it will explode at the end of the ashura's next Turn, inflicting 4k4 fire damage on those within 5 feet.*
- *Poison: An ashura's obsidian katana and its razor-sharp wings are both coated with a vicious poison that can paralyze anyone who comes into contact with it. Every time an ashura deals damage with a sword or wing attack, the victim must make a Stamina roll at TN 25. If he fails the roll, on his next Turn he cannot take a Complex Action and can take only one Simple Action. (He may take Free Actions as normal.)*
- *Regeneration: An ashura heals 1 Wound per Round as a Free Action. It may focus on its injuries as a Complex Action to recover 5 Wounds instead.*
- *Scream: Once per skirmish an ashura can utter a piercing scream as a Simple Action. Anyone hearing this scream is affected by Fear 6.*
- *Spirit Sight: An ashura can see in perfect darkness and can see invisible creatures.*
- *Swift 3 while flying.*
- *Wing Attack: An ashura's wings can strike a target up to ten feet away.*

Legendary Item: Blood of Ashura

After many difficult encounters with the ashura, the Kolat manage to capture small quantities of their blood, sealing the caustic substance into vials before the monster's death. This provides a new weapon to bear against Fu Leng's armies, a weapon doubly satisfying since it is born from Jigoku's greatest threat against the human armies. Needless to say, securing the blood of a living ashura is extremely dangerous, and only a few such vials are ever created.

Ashura blood can only be properly sealed into a vial with a Craft: Alchemy roll at TN 25. If the vial is broken (typically by throwing it at the target), it explodes for 4k4 fire damage. This explosion follows the same rules for the **Deathwrack** special ability of the ashura (listed above).

Needless to say, using such a weapon is not exactly honorable. Although most samurai can rationalize this when facing Shadowlands foes, using ashura blood against non-Tainted enemies should probably entail a loss of Honor similar to using a Low Skill.

Tadaka's Children

In the canonical history of Rokugan, Isawa's Last Wish was never fully completed, and was finally destroyed in the late twelfth century. In the Thousand Years of Darkness, however, the Last Wish was finally made whole after merging with the soul of Isawa Tadaka, becoming Tadaka's Last Wish. It traveled with Shiba Tsukune to help her fight the Shadowlands and right wrongs across the countryside. To aid in their task it created Tadaka's Children, magical extensions of the powerful nemuranai's will.

Tadaka's Children resemble humans composed of raw earth. Despite their composition, they are slim and nimble. They serve as extensions of Tadaka's Last Wish, its remote limbs as it were, and can travel many miles away from it without losing their power and structure. They relay all information back to the artifact and speak with its voice. The Wish may spawn up to a dozen Tadaka's Children at once, and can potentially create even more by exerting more of its power into the ability.

Tadaka's Children, The Constructs of the Last Wish

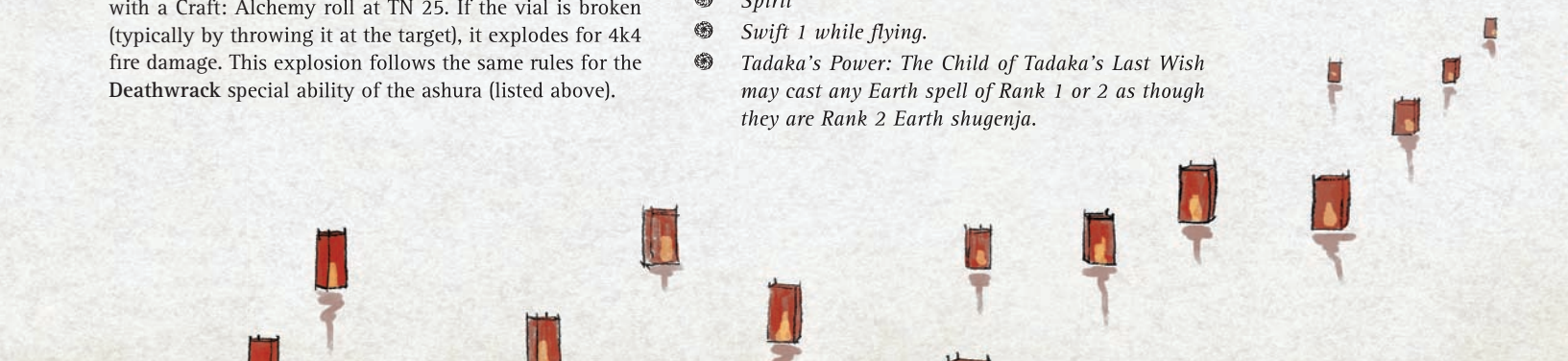
Air: 3 Earth: 4 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 5
Reflexes: 4

Initiative: 6k4 — *Armor TN: 25*
Damage: 6k2 (Blast of Power) — *Attack: 7k4 Blast of Power (Complex)*
Reduction: 3 — *Wounds: 10: +5; 20: +10; 30: +15; 40: +20; 50: Dead*

Skills: Etiquette 2, Investigation 2

Special Abilities

- *Child of the Void: The Children of Tadaka's Last Wish are constructs of pure Void. At the beginning of each Round, a Child may substitute its Void Ring for one of its Rings (and the associated Traits). This does not affect its Initiative or its Wounds. It may not use the Void Ring in any other way and cannot spend Void Points.*
- *Flight: Although they have no wings, the Children of the Last Wish may fly through the air as easily as they walk on land.*
- *Spirit*
- *Swift 1 while flying.*
- *Tadaka's Power: The Child of Tadaka's Last Wish may cast any Earth spell of Rank 1 or 2 as though they are Rank 2 Earth shugenja.*



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- Tao of Shinsei

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