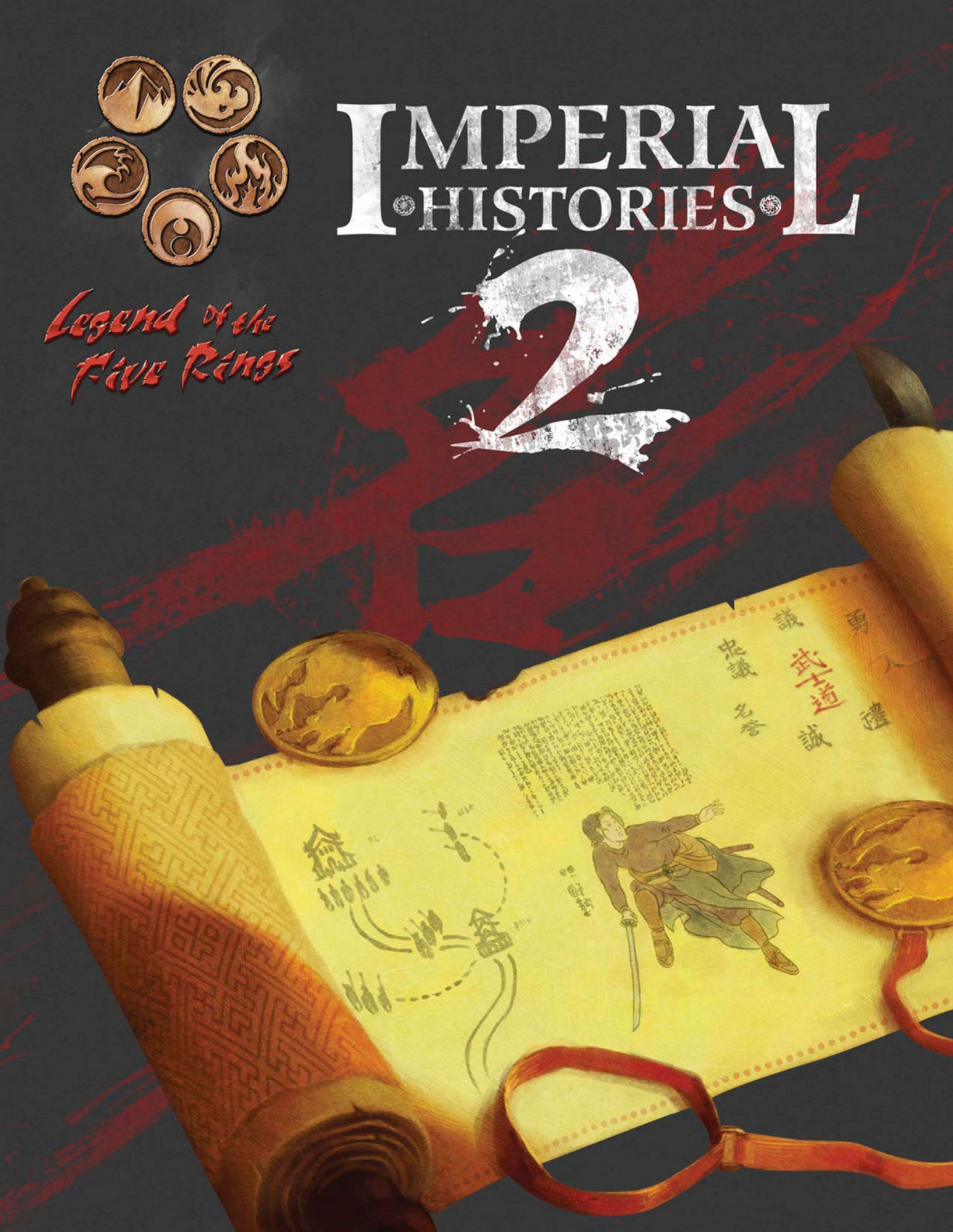
Imperial Histories 2

Legend of the Five Rings





Imperial Histories 2

Written by: *Kevin Blake, Marie Brennan, Daniel Briscoe, Shawn Carman, Robert Denton, Robert Hobart, Kim Hosmer, Maxime Lemaire, Seth Mason, Eric Menge, Ryan Reese, Jason Shafer, Alexandre Simard*

Edited by: *Robert Hobart*

Art Director: *Shawn Carman*

Cover Design: *Robert Denton*

Cover Art: *Jason Juta*

Layout *Robert Denton*

Original Graphic Design: *Edge Entertainment*

Artists: *Aaron Acevedo, Christopher Appel, Steve Argyle, Matthew S. Armstrong, Drew Baker, Stefano Baldo, Julie Baroh, beet, Jason Behnke, Noah Bradley, Adam Bray, Manuel Calderon, Mike Cappriotti, Luis Castro Torres, Brent Chumley, Miguel Coimbra, Storn Cook, Ed Cox, Edwin David, Maximilian Degen, Michael Dixon, John Donahue, Cris Dornaus, Randy Elliot, Jason Engle, Esabra Studio, Shen Fei, Sam Flegal, Anthony Francisco, Garrie & Ifan, Felipe Gaona, Genzoman, Thomas Gianni, Joachim Gmoser, Gong Studios, Troy Graham, Anthony Grabski, Paul (Prof.) Herbert, Hector Herrera, Bryan Heyboer, Jeff Hill, Jon Hodgson, David Horne, Aurelien Hubert, Llyn Hunter, Lisa Hunt, Imaginary Friends Studio, Janine Johnston, Veronica Jones, Wen Juinn, Jason Juta, Michael Koch, Heather Kreiter, Alayna Laymer, Stephanie Law, Brandon Leach, April Lee, Eric Lofgren, Britt Martin, David Martin, Jorge Matar, Val Mayerik, Malcolm McClinton, Patrick McEvoy, Aaron Miller, John Moriarty, Tony Moseley, Jake Murray, Carlos NCT, William O'Conner, Mateus Ozminski, Jim Pavelec, Joshua Pinkas, Alessandra Pisano, Mark Poole, Chris Pritchard, Angga Satriohadi, Erich Schreiner, Adam Schumpert, Chris Seaman, Eddie Sharam, Brian Snoddy, Nikolay Stoyanov, A. Swedberg, Gemma Tegelaers, Charles Urbach, Steve Venters, Gabriel Verdon, Alain Viesca, Franz Vohwinkel, Mario Wibisono, Matt Wilson, Jarreau Wimberly, Matt Zeilinger*

Production Manager: *David Lepore*

Senior Brand Manager: *Todd Rowland*

Chief Executive Officer: *John Zinser*

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 Williams) Jim Friedman, Izzy Friedman, Jay Becknell, Mandy Spice, Daniel Slater*

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Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Chapter One: The Togashi Dynasty 7

Welcome to a Different Rokugan 7
A Recognizable History 8
...Or One Less Recognizable 12
Clans and Factions in the Togashi Dynasty 15
The Crab Clan 16
The Crane Clan 16
The Lion Clan 17
The Mantis Clan 18
The Phoenix Clan 19
The Scorpion Clan 19
The Unicorn Clan 20
Hantei's Clan: The Owl Clan 21
The Spider Clan 22
The Minor Clans 22
The Imperial Families 23
The Kolat 23
Notable Personages of the Togashi Dynasty 23
Storytelling in Mystic Rokugan 25
The People 25
The Tales 26
The Spirits 26
New Mechanics 26

Chapter Two: The Reign of the Shining Prince 31

The World of the Shining Prince 32
The Great Clans During the Reign of the Shining Prince 38
The Crab Clan 38
The Crane Clan 39
The Dragon Clan 40
The Lion Clan 41
The Phoenix Clan 42
The Scorpion Clan 43
The Ki-Rin Clan 45
The Minor Clans 45
The Imperial Families 45
Threats 46
Notable Personalities During the Reign of the Shining Prince 46
Founding a Religion: Genji, Shinsei, & the Fortunes 49
Alternate Branches of Development 50
Clan Spells of the Early Empire 52

Chapter Three: The Iron Empire 55

An Iron Empire 56
The Timeline of Iron Rokugan 57
The State of the Clans 67
The Crab Clan 67
The Crane Clan 67
The Dragon Clan 68
The Lion Clan 69
The Phoenix Clan 69
The Scorpion Clan 70
The Minor Clans 71
Major Figures in Iron Rokugan 72
Portrait of an Iron Empire 75
Social Impacts of Technological Progress 75
The Iron Dragon and the Golden Road 76
Woodblock Printing and the Spread of Literacy 76
The Restorationists 77
Samurai Firearms 78
New Mechanics 80
Unique Firearms of the Great Clans 81

Chapter Four: Heresy of the Five Rings 83

Timeline of the Heresy 84
The Clans and Factions During the Heresy Era 89
The Crab Clan 89
The Crane Clan 90
The Dragon Clan 91
The Lion Clan 91
The Phoenix Clan 92
The Scorpion Clan 93
The Minor Clans 94
The Imperial Families 95
The Brotherhood 95
Important Personages of the Heresy Era 96
Faith and Politics 97
The All-Monk Campaign 99
A Darker Heresy: Gorinno the Villain 101
New Game Mechanics 102

Chapter Five: The Reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum 105

Rokugan Under Tyranny 106
Hantei Okucheo, the Early Years 106
The Dark Times: The Madness of Hantei Okucheo 107
Clans and Factions in the Steel Chrysanthemum's Reign 113
The Crab Clan 113
The Crane Clan 114
The Dragon Clan 115
The Lion Clan 115
The Phoenix Clan 116
The Scorpion Clan 116
The Imperial Families 117
The Minor Clans 119
Notable Personages of the Steel Chrysanthemum Era 119
The Golden Legion 123
The Steel Magistrates 123
An Alternate Explanation of the Steel Chrysanthemum 124
An Empire of Fear 125
Resistance and Rebellion 125
Aftermath of Tyranny 126
New Mechanics 126

Chapter Six: The Eighth Century Crises 129

A Century of Peril 130
Overview of the Clans and Factions 135
The Crab Clan 135
The Crane Clan 136
The Dragon Clan 136
The Lion Clan 136
The Phoenix Clan 137
The Scorpion Clan 138
The Minor Clans 139
The Imperial Families 140
The Shadowlands 140
Important Personages of the Eighth Century 140
The Political Climate Before and After Iuchiban 143
Alternate Paths: The Maw Successfully Conquers Crab Lands 143
Alternate Paths: The Maw is Never Freed 144
Alternate Paths: The Phoenix - Bloodspeaker Alliance 145
Nemuranai of the Eighth Century 145
Nightmares of Jigoku 147

Chapter Seven: The Return of the Unicorn .. 151

The History Behind the Unicorn Clan's Return 152
The Clans and Factions at the Dawn of the Ninth Century 158
The Crab Clan 158
The Crane Clan 159
The Dragon Clan 160
The Lion Clan 160
The Phoenix Clan 161
The Scorpion Clan 162
The Unicorn Clan 163
The Minor Clans 164
The Imperial Families 164
The Kolat 165
The Shadowlands 165
Presenting the Return of the Unicorn 166
The Unicorn Perspective 166
The Defenders of the Empire 167
New Mechanics 168

Chapter Eight: The Shattered Empire 171

An Alternate Rokugan 172
A Changed History 172
Timeline of the Shattered Empire 173
The Clans and Factions in the Shattered Empire 182
The Crab Clan 182
The Crane Clan 184
The Dragon Clan 185
The Lion Clan 186
The Mantis Clan 187
The Phoenix Clan 187
The Scorpion Clan 188
The Unicorn Clan 189
The Imperial Families 190
The Shadowlands 191
Prominent Figures in the Shattered Empire 191
An Unresolved Epic 194
Sengoku Jidai Rokugan 194
A Potential Savior: Kaneka 195
GM's Toolbox: Using Kaneka in a Shattered Empire 196
New Mechanics 196

Chapter Nine: The Four Winds Era 199

The Time of the Four Winds 200
Clans and Factions in the Four Winds Era 208
The Crab Clan 208
The Crane Clan 209
The Dragon Clan 209
The Lion Clan 210
The Mantis Clan 210
The Phoenix Clan 211
The Scorpion Clan 211
The Unicorn Clan 212
The Shadowlands 212
Major Figures of the Four Winds Era 213
The Onisu: Nightmares of the Eight Clans 216
The Cursed Blade Chukandomo 217
The Shadowed Tower 218
New Mechanics 220
New Creatures: The Onisu 220

Chapter Ten: The Shadowed Throne ... 227

History of a Different Shade 228
Year 1160: The Shadow of the Empress 228
Clans and Factions Under the Shadowed Throne 233
The Crab Clan 233
The Crane Clan 233
The Dragon Clan 234
The Lion Clan 235
The Mantis Clan 235
The Phoenix Clan 236
The Scorpion Clan 237
The Unicorn Clan 237
The Minor Clans 238
The Imperial Families 238
The Shadowlands 239
Notable Figures of the Shadowed Throne 239
What Happened to the Dark Covenant of Fire 241
The Tests of Enlightenment 242
The Shadow Court 242
The Realm of Shadows 244
New Mechanics 244

Chapter Eleven: The Destroyer War 247

Timeline of the Destroyer War 248
The Clans and Factions in the Destroyer War 255
The Crab Clan 255
The Crane Clan 256
The Dragon Clan 256
The Lion Clan 257
The Mantis Clan 257
The Phoenix Clan 258
The Scorpion Clan 258
The Spider Clan 259
The Unicorn Clan 260
The Imperial Families 260
The Minor Clans 260
The Ronin 261
Notable Figures of the Destroyer War .. 262
The Black Scrolls and the Tao of Fu Leng 265
The Destroyers as a Military Threat 266
The Ebon Daughter 267
The Fate of Fu Leng 267
The Politics of Total Warfare 268
New Mechanics 270

Chapter Twelve: The Age of Exploration .. 273

A Time of Change 273
The Clans and Factions in the Age of Exploration 276
The Crab Clan 276
The Crane Clan 276
The Dragon Clan 277
The Lion Clan 278
The Phoenix Clan 278
The Scorpion Clan 279
The Spider Clan 279
The Unicorn Clan 280
The Imperial Families 280
Notable Personages of the Age of Exploration 281
The Dark Naga and the War of Serpents 283
The Fudoism Heresy 286
New Mechanics 286

Chapter Thirteen: Empire of the Emerald Stars 289

Rokugan In Space! 290
Timeline of the Emerald Stars 291
Clans and Factions of the Emerald Stars 295
The Crab Clan 295
The Crane Clan 295
The Dragon Clan 296
The Lion Clan 296
The Mantis Clan 297
The Phoenix Clan 297
The Scorpion Clan 297
The Spider Clan 298
The Unicorn Clan 298
The Minor Clans 299
Notable Personalities of the Emerald Stars 299
The State of the Galaxy 301
Personal Technology in the Era of the Emerald Stars 304
The Age of Space Exploration 305
Rokugan in Space: Game Mechanics 306

Index 308

Introduction

The halls of the Ikoma libraries echo as the young Ikoma scribe hauls yet another armful of scrolls out to the low table in the central chamber. His hair and kimono are gray-white with the accumulated dust of the day's work, and sweat turns the smudges on his forehead into dark blotches. He wipes his forehead with his sleeve and belatedly realizes he has made things even worse, staring with dismay at the dark stains on the golden-tan silk. His voice quavers as he asks, "Master, have we found everything now?"

"We can never find everything, boy." His master does not look up from the scrolls he is perusing by candlelight. "Even here in the Ikoma libraries, some records are incomplete."

The boy shivers uncontrollably for a moment. The idea that the Ikoma histories, the most ancient and comprehensive records of the Empire, could be 'incomplete' seems almost... blasphemous.

"Don't distract yourself with idle thoughts," the old man snaps. "Bring those scrolls to me. We are very close to our goal, very close." He sets aside the scroll he has been reading and grabs for the new pile the boy has just delivered. "Ah, yes. Here we are. The reign of Hantei XX."

The boy blinks. "Was not that an uneventful time? Why would that be useful to our clashes with the Phoenix, master?"

"Uneventful?" The old Ikoma laughs, his voice echoing through the halls of the library. "Oh no, boy, not at all. The Otomo may say it was now, but we..." He waves his hand at the vast library around them. "We know the truth, boy. That is our duty, to know the truth, no matter what comforting lies others may tell."

Welcome to **Imperial Histories 2**, the latest sourcebook release for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game, 4th Edition! Like its predecessor, this book is designed to help you shape and develop your L5R RPG experience and to realize the full potential of the latest edition of the game.

What Is This Book?

Imperial Histories 2 provides GMs and players with the information necessary to create campaigns and play characters in a variety of different eras from Rokugan's history and from alternate timelines and might-have-been versions of Rokugan. Some of the eras presented here are part of the established "canon" of L5R history, while others are newly-revealed parts of that history or alternative settings. Each chapters gives GMs a host of background and detail for planning and running a new campaign in one such era, and also includes mechanical options to enhance the experience of running a game in those time periods. And of course each chapter is also a guideline to how to create your own era and to offer your own interpretation of L5R. We have deliberately designed **Imperial Histories 2** to offer more variety and encourage more creative freedom than the previous supplement *Imperial Histories*, so as to inspire the maximum options and fun for your own gaming group.

The eras detailed in this sourcebook include the following:

The Togashi Dynasty

An alternate version of Rokugan itself, written by one of L5R's many fans and based on a simple question: what if one of the other Kami had defeated Hantei and become the first Emperor of Rokugan? In this case, the victor is Togashi, and the Empire he creates is a place of mystical wonders, rife with nonhumans and creatures from other spirit realms. The chapter also presents mechanics for a potential Clan of Hantei: the Owl Clan, charged with handling Rokugan's dealings with its nonhuman neighbors.

The Reign of the Shining Prince

Rokugan's second Emperor reigned for nearly two hundred years, and it was during that time that most of the Empire's social customs and beliefs solidified and the scattered clans came together into a united and prosperous country. A campaign set in this era can evoke the spirit of the Tale of Genji, a world where the refinements of court in the Imperial Capital contrast with the rough-and-ready, almost frontier-like world of the outlying clan territories.

Iron Rokugan

A "what-if" alternate setting that examines the question of how Rokugan might have been changed by more extensive contact with gaijin after the Battle of White Stag. Welcome to an Empire where samurai carry ancestral matchlock pistols, and the construction of a railroad threatens to tear Rokugan's crumbling social system asunder.

The Heresy of the Five Rings

Created by submission from our fans, this era presents a forgotten incident in the Empire's history: a religious schism that threatened to tear the Empire asunder. In addition to outlining the (previously unknown) historical events



of the Heresy, this chapter also presents options for GMs who want to escalate things into a full-fledged civil war between samurai and monks.

The Steel Chrysanthemum

Rokugan's worst and most evil Emperor, Hantei XVI, has been mentioned many times in L5R. Now at last we detail the full horrors of his twisted reign. GMs seeking a campaign built around themes of tyranny, paranoia, and fear should look no further!

The Eighth Century Crises

Rokugan's eighth century was almost as catastrophic as the more iconic twelfth century. Between the attack of the Oni Lord known as the Maw and the second rise of Iuchiban the Bloodspeaker, this was a time of epic conflict in which heroes and villains can change the history of the Empire for the better... or the worse.

The Return of the Unicorn

The early ninth century saw one of the most convulsive events in Rokugan's history: the return of the former Ki-Rin Clan, now known as the Unicorn, after an 800 year absence. This chapter presents a detailed account of this era, allowing the GM to present it from either the Unicorn viewpoint or that of the Empire.

The Shattered Empire

A 'what if' era created by one of our own Design Team, the Shattered Empire looks at a Rokugan where the Second Day of Thunder turned out much like the First: Fu Leng defeated, but the Thunders dead, leaving no one to claim the Throne. With the Hantei Dynasty gone for good and no hero to unite the clans, Rokugan enters an era very much like historical Japan's *sengoku jidai* – a war of all against all. And all the while the Lying Darkness develops its plans...

The Four Winds

An iconic era from the L5R card game, this chapter outlines the struggle for power between the four children of Emperor Toturi I, and the rising threat of the man known simply as Daigotsu.

The Shadowed Throne

Our third fan-written submission, this chapter offers a 'what if' setting based on the aftermath of the Four Winds era. Instead of Naseru becoming Toturi III, his older sister Tsudao becomes Toturi II – but an idealistic young woman, it turns out, may not be the best choice for Emperor in an unsettled and dangerous age.

The Destroyer War

The epic struggle for survival which afflicted Rokugan after the ascension of the Iweko Dynasty, the Destroyer War – also known as the Kali-Ma Invasion – presents a truly epic-scale story in which the Empire must fight for its very existence against the invading hordes of a gaijin death-goddess. The narrow and troubled victory over Kali-Ma led to Rokugan the next era...

The Age of Exploration

The current setting of the L5R card game, and the background for our recent boxed set *The Second City*. This chapter details both the Empire's exploration of the Colonies and the problems which Rokugan faces at home, most notable the threat posed by the Dark Naga

The Emerald Stars

Our most radical experiment in this book, this chapter is designed to encourage GMs in expanding their L5R campaigns into radically different settings. What will Rokugan look like in the far future? What happens when samurai take to the stars? Read this chapter and find out!



The Togashi Dynasty

The mountain's stone wall
cannot stop the restless wind
from moving onward.

Blinded by anger,
a beast will attack its own
reflection, and drown.

Protective colors
do not save the insect from
the swallow's keen eye.

The perfect blossom
among ten thousand others:
it alone endures.

Water cannot stop
the beaver who shapes it with
mere sticks, mud, and stone.

The hawk stoops in flight
but halts before its talons
sink into its prey.

What strength is there in
the mightiest stone, if it
crumbles at a touch

Welcome to a Different Rokugan

Before the Kami agreed to hold a tournament to choose a ruler from among themselves, Togashi recited a series of seven poems. At first their meaning was incomprehensible to his siblings, and they simply regarded it as more of their brother's strange behavior. Togashi declined to participate in the tournament itself; the other Kami proceeded with their duels, and all went as it did in a more familiar world.

But when Akodo finally bowed to Hantei, Shiba remembered the poems and suddenly understood their meaning: Togashi's foresight had shown him the exact flaws that would lead each of the Kami to fail. Before the others could follow Akodo's example, Shiba declared their brother had defeated them all without striking a single blow. And once he spoke, the others – even Hantei – realized he spoke the truth.

And so all the Kami bowed to Togashi instead.

In the canonical history of Rokugan, Togashi's determination to control events led him to go on ruling the Dragon for more than a thousand years, changing his identity every few decades. But as the winner of the tournament, he had no need to hide: he was simply the immortal Dragon Emperor, a reclusive and mysterious figure, the true power behind a throne later occupied by his mortal descendants.

A Recognizable History...

"The Togashi Dynasty" is not a conventional alternate history in the manner of some of the other chapters in this book, such as Chapter Ten (the Shattered Empire) or Chapter Twelve (the Shadowed Throne). Those chapters depict timelines in which the changes to the canonical history ripple outward from a single specific point – the Second Day of Thunder, or the climax of the Four Winds saga. Instead, this chapter shows Rokugan completely re-imagined into a different mode. It is not a specific timeline but rather a set of suggestions for how the Empire might look if it were ruled by a Kami who focused on spiritual and supernatural concerns. The clans and the world they live in are generally recognizable but not at all the same. Further, the degree of change from canonical Rokugan can be magnified or reduced to suit your own campaign's needs.

Intuition and enlightenment, ancient secrets and future visions are the core of Togashi's Rokugan. It is a place where the mind and spirit rule over the body, where there is no human limit to what exceptional individuals can achieve.

Movement in the trees ahead made Komori Jikei pause, stilling her breath to give no sign of her presence. There should be no one here... but the Island of Shifting Winds hid many secrets.

The figures she glimpsed through the eternal twilight seemed human enough. Jikei frowned, studying them more closely. Human, yes... but not ordinary. Their armor was archaic, and they had a nimbus around them as if they were not truly creatures of Ningen-do.

Jikei's skin jumped as if lightning had struck nearby. Spirits, she thought, returned through the gate. She had heard of such, but had never seen any before now.

She needed to warn the others. This was clearly a war-party, bent on some dangerous end. If she moved away, though, they might hear her; it was pure luck they had not already. They almost certainly would if she called on the kami to bear her message.

But she could finish her incantation before the strangers reached her. Then, at least, she could be sure her warning made it through.

Gathering her focus, Jikei began to chant under her breath.



GMs who wish to play in a more mystical Rokugan while still keeping things somewhat familiar (and without having to forget all the canonical Rokugani history they've learned) may prefer to depict the Togashi Dynasty as retaining all the major events of the Empire's normal timeline, albeit somewhat altered. Of course, it would be impossible to print a complete revised history here – it would take up an entire book on its own! Instead, we present several different sections here that serve as illustrative examples of how the canon timeline might keep its general shape while still accounting for the effects of Emperor Togashi and his heirs. The focus here is on events affecting the whole of Rokugan, events where the Hantei Emperors or samurai of the Dragon Clan played a pivotal role in the canon, and showing how such events can be retained even in the absence of those groups.

The Gozoku Conspiracy

In the late fourth century, Togashi issues an unexpected command for the dissolution of an order of Brotherhood monks affiliated with the Crane Clan, the Shrine of the Perfect Lotus. The fallout from this command leads to strife among the clans, causing many to question the Emperor's wisdom.

A few, however, do more than question. Bayushi Atsuki investigates and learns a secret at the heart of Rokugan: Togashi has been in seclusion, unseen by any of his followers, for more than a hundred years. The government is being run by those Mirumoto who serve as the Voice of the Emperor. The order to dissolve the Perfect Lotus is one of dozens Togashi wrote out before retreating into meditation, each with instructions as to when it should be opened and executed. This one, unfortunately, was carried out at the wrong time.

Atsuki sees a chance for power in the void left by Togashi's inattention. Joined by Shiba Gaijushiko and Doji Raigu, he forms the Gozoku conspiracy, and they acquire political power in much the same fashion as in Hantei's history – though in this timeline they manipulate and control the successive Voices of the Emperor, since Togashi himself lies beyond their reach. Over the course of sixty years they fundamentally reshape the nature of government in Rokugan, laying a framework for social and secular power, using a series of Mirumoto Voices as their puppet figureheads.

They meet their downfall in the year 435, when they appoint Mirumoto Gaira as the new Voice of the Emperor. A stranger appears at Gaira's investiture and claims to be the Emperor's son: Togashi Hoshi. He challenges Gaira to a duel and kills him with a single blow, then claims Imperial authority for himself.

Togashi emerges from seclusion to acknowledge Hoshi as his son. He goes on to institute a tradition of "cloistered rule": the Kami officially steps down from the throne, leaving his descendants to govern Rokugan, but he continues to exert considerable influence from behind the scenes as the Retired Emperor. This shift allows him to focus his attention where he wishes – on the distant threat of Fu Leng and other such long-term matters – while leaving the daily affairs of Rokugan to someone more engaged with human concerns.

Although the conspiracy itself is shattered, Hoshi permits much of the bureaucratic machinery it created to continue. Indeed, those who formerly questioned Togashi's wisdom now speculate that the Emperor's foresight led him not only to permit the error of his order being opened too soon, but indeed to orchestrate it so as to spur the development of a government that could keep Rokugan from fragmenting into independent fiefdoms.

The Dragon Veil

Isawa Kusaeri, the wife of Togashi Hoshi, gives her life to create a mystical barrier shielding Rokugan from the disruptive effects of gaijin influence. A radiant mist traces the borders of Rokugan, through the Great Wall of the North, past the Shinomen Mori, along the edge of Crab lands, and into the waters beyond the Islands of Spice and Silk. Any mortal who attempts to pass through becomes lost in the mist, eventually stumbling back out where they began.

Unfortunately, even Kusaeri's powerful magic cannot stand forever against the corrupting influence of the Taint. The Veil is weaker along the Crab border, allowing the forces of the Shadowlands to continue to stage assaults and eventually necessitating the construction of the Kaiu Wall. This also means samurai can pass through in the other direction as well – albeit never without good reason.

This weakening has one beneficial effect: it makes possible the return of the Unicorn. Shinjo's followers become lost in the mist after their passage through the Shadowlands, but the travel-focused magic of the Iuchi ultimately shows them the way through the weakened barrier. Those Unicorn with largely gaijin ancestry – the Moto in particular – have more difficulty. Finally a nightingale appears, the bird associated with the Togashi Dynasty, and leads them through to the other side. The nightingale's guidance is taken (grudgingly) by other Rokugani as proof of their right to enter the Empire.

The weakened Dragon Veil stands until the Emerald Throne is damaged by the Bloodsword Ambition during the Scorpion Clan Coup. Because Kusaeri tied her spell to the throne of her husband Togashi Hoshi, Bayushi Shoju's actions shatter not only his sword but also the Veil, leaving Rokugan open once more to outside influence. If the GM chooses not to depict the Clan Coup in this timeline, however, the Veil endures despite being weakened along the Shadowlands border – unless the GM decides otherwise.



The Battle of White Stag and the Return of the Unicorn

Killing the son of a Kami takes more than a simple cannonball.

The *gaijin* weapons employed at White Stag do, however, inflict terrible damage on Togashi Hoshi, leaving him with injuries even the greatest shugenja in the Empire cannot heal. He becomes known as the Wounded Emperor, and although he is un-aging, the lingering consequences of Garen Hawthorne's attack contribute to his decision to step down from the throne sixty years later. He ascends to the Heavens and is succeeded by his only son, Togashi Satsu.

The shock of this encounter with *gaijin* leads the Empire to isolate itself from all foreign influence. Hoshi's wife, Isawa Kusaeri, gives her life to create what becomes known as the Dragon Veil: a spell that conceals and protects Rokugan from outsiders.

Nearly three hundred years later, the Dragon Veil creates great difficulties for the returning Ki-Rin (now Unicorn) Clan – particularly the Moto family, because of their largely *gaijin* ancestry. However, the ultimate success of the Unicorn in traversing the Dragon Veil forces the other Great Clans to accept them as Shinjo's missing followers despite their foreign ways.

The Scorpion Clan Coup and the Second Day of Thunder

It is at least possible that a descendant of Togashi might become the vessel of Fu Leng, as Hantei XXXIX did in canonical history, thus creating the prophecy that led Bayushi Shoju to precipitate the Scorpion Clan Coup. Given the different role Togashi occupies as the Retired Emperor, however, it may be useful to create a slightly different motivation for Shoju's attack against the Imperial line. Perhaps the Prophecies of Uikku suggest to him that a nearly-forgotten threat is returning to Rokugan, and only when the Emperor himself has been sacrificed will the Empire be armed against it.

By now Togashi has faded so far from the public eye that most people believe the "Retired Emperor" is nothing more than a polite fiction and the Kami actually left for Tengoku centuries ago. Shoju therefore believes he must kill only the current ruler, Togashi Massuri, precipitating the Scorpion Clan Coup.

In truth, the prophecy refers to the twelfth Black Scroll, hidden inside Togashi's own body. At the end of the Clan War, he emerges from seclusion and allows Bayushi Kachiko, who has taken up the Obsidian Hand, to tear open his body and remove the scroll. The sacrifice of the immortal Dragon Emperor makes possible the final defeat of Fu Leng, and with the loss of the imperial line, Akodo Toturi steps forward to become the first Emperor of a new dynasty.

The Sun and the Moon

The timeline begins to diverge more strongly after the fall of the Togashi Dynasty, since many of the key individual conflicts and stories of the Seven Thunders have turned out radically differently.

The Obsidian Hand soon begins to corrupt Bayushi Kachiko, the Scorpion Thunder and Clan Champion. Her contact with Togashi at the time of his death, moreover, leaves a dangerous fragment of his knowledge in her mind. She journeys into the Great Wall of the North and frees Shosuro from the crystal prison in which Togashi contained her ten centuries earlier.

Following this, Kachiko begins to gather various artifacts of Lord Moon, which she uses to challenge and destroy Onnotangu. Before she can ascend to take his place, however, the influence of his power, combined with the taint of the Lying Darkness within her, sends Kachiko completely mad. She brings calamity upon her clan until an unnamed Brotherhood monk infiltrates her castle and attacks her. He dies, but his final strike bestows clarity upon her conflicted mind. Kachiko cuts the Obsidian Hand from her body, arms the Scorpion with crystal weapons against the Lying Darkness, renounces her position as Clan Champion, and leaves to hunt Shosuro.

Meanwhile, the death of Onnotangu has led to Amaterasu's suicide, plunging Rokugan into darkness. Unfortunately for the Empire, not only did Kachiko fail to ascend as the new Lady Moon but in this timeline Hida Yakamo was never resurrected by the Naga. The sky is left empty of all but stars.

In the moment of Lady Sun's suicide, however, a group of ise zumi – all bearing the Centipede tattoo – appear at Amaterasu Seido in the lands of the Centipede Clan. They carry shugenja of the Moshi family to all corners of the Empire, and instruct them to do what they can for the people





of Rokugan. The Moshi beseech the kami for aid and are able to create pale shadows of the true Sun – enough to permit plants to grow. These are not replacements, of course, and so Rokugan exists in a state of uneasy twilight, havens of half-light separated from one another by regions of terror-filled darkness. This lasts throughout the War of the Spirits (which becomes a protracted affair, as Oblivion's Gate has not been closed, and ghosts find their way through continually), the Rain of Blood, and subsequent events. Many blame this catastrophic state of affairs on the loss of the Togashi Dynasty.

Resolution does not come for many years. The Nothing's infiltration of the Toturi Dynasty proceeds more slowly, and in the meantime Kachiko wanders the Empire, suffering intermittent periods of lucidity and madness, until she at last she finds Shosuro at the Sleeping Lake. Kachiko's intent is to kill both Shosuro and herself, by luring the first Scorpion Thunder into possessing her body and then committing jigai with a shard of crystal. But although her actions succeed, their results are not what she expects: instead of killing them, the crystal allows them both to resist the control of the Nothing. Their souls merge into one, and she rallies the armies of Rokugan to battle at Oblivion's Gate. There she uses Onnotangu's power to impose the name "Akodo" on the Lying Darkness, destroying all but a remnant of its power. Then, with Yoshun Chiryo as her second, she commits seppuku so that the Nothing will never again be able to use her as its agent.

Her death frees the stolen power of Lord Moon, making a successor possible. The Jade and Obsidian Dragons ascend to become the Jade Sun and Obsidian Moon, and the twilight ends at last.

The Race for the Throne

Just as in the canon, the Toturi Dynasty is doomed not to last long, and indeed meets its end not long after the first rise of the Jade Sun. Rokugani widely agree the dynasty was cursed, and will not accept any ruler who cannot demonstrate the favor of Heaven.

Seppun Narako, a young prophetess, foretells the appearance of two strangers at the High House of Light where Togashi spent centuries in seclusion. Many leaders of the Empire journey there, where they encounter the Voices of the Jade Sun and Obsidian Moon. The Voices decree a Celestial Tournament, to seek out the samurai who best demonstrates the spiritual wisdom and enlightenment necessary to rule well.

The participants include not only Clan Champions and daimyo also but lesser-ranking shugenja and even a handful of monks. In the end, however, the Voices bestow their favor upon an unexpected victor: a low-ranking courtier of the Owl Clan, a woman named Hantei Kiku.

The Geography of Togashi's Empire

By and large, the clans in the Togashi Empire control the same territory as they do in canonical history, but there are three major exceptions:

Orosan Uchi – The place where the Kami descended into the mortal realm becomes the greatest religious complex in all of Rokugan. In addition to major temples honoring each of the founding Kami and the Seven Great Fortunes, there are countless smaller shrines to lesser Fortunes, ancestors, minor kami, and more. Some are official institutions, with monks and priests to tend them; others are ad hoc things, set up by a visitor in some unused corner, and afterward forgotten.

Imperial Lands – Togashi's preference for solitude causes him to take up residence in the lands that belong to the Dragon Clan in canonical history. Apart from one accessible palace at the foot of the mountains, this territory is largely trackless and inhospitable to anyone not guided by a member of the Imperial families.

Owl Clan lands – The great forest of the Shinomen Mori and its surrounding territory are the home of the Owl Clan, the clan of Hantei. Which is not to say they have total control of their lands, or even know what lurks in the depths of their domain; rather, they are the custodians of the forest, protecting it against threats from both without and within. Their strongholds are for the most part located at the forest's edge. This uneasy situation makes the Owl easily the poorest Great Clan in Rokugan. Their resources are few, and they refuse to fully exploit the potential wealth of the Shinomen – for they know all too well what powers might take offense if they did.

...or One Less Recognizable

The Shrine of the Little Stone should have been remote enough to ensure Kanju a quiet retirement. But as he was sweeping the courtyard that chill autumn morning, a youth wearing the mon of his own former family came running through the gate. His speed marked him as one trained with the techniques of the Unicorn. The youth fell to his knees at the sight of Kanju and bowed his head to the stone, trembling with exhaustion.

Kanju laid down his broom and brought a dipper of water for the stranger to drink. "Rest. You need not kneel to me. I am only a humble monk."

Ignoring water and advice both, the scout gasped out the message he had run so far to bring. "Hiruma-sama. Six of us were sent; I am the only one who survives. You are needed in Shiro Kuni."

He should have chided the boy for calling him by that name -- a name he had laid aside ten years ago, when he shaved his head and came to this shrine. But all his attention was taken by the unspoken implication of the scout's words. "It has been stolen."

"Yes."

Chaos, war, the possible destruction of the Crab Clan. He would pay in a future life for breaking his vows, but that was nothing next to the cost of inaction. Rising to his feet, Hiruma Torikage said, "We leave in one hour."

Logically, a shift as profound as a different Imperial Kami should produce far greater changes in Rokugan's history and culture than those outlined above. GMs interested in a more radically different depiction of the Emerald Empire may prefer a timeline where the Thousand Years of Peace feature more conflicts with non-humans, more spirit world incursions, and an array of new heroes known for their strange feats and enlightened deeds.

Some of the events depicted here are designed to present certain elements from the canonical timeline (such as the establishment of Togashi's descendants as a dynasty, or the departure and return of the Unicorn) in the new timeline's context. Others are entirely new, and may be integrated into the altered canon suggested above or taken as a jumping-off point for an entirely different history.

The Son of the Dragon

One morning in the early fourth century, the Imperial shugenja Agasha Sukumi enters the High House of Light and prostrates herself before the Emperor, intending to beg his attention for an important matter. Togashi, seemingly deep in meditation, does not acknowledge her. An ise zumi enters the room and, to Sukumi's horror, strikes the Emperor in the face, knocking him to the floor. Togashi still does not wake.

Before Sukumi can bring the wrath of the kami down on the ise zumi for his attack, the monk declares the Emperor's spirit is no longer in his body. As he speaks a visitor arrives to confirm it: Bayushi Musou, the Scorpion Clan Champion. Musou tells Sukumi the waters of the Sleeping Lake have granted him a vision. The Emperor will not return to his body unless someone goes to Yume-do, the Realm of Dreams, to retrieve his spirit. Musou vows the Scorpion will protect this secret lest the Empire fall into panic.

At the moment of Musou's speech, emissaries from the Elemental Dragons appear in Ningen-do and mark five samurai with signs of their favor. These five find themselves drawn to the Forest of the Dreamers, where they are greeted by the same ise zumi who struck the Emperor. He tells them there is a gate to Yume-do within the forest, and they must journey through it to search for Togashi's spirit. The gate is defended by the ghosts of those slain by nightmares; the seekers, however, win through.

Within Yume-do, they travel through a series of realms built from the dreams of the other eight Kami – Fu Leng among them – showing the Empires that would have been had they taken the Emerald Throne. Each realm poses great dangers, and it seems to the seekers they have been trapped within Yume-do for lifetimes. Reaching Togashi's dream at last, they persuade him to wake by demonstrating the Empire's need for his presence. When they return to Ningen-do, however, they find the man they have brought with them is a stranger.

One year has passed since their departure, and Musou has successfully kept the Emperor's secret. But when the Scorpion Clan Champion visits the High House of Light, a Soshi in his entourage (driven by the corruption of the Lying Darkness) attempts to murder Togashi. He kills Musou and most of the Scorpion, as well as many Imperials, but is finally stopped by a Scorpion shinobi a mere pace from the Emperor. As the corrupted Soshi falls, the five seekers appear with the stranger. He kneels before Togashi, who wakes and proclaims the man to be his son Hoshi, the new Emperor.

This begins the tradition of cloistered rule. Hoshi lives for centuries, with his father watching over him as the Retired Emperor, before ascending to Tengoku and ceding the throne to his own son Satsu. As for the five who journeyed to Yume-do, their deeds prove them worthy; they become the Oracles of the Elemental Dragons. For his heroism in defending Togashi, the shinobi Shosuro Okuno is offered the position of Oracle of Thunder, but he refuses the honor (and the unwanted attention it would bring).

It should be apparent to aspiring GMs that there is no Gozoku conspiracy in this version of history – which in fact makes sense, given an immortal and all-knowing Emperor. In the "official" version of this story, the five chosen samurai are named Kuni Futaiko, Doji Tenga, Matsu Shireki, Shiba Sosei, and the Owl Clan monk Chie – however, the GM is free to assign their role to PCs instead.

Adventure Seed: The Cat Empress

Challenge: Emperor Hoshi's wife has died of old age, and he has recently shown interest in Kawahime, a strange woman of no identifiable family. The PCs have been asked to discover where she came from.

Focus: Kawahime is in fact a bakeneko, a cat spirit who has taken human form to explore Ningen-do. It is unlikely that Hoshi, who shares his father's wisdom and foresight, has failed to notice this fact; however, it would be of great interest – both positive and negative – to samurai of various clans. Both an Asako Loremaster and an Ikoma Bard have publicly questioned Kawahime's origin.

Strike: The PCs could gain great political advantage from exposing Kawahime to either the Phoenix or the Lion, but this might earn Imperial wrath as well. Her nature as a trickster makes her untrustworthy, and if she is exposed, she will go into hiding and may pose a danger to the Empire.

The Naga-Nezumi War

Following a massive Shadowlands attack during the sixth century, the Owl Clan Champion, Hantei Riuka, perceives an opportunity to strengthen Rokugan against the threat to the south. She sends emissaries to the leaders of various Nezumi tribes and goes to Kyuden Hida herself, where she argues persuasively for the benefits to be gained from an alliance with the ratlings.

Although their experiences with Shadowlands creatures have taught the Crab to be suspicious of anything that is not human, the immunity of the Nezumi to the Taint makes their assistance too valuable to be refused. Hida Gomyu, Champion of the Crab, accepts Riuka's offer, and a formal alliance is secured with the blessing of the Emperor.

But the vast knowledge of the Owl does not yet extend to all the strange things within Rokugan's borders. Eight years after the creation of the alliance, the first Naga emerge from the unmapped depths of the Shinomen Mori and begin to interact with the humans now populating the land. They are startled and displeased to find the Nezumi, their former pets and food source, now presume to see themselves as warriors the equal of those around them.

The Qamar, the war leader of the Naga, offers to aid the Crab against the Shadowlands if they will hand over their Nezumi allies into what the Naga see as "proper" control. Although many Crab harbor mixed feelings about the ratlings, their honor will not permit them to betray one ally in the hope of gaining another – especially when the other is a stranger to them. Riuka assembles the different leaders to broker an agreement, but on the very first day of negotiations Hida Gomyu strikes a Naga emissary for threatening a member of the Blue Fur tribe. During the ensuing confrontation, he declares he will fight the Naga before he will hand over a single ratling to their former masters.

The Naga take this as a declaration of open war. They gain the sympathy of Isawa Tayoe, Hoshi's current wife, who sees much more of value in the Naga's spiritual wisdom than in the strange beliefs and practices of the Nezumi. Her support leads the Phoenix to champion the Naga against the Crab-Nezumi alliance, while the Lion, seeing all these dealings with non-humans as harmful to Rokugan, declare their opposition to both sides.

The Owl continue their efforts to end the conflict peacefully, assisted by the diplomats of the Crane, but they are fighting against the tide: war breaks out not only along the border between the Shinomen Mori and Crab lands, but also in other locations around Rokugan, as emissaries of both the clans and the two inhuman races travel back and forth to organize support. The war only comes to an end when a second assault from the Shadowlands persuades the Naga and Nezumi to devote their attentions to a greater enemy.

The Pure One's Fires

Lion and Owl settlements in the northwest of Rokugan come under attack in the ninth century from forces no one can immediately identify. Villages are obliterated by terrible flames, and in the aftermath the fire kami in these areas become wild and uncontrollable.

Fearing the Shadowlands have somehow spread up through the Western Wastes, the clans seek help from the Crab, sending small units of Kuni shugenja and Hiruma scouts past the borders of Rokugan in search of the trouble's source. Most of them perish, but one badly burned pair makes it home to tell what they have seen: a sorcerer from the Burning Sands, exiled from Medinaat el-Salaam for his use of foul magic. Known as Al-Zayar, the "Pure One," he has gathered to his banner a vast army of barbarians, bandits, and ghuls.

These warriors and monsters are threat enough, but it is clear that Al-Zayar has some other unidentified power at his disposal. A Scholar of the First Dawn named Hakuen undertakes a month of fasting and meditation, hoping



Adventure Seed: The Jinn's Escape

Challenge: Jinn cannot be destroyed by mortals (though the Ashalan Enshir suggested they could be killed by a force he called the Khayel, known to the Unicorn as the Lying Darkness). Thus there was no choice but to imprison the jinn in a globe of water. Now, however, the temple built by Tojikome's followers has burned to the ground, taking all the monks and attendants with it.

Focus: The prison of water is nowhere to be found; Zebul, the jinn bound by Al-Zayar, has escaped. Though weakened by his long imprisonment, over time he will grow in power until he becomes a major threat to Rokugan once more.

Strike: If the PCs find and confront Zebul soon enough, they might be able to re-create Tojikome's prison; however, it will have to be maintained as before, and might break again. There are some alternatives. The PCs could try to find and use the corrupting power of the Lying Darkness to destroy Zebul. Or they could seek out the Dragon of Water and beg for its aid to imprison Zebul forever.

to gain insight on the problem; meanwhile, the leaders of Rokugan begin preparing their armies. To their great disappointment, when Hakuen rises from his meditation he walks away without a single word, vanishing into the Burning Sands.

The Empire is left with no choice but to face Al-Zayar's armies in battle. The bushi of the Lion and Crab form the core of Rokugan's forces; they slaughter invaders by the thousands, but those they kill rise again as undead ghuls. The Empire's shugenja can barely keep pace with this second threat. But worse yet are the fires that burn vast swathes of land to nothing more than ash, claiming entire military units in the process. Whatever defeats they inflict on the human and undead followers of Al-Zayar, the samurai of Rokugan can do nothing against these alien fires, nor against the Pure One himself. The Scorpion send many assassins into his camp, and many return claiming they succeeded in their mission... but every morning Al-Zayar reappears, clearly unharmed.

At the Battle of the Ashen Plain, where the samurai form ranks atop the charred remnants of their brothers-in-arms, Al-Zayar's victory seems inevitable. The Emperor himself has come to fight alongside them, but when Hoshi takes dragon form to battle their foe, the mysterious flames strike him down, burning him to nothing in an instant. Then horns sound from the desert, and a new force appears. The scouts report that the strangers are gaijin, but as the first wave of cavalry crashes into the Pure One's armies, Asako Jirushi recognizes the emblem on their banners as the mon of the lost Ki-Rin Clan.

The Ki-Rin – now the Unicorn – beat back Al-Zayar's forces from the Ashen Plain, and in the aftermath of the battle they share the knowledge gained in their wanderings: he is a khadi, a sorcerer made immortal by the removal of his heart. Only by finding and destroying the heart can he be defeated.

This quest is ultimately achieved by a ronin named Utsu, who infiltrates Al-Zayar's camp by posing as one of the disaffected swordsmen who have chosen to follow his banner. For his success, Utsu is granted the right to found a vassal family of the Scorpion; in later years he ascends to become the Fortune of Virtuous Murder. Al-Zayar's death splinters his army, but it does not stop the fires.

Hakuen returns at last, accompanied by a strange creature marked with tattoos of light. This creature, who identifies himself as the Ashalan Enshir, bears the answers Hakuen left to seek. The flames come from a powerful and corrupt jinn – a being which the Ashalan calls a "child of smokeless fire," bound into Al-Zayar's service. Unfortunately, nothing known to mortals can destroy a jinn; in the end, one of the Lion daimyo, the monk Tojikome, traps the jinn within a sphere of water. The jinn's power continually threatens to burn the water away, so Tojikome retires with several of her attendants, forming a tiny monastic order dedicated to eternally maintaining the prison.

Following the end of the war, the returned Unicorn claim the scorched lands to settle their people, promising to rebuild and renew them. Hoshi's widow Isawa Kusaeri sacrifices herself to create the Dragon Veil, protecting Rokugan from any such future attacks. The throne passes to Hoshi's son Satsu, who reigns for three hundred years.



The Return of the Lovers

The tragic affair of Isawa Minburo and Matsu Chomei is the subject of plays and poems from the sixth century onward. Born during a period of intense hostility between their clans, they meet at a Winter Court hosted by the Crane, and the diplomat Doji Shuren hopes to arrange a marriage between the two as part of a treaty settling the conflict. The pair find much to admire in each other, but manipulation by Bayushi Jaro (who is benefiting greatly from the strife between Lion and Phoenix) destroys not only the hope of peace, but also the incipient betrothal. A small error on the part of the Phoenix leads the Lion to claim great insult; the Isawa refuse to apologize, and the matter escalates until the Voice of the Emperor orders Minburo's seppuku in reparation. In a berserker rage, Chomei calls on the Fortune of Vengeance to give her satisfaction, but is struck down by the Phoenix Clan Champion.

Chomei's prayers are not answered until the tenth century, when her soul and that of Minburo return from Meido to be reborn. But some force of perversity intervenes along the way, for Chomei is reborn as an Isawa, while Minburo is reborn among the Matsu.

Both children are unaware at first of the kharmic legacy they bear. However, as the Phoenix girl Ennari grows up, she is subject to fits of blinding rage. Her parents, seeking to calm her inexplicable anger, foster her at a Four Temples monastery in Crane lands, and there Ennari learns enough self-control to eventually return home and enter the Isawa shugenja school.

Kishu, the young Lion who bears Minburo's soul, displays an intermittent ability to hear the kami – a trait not much valued in the Lion Clan in this version of Rokugan. His parents therefore send him to study with the monastic Disciples of the Honored Ancestors. The boy nonetheless begins to manifest occasional shugenja abilities, as if he has been taught the casting of spells. Unable to endure life among the Disciples, Kishu flees the Lion lands and ends up among ronin, learning what he can of the sword, but sporadically manifesting the powers of Minburo's previous life.

Both samurai might have lived out their lives with these strange conditions, but in the summer of their twentieth year they encounter one another at a festival in Crane lands. Ennari has become a Jade Magistrate, and Kishu is a hired bodyguard to a Scorpion courtier. They see each other only at a distance, and only for a moment. But the souls of Chomei and Minburo recognize one another, and this recognition sets Ennari on a path of destruction. She uses her position as a Jade Magistrate to undermine those who wronged her in her past life, sending Asako Inquisitors against the Scorpion, summoning spirits to attack the Lion, and driving Doji Uena (the descendent, many generations removed, of Shuren) to drown herself. The Isawa she begins to murder outright, arranging to place herself in charge of the investigations. The chaos Ennari spreads not only foments a general distrust of the Phoenix, but draws the attention of the Seppun and the Kuni, both of whom use the opportunity to try and claim the office of Jade Champion for their own families.

This violent campaign cannot last forever, of course. Finally the Isawa uncover the truth and attempt to put an end to the threat, and Ennari flees to the Great Wall of the North. But Kishu, driven by his own ancestral memories, has been investigating the sudden trouble among the Scorpion, and connects it to the chaos elsewhere. Recognizing the source of it all, he journeys to Kyuden Isawa and demands the right to bring Chomei to justice. Kishu is forced to face the Master of Void in a taryuu-jiai duel, and the combination of his abortive Disciple training and his memories of the Isawa skills of his past life allows him to improbably prevail. He delivers a searing rebuke to the Isawa for their inflexible pride and departs in search of his lost love. After many months he finds Ennari in the snows of the far north; the lovers confront one another at last and perish in each other's arms.

Chastened by Kishu's words, the Isawa invite the Lion to court and formally apologize for their error from over four hundred years before.

Clans and Factions in the Togashi Dynasty

The monk sat in the center of the bridge, folded into the lotus position. However, the naginata across his knees showed he was not meditating. He watched unblinking as Otaku Nazoto pulled her horse to a halt at the foot of the bridge.

"Will you let me pass?" she asked mildly.

"If you can answer my riddle," he said. "I am the monk Shimon. I have sworn an oath to Muzaka, the Fortune of Enigmas, that I will kill anyone who comes this way and cannot answer it correctly."

Nazoto smiled, but her hand slid toward the dai-kyu hanging from her saddle, the motion concealed by the angle of her body. "And if I do answer it correctly? Do I kill you, or will something more interesting happen?"

For the first time, Shimon's face betrayed a hint of feeling beyond simple patience. It was almost, but not quite, a smile.

"You are the first samurai to ask that question," he said. "Perhaps you will be the first to face me and live."

How would each clan express its identity in the supernatural environment of Togashi's Rokugan? The descriptions presented here offer one set of possibilities for what roles each group and family might occupy, and how the dynamics of inter-clan alliance and enmity might be changed. Each clan has also formed a close association with one of the Brotherhood's monastic orders.

The Crab Clan

Monastic association: Temple of Osano-Wo

The Shadowlands are as great a threat as ever, and their influence is simultaneously more pervasive and more subtle. While the occasional massive army still strikes at the Kaiu Wall, the greater danger often comes from insidious creatures such as bog hags or Pekkle no Oni, and from the spread of the Taint through Rokugan.

The greatest burden in protecting against this threat falls upon the two main schools of the Kuni family. The Emperor grants Kuni shugenja the authority to pursue Shadowlands creatures anywhere in the Empire, and the Witch-Hunters hold similar authority over Tainted humans. Despite their Imperial backing, however, they face obstacles. Neither group is welcomed by other clans, who fear what the presence of a Kuni might mean.

Kaiu ingenuity, equally vital to the clan's success, takes on a more mystical aspect under the Togashi Dynasty. Although their engineers still produce some of the finest weapons, armor, fortifications, and siege equipment in Rokugan, their creations – even the largest of them, such as castle keeps – are far more likely to awaken as nemuranai, often of great strength.

Those Crab who lack spiritual capability do not lack for work. The Hida care even less (if such were possible) for social niceties than they do in Hantei's Empire; they focus their efforts on the continual war against the Shadowlands, to the point where some even in their own clan consider them to be more like ferocious beasts then men. As for the Hiruma, they stop at nothing to retrieve lost Crab nemuranai or other treasures – whether in the Shadowlands or elsewhere in Rokugan. While some condemn them as treasure-hunters little better than the Yoritomo, the Hiruma know the Crab cannot afford to abandon their tools to enemy hands. The clan has no real courtier tradition, for in this timeline the First Yasuki War never happens and indeed the Yasuki family does not exist. Crab diplomats are usually Kuni, sent as much to ferret out the Taint as to conduct politics.

Among the Great Clans, the Crab have the most in common with the Lion, who share their misgivings about anything that is not human. They have little more than contempt for the Crane, whom they see as nearly useless – but even that is better than their attitude toward the Owl. Although they once accepted the aid of the Hantei in negotiating an alliance with the Nezumi (whose value against the Shadowlands is incalculable), as a general rule the Crab see all other non-humans as threats. The Owl, who spend more time with such creatures than with their own kind, are not to be trusted.

The Jade Champion

Given the ubiquity of supernatural problems and challenges in the Togashi Dynasty, the office of the Jade Champion is never in abeyance. Control of it almost always rests with one of three families: the Kuni, the Seppun, or the Isawa. Each prefers to focus on a different kind of threat.

For the Kuni, maho-tsukai are the greatest concern. When Bloodspeakers or similar foes are ascendant, the Kuni do whatever is necessary – up to and including challenging the current Jade Champion – to make certain they are in command of the forces that hunt them. They do not trust any other family to adequately handle the threat of maho.

The Seppun are, unsurprisingly, most concerned with non-human magic. They hunt troublemakers of other races (and the artifacts scattered or lost by such creatures). Indeed, they do so with such zeal that there has been talk of creating a separate Champion for such matters, though this has not happened yet.

The Isawa, whether they control the Jade Championship or not, use the Asako Inquisitors to hunt magic they view as "heretical" – which is to say, anything that does not conform to the practices of the Isawa themselves. This includes not only the gaijin-derived meishodo of the Unicorn and the tejina Shadow Brands of the Soshi, but also (in times of inter-clan conflict) the wards of the Yogo or the fetishes of the Asahina. Even the Isawa, however, are not bold enough to target Imperial alchemy.

The Crane Clan

Monastic association: Four Temples

Togashi's Empire is a less political place, favoring spiritual advancement over the intricate dance of social maneuver. The Crane have little to no prominence in the early centuries of this Rokugan's history. If the Gozoku conspiracy is included in the timeline, it finally creates an Imperial government for the Crane to participate in, and a platform from which they can spread their aesthetics to the other clans.

Although they rarely gain influential positions themselves, the Crane are adept at marrying their samurai to those who do. The later Togashi Emperors rarely take their wives from among Doji's followers, but the other clans are a different matter. Link by careful link, the Crane forge a wide-ranging network of alliances and blood ties. They do this not only for their own benefit but for all of Rokugan: when disputes arise, the Crane are always in a position to mediate. By such means do they make themselves indispensable, even to those who sneer at their delicate ways. Such efforts rely heavily on the diplomatic skills of the Doji, who are the undisputed masters of the social dance. Thanks to them, the Crane are seen as a friend by many, and a threat by none... which is close enough to the truth to be believed. The sole exception is the Daidoji, who are if anything even more pragmatic and ruthless in this timeline than in the canon. Someone has



to clean up the mess when the Doji fail to secure a peace, after all. Daidoji bushi often clash with the Scorpion in the shadows.

The Kakita have both benefited and suffered from the absence of their traditional rivals, the Mirumoto. With the Mirumoto style restricted to only a few in the direct service of Togashi, the Kakita "one sword, one strike" philosophy reigns supreme over iaijutsu. And if the Kakita fight fewer duels in court (sword-duels themselves being less frequent, while magical taryuu-jiai duels are more common), that does not mean their blades are idle: many Kakita take up a role as wandering swordsmen, traversing Rokugan and offering themselves as champions to those in need.

The Asahina likewise wander the Empire, but the assistance they offer to the downtrodden is very different. Many peasants and samurai have found themselves miraculously shielded from harm or healed of wounds, only afterward realizing their humbly-dressed benefactor is in truth a Crane shugenja. Faithful to their philosophy of pacifism, the Asahina rarely fight to defend their targets, but only a fool believes this means they are easy targets.

The clan's principal rivals in the Empire are the violent Crab (whose grim duty the delicate Crane do not like to think about unless absolutely necessary) and the Scorpion (who all too often work directly against the Crane Clan's harmonious purposes). By contrast, they get along reasonably well with the Lion, since in this timeline the great feud between Kakita and Matsu never happened.

The Lion Clan

Monastic association: Order of Heroes

The Lion see themselves as the defenders of mankind. In a Rokugan where supernatural forces are so prominent, someone has to stand up for simple human strength, and Akodo chooses to take on that role for himself and his followers. The Lion believe Bushido separates Rokugani not only from gaijin but also from the other creatures that inhabit the world. The most zealous of them say Bushido makes them superior to all others.

The Ikoma are the heart of this Lion Clan, exhorting their brethren to the pinnacle of their abilities and beyond. To their fellow clanmates they are living proof of the superiority of Lion philosophy, the refutation of any argument that a samurai needs more than his body, his mind, and the favor of his ancestors.

The backbone of the Lion, however, is still the armies of the Akodo and the Matsu. The Lion, more than any other clan – perhaps even more than the Crab – trust in the strength of their bushi, in contrast to the reliance on spiritual power that prevails elsewhere in Rokugan. The rarity of this attitude is also the reason for its success: few other clans are prepared to face the berserk fury of the Matsu, so different from the meditative and serene approach of other bushi. (They are even less prepared for the Matsu Beastmasters, who are more common than in canonical Rokugan.) Paired with the tactical precision of the Akodo, the power of the Matsu allows the clan to

GM's Toolbox: Shugenja-Free Lion

Perceptive readers will notice the Lion in this timeline do not have a shugenja family. This is intentional, to maintain a consistent depiction of the world of the Togashi Dynasty. In this timeline the Lion extol the virtues of unaided humanity; thus, although they acknowledge and honor the kami, they refuse to call on them for aid. Instead, they have the Disciples of the Honored Ancestors, monks who call upon the blessings of the ancestors to support their clan.

GMs who prefer to keep Rokugan closer to its canonical roots, or who do not wish to deprive the Lion of shugenja, may opt to retain the Kitsu shugenja school under another family name – perhaps the Ikoma. However, in this case the other clans may mock the Lion for compromising their ideals.

attain victories that do indeed seem to argue persuasively for the power of simple human strength.

As noted elsewhere, the acceptance of non-humans in this version of Rokugan means the near-extinction of the Kitsu never occurs. The spiritual side of the Lion Clan is instead the responsibility of a wholly human-derived group: a clan monastic order called the Disciples of the Honored Ancestors. The Disciples are the keepers of the clan's religious customs and its ancestor-worship traditions; in war, whether against fellow mortals or stranger things, the Disciples' knowledge helps negate the spiritual advantages of the Lion Clan's opponents.

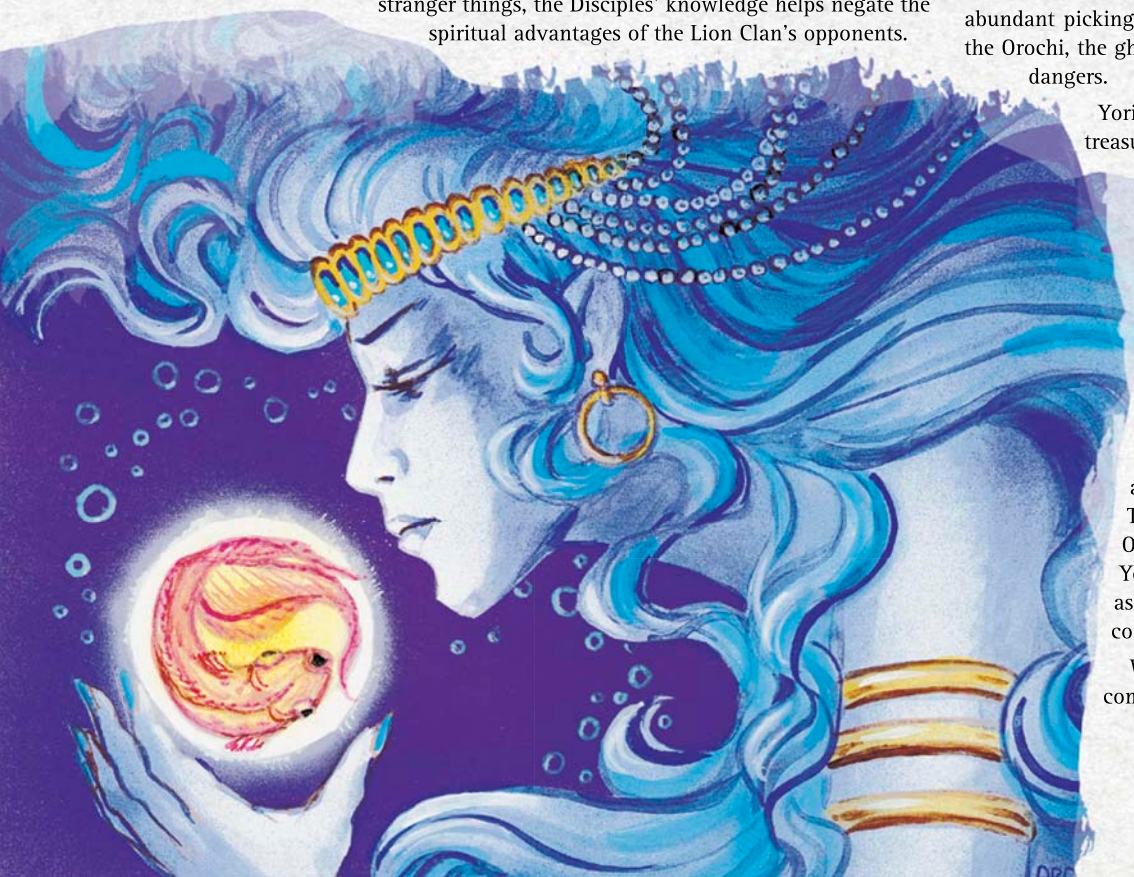
The prejudices of the Lion put them in hostile opposition to the Owl. Although the Akodo spend more time studying non-humans than nearly anyone else other than the Hantei and the Otomo, they do so to uncover the weaknesses of their enemies. As far as most Lion are concerned, the Owl are borderline traitors, to be tolerated only due to the Emperor's will, since they advocate for the benefit of inhuman creatures over their own kind. This attitude, combined with their focus on martial strength, often puts the Lion and the Crab on the same side the Empire's various internal disputes. The one crack in their otherwise solid friendship comes from the Crab alliance with the Nezumi; the Lion refuse to make an exception for the ratlings, no matter how useful they may seem, and insist they are not necessary to defend against the Shadowlands. (Since the Lion are not the ones standing on the Kaiu Wall twelve months of the year, the Crab ignore this argument.)

The Mantis Clan

Monastic association: Temple of Kaimetsu-uo

The seas of Rokugan are a haunted place, beyond the knowledge of even most Otomo scholars. The Dragon Veil prevents the Mantis from conducting any trade with outside lands. Enough riches have been lost beneath the waves, however, for them to make an excellent living by retrieving it.

In the eyes of the other clans, the Mantis are scavengers, no better than the bottom-feeders they eat. Or at least that is the public stance: in reality, there's a thriving market for the precious items their divers and shugenja dredge up from the deep. Treasures lost in the wreck of Rokugani ships, the ruins of the shattered Ningyo civilization, and abandoned settlements of the Naga Chameleons all offer abundant pickings for those willing to risk the wrath of the Orochi, the ghosts of the drowned, and other seaborn dangers.



Yoritomo bushi are the most common treasure-seekers among the Mantis, having trained to fight in the water. They have a healthy respect for the ferocious warriors of the ocean races, but no friendship with them; in fact, Yoritomo activity has more than once been the cause of small-scale war with the Naga. The courtiers of the family show little interest in quieting these difficulties, preferring to act as artifact brokers to the other clans, and relying on the alliances thus produced to defend them. These alliances extend even among the Owl, for while many of that clan decry Yoritomo disrespect to the Naga, they ask few questions when beautiful artifacts come into their hands.

What true diplomacy the Mantis practice comes from the Moshi, whose reverence for

spiritual forces often puts them at odds with the Yoritomo. Necessity has led them to become highly skilled at the social aspects of air magic, to mend the rifts their fellow Mantis create. The unscrupulous among them master illusion as well, to hide the clan's less admirable activities.

The Tsuruchi, both as the independent Wasp Clan and as a Mantis family, are among the great wanderers of Rokugan. In addition to pursuing thieves who dare to steal from the Mantis (the "rightful owners" of the items stolen from others), they enjoy widespread employment as bounty hunters for the other clans – a task that often brings them face-to-face not only with Hiruma on similar missions, but with wandering Kakita champions. More than one village has been witness to the astonishing sight of a Kakita duelist drawing his sword in an iaijutsu strike to split an arrow fired by a Tsuruchi bowman.

The Phoenix Clan

Monastic association: Shrine of the Seven Thunders

Togashi's Rokugan is a congenial place for the Phoenix. Although their numbers are small, the respect accorded to shugenja means the Isawa are one of the most influential families in all of Rokugan, standing at most a bare step below the Imperial families. Indeed, some say – not entirely in jest – that they are an Imperial family, as the Emperors of the Togashi Dynasty have taken more wives from the Isawa than from any other family line. Only the Seppun of the Owl Clan, with whom they enjoy competitive friendship, have supplied even half so many.

Unlike the canonical history, the Phoenix are not ruled by the descendent of their founding Kami. As the Isawa are wont to remind everyone, Shiba knelt not only to Togashi, but also to Isawa, and the Clan Champions are therefore selected from among Isawa's descendants. The Soul of Shiba is still passed down within the Shiba family via the sword Ofushikai, but the one chosen by it is merely the Shiba daimyo rather than the clan's leader. However, the bearers of Ofushikai are the heroes of some of Rokugan's most epic tales, known all the way to the borders of the Empire.

Behind the Isawa stand the Asako scholars. In light of how often the past comes back to haunt the present (whether in the form of feuds, curses, lost artifacts, or the spirits of the ancestors themselves), the Loremasters and their library are a priceless resource, and their knowledge is a potent political weapon. Shiba yojimbo occupy a relatively humble position in the clan's hierarchy, but their artisans are renowned as great crafters of nemuranai.

The other strength of the Phoenix lies with the henshin. Although this monastic order is secretive, its true nature unknown to most, the henshin are often seen beyond the borders of Phoenix lands. They seek to bring all of Rokugan to the Path of Man, and frequently test strangers (samurai and peasant alike) for suitability. Most fail, a few succeed, and a few more become misguided heretics, just enlightened enough to pose a threat to themselves and others. When this happens, the henshin are forced to seek assistance in neutralizing them.

Alternate Paths: The Eighth Great Clan

In a Togashi Dynasty campaign that follows the general shape of the canonical timeline, the Mantis will still eventually become a Great Clan and will still absorb the Centipede and the Wasp Clans. There may or may not be a Kitsune family and a Minor Clan of the Fox in this timeline, since the Owl Clan is already dominating Rokugan's relations with spirit creatures. Even if the Fox do exist, it is unlikely that they join the Mantis, since the events which led to that unification are completely different in this world.

It is also possible that the Great Clan of the Mantis, with their materialism and practical nature, may not suit the spiritual atmosphere of this setting. The GM may opt to keep the Mantis as a single-family Minor Clan, or even to allow some other Minor Clan Champion to turn the tide during the war against Fu Leng, earning Great Clan status as a result. This would, of course, have a ripple effect on later events, such as the War of Fire and Thunder.

If the Mantis do attain Great Clan status, the new post-Togashi Emperor orders they be given a magical amulet allowing the passage of one ship through the Dragon Veil. This is not enough for significant smuggling, and is done mainly so the Mantis may watch for any future threats from beyond the sea.



If the Lion understood the purpose of the henshin, they might feel less hostility toward the Phoenix. As it stands, the two clans are often at odds. The enthusiasm of the Asako Inquisitors for hunting heretical magic also creates friction with the Unicorn and (to a lesser extent) the Crane.

The Scorpion Clan

Monastic association: Shinmaki Order

Ninja exist. Why bother denying it? The Scorpion Clan derives a great deal of benefit from the activities of its less reputable members. Whether it's a crowd of disposable enemies in black pajamas or a true shinobi slipping behind the scenes, the services of the Shosuro Infiltrators are a valuable commodity to market to the other clans. Of course, this also leads to more frequent clashes with the ruthless side of the Daidoji family.

Unfortunately for the Scorpion, another kind of ninja moves among them, though few realize it. The influence of the Nothing festers in the Soshi and Shosuro families. Those corrupted by it are sometimes hunted by their fellow clanmates, sometimes overlooked... and sometimes cultivated by leaders who should know better. More than once this hubris has brought the Scorpion to the brink of total destruction.



Much of the responsibility for preventing such an evil falls on the Yogo, whose Kuroiban members spend as much time fighting the corruption within their own clan as they do with the Kuni hunting maho-tsukai. Those not involved in such efforts devote themselves to the study of curses and their removal. Yogo shugenja are without equal in Rokugan for undoing the spiritual afflictions of others... even if their own curse remains beyond their reach.

When not undermined by the Nothing among their brethren, the Bayushi are usually able to lead the Scorpion to great prosperity. The Clan of Secrets thrives in a Rokugan that is full of hidden dangers, trading history about ancient curses to the Asako, leads on missing nemuranai to the Hiruma, and warnings about non-human intentions to the Lion. They are the greatest brokers of information – both true and false – in the Empire. They are no more trusted, however, than in Hantei's Rokugan. After all, Scorpion courtiers undo the careful peacemaking of the Doji, and Scorpion ninja clash often with the Daidoji. The Soshi frequently come under the scrutiny of the Isawa. Yogo have more illegitimate children than any other family, since many samurai deceive themselves that a Yogo mistress is less dangerous than a Yogo wife. (This does not, of course, protect them from the curse, and often makes them the targets of ordinary revenge.) Only trickster spirits from Sakkaku seem fond of the deceitful Scorpion, sometimes to the extent of taking human form to wed them.

The Unicorn Clan

Monastic association: Order of the Wind

Although the Unicorn have their own lands in which they are supposed to live, there is a half-serious proverb that one is likely to encounter the Unicorn in any territory but their own. Unlike the wandering samurai of other clans, however, the Unicorn are usually found in small bands, traversing the Empire for months or years at a time before returning home to report what they have learned. (Some speculate this is a spiritual taboo laid on them, an inability to spend too long in any one place.)

Thanks to the efforts of the Ide, the Unicorn are the only Great Clan permitted to travel in numbers across the Dragon Veil. Their emissaries argued it was dangerous for Rokugan to remain wholly ignorant of the world outside the Veil, and their accounts of the many dangers the Unicorn had encountered in their centuries of wandering certainly seemed to back their position. It took nearly a hundred years of effort, but the Agasha eventually gave them one hundred nightingale amulets granting their bearers passage through the Veil. Eleven of these amulets have since been destroyed, and nine have been lost. Most are rumored to be in Scorpion hands (or worse), but the Ide fear one may have been acquired by gaijin. There is intense competition among the Unicorn for the use of the remaining amulets.

Many of the Unicorn wanderers, within the Empire and without, travel in order to prove their worth to their daimyo and Clan Champion; others are simply restless. Otaku battle maidens often journey alone, seeking challenges worthy of their skill. The Shinjo and Moto more often go in groups, with or without Ide emissaries to speak on their behalf.

Iuchi who practice meishodo must keep a low profile, knowing their foreign magic will draw unwanted attention not only from Phoenix Inquisitors but also from peasants and samurai who mistake a gaijin-featured Unicorn performing strange spells for a non-human threat. Sadly, more than a few shugenja have been ambushed and killed by frightened samurai or angry mobs of peasants, leading even the compassionate Unicorn into bitter feuds of revenge. Such feuds are all the more regrettable in light of the clan's usually kind treatment of peasants. The frequent absence of their samurai lords means the heimin often rise to positions of surprising influence in Unicorn lands, and traveling Unicorn samurai often go to considerable efforts to protect those peasants they encounter elsewhere. This makes them allies of the Crane in general and the Asahina in particular (though less so of the Daidoji). Otaku battle maidens share a grudging bond of respect with female Matsu, especially the Beastmasters; on the other hand, Moto and Matsu often wind up in challenges of strength and ferocity, challenges that end in either death or lifelong friendship.

Hantei's Clan: The Clan of the Owl

Monastic association: Scholars of the First Dawn

After the Tournament of the Kami, Togashi laid a specific and peculiar duty upon Hantei. His brother, he said, would have been a fine Emperor; he would have brought the people of Rokugan together into a society where their different strengths formed a complementary whole. Now he should put that gift to use by reaching out to the non-humans in the unseen corners of the Empire.

Although the Owl Clan is led by the Hantei family, their spiritual and mystical heart is the Seppun shugenja family. In this timeline, the Seppun become deep adepts of the ways of the spirit realms and study the esoteric magic of the Five Ancient Races. They are defended by the Hantei and by another bushi family, the Yoshun. Their founder once saved the life of a Kenku Kensai trapped by a maho-tsukai. In gratitude, he not only taught her the techniques of his people but gave her permission to pass some of them on to those who bear her blood. To this day, the Yoshun dojo only accepts students who are descendants of the original Yoshun herself.

The politicians of the clan are the courtiers of the Otomo family. Their knowledge of the non-human races and the spirit worlds is unparalleled, and the techniques of their school aid them greatly in smoothing over the differences of behavior and expectation between humans and their supernatural neighbors.

The Role of Non-Humans in the Togashi Dynasty

The Five Ancient Races, other non-human races such as the Naga and Nezumi, and various kinds of spirits are all more common and active in this version of Rokugan. Depending on preference, GMs can handle this in a variety of ways.

Obviously, in this world the Emperor never issues the edict to exterminate all dangerous non-humans in Rokugan. Thus, Akodo never slaughters the Kitsu race.

In a world where Togashi was destined to win, it might well be that non-humans never faded away as they did in the canon. The Naga never went into the Great Sleep (or only part of the race did so), fewer Kenku left for Sakkaku, and so on.

Alternatively, the efforts of the Owl Clan may have made a difference in these matters. Perhaps Hantei's followers awoke the Naga ahead of schedule, or persuaded a group of Kenku to return to Ningen-do.

GMs interested in a highly supernatural flavor can even posit a Rokugan where humans have always been in the minority. Perhaps the clans struggle to hold their own against the other races, and must deal at every turn with the concerns and actions of the Nezumi, the Kitsu, the Zokujin, and more.



The Owl Clan's affiliated monastic order is known as the Sekisho, the Scholars of the First Dawn, who seek enlightenment through understanding the world that existed before the Kami fell, even studying the world as it was before human beings appeared in Ningen-do. They devote themselves to the ancient past, and maintain a great library inside the Shinomen Mori that is open to all – if a visitor can find it, that is.

The Spider Clan

Monastic order: Order of Venom

It is up to the GM as to whether or not history follows a course in this timeline that allows the Spider Clan to exist. If the lead-up to the Scorpion Clan Coup includes an attempt by the Bloodspeakers to kidnap and kill the Emperor's family, then a scion of the Togashi Dynasty might well become this world's version of Daigotsu, a nemesis to the Toturi Dynasty and to Rokugan itself. In a timeline more divergent from canon, such a kidnapping might occur far sooner – forming the Spider Clan before the Second Day of Thunder – or the Lost might swear fealty to a different leader, such as Doji Nashiko, the Dark Daughter of Fu Leng.

In this setting, it is unlikely the Spider ever achieve official Imperial recognition as a Great Clan. On the other hand, such recognition is far less necessary. Religious considerations, not political ones, are the foundation of a clan's existence in Togashi's Rokugan, and in that respect the Spider (being devoted to Fu Leng) have as much claim as any other Great Clan – and more than the Mantis, unless the deification of Yoritomo takes place here as it did in canon.

Whether or not they are openly acknowledged as a Great Clan, the Spider in this timeline serve the destructive forces of the cosmos. Rather than spearheading the expansion of Rokugan into the Ivory Kingdoms (an event highly unlikely to occur in this setting) they are instead one of the driving forces bringing foreign influences into the Empire, circumventing the Dragon Veil through the use of maho. These influences most often take the form of magical artifacts from the Ivory Kingdoms, the Burning Sands, and places further afield. The Spider have even welcomed into their Tainted ranks the occasional gaijin sorcerer – a fact they take pains to conceal from Jade Magistrates. They also find use in mundane imports, including gaijin inventions like spyglasses, astrolabes, and even firearms. The prohibition against these is social and spiritual, not legal, and there are always those willing to lay aside piety in exchange for power.

Firearms in the Togashi Dynasty

The "Era of White Stag" chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories* suggests optional mechanics to magnify the alien and frightening nature of *gaijin* weapons. It is strongly recommended these rules be used in the Togashi Dynasty timeline. In a world where the supernatural is so central to everyone's existence, firearms should be a strange and terrifying threat.

The Minor Clans

The basic nature of a Minor Clan is different under the Togashi Dynasty. For the Great Clans, veneration of the founders is vital to their identity. Everyone within a given family honors the ancestor of that family, and the entire clan makes offerings to the founding Kami. Because of this, the creation of a Minor Clan is less a political matter and more a spiritual one. Imperial authority does not bestow the right to establish a new clan. It happens when mortals ascend and become Fortunes – and not by Imperial decree, but by virtue of their own enlightenment and the greatness of their deeds.

The histories of the various canonical Minor Clans should be revised to accommodate this change. Hayabusa, for example, becomes the Fortune of Vigilance for his self-sacrifice in protecting an Imperial advisor from a possessed assassin, and is subsequently venerated by his Falcon Clan descendants. Heichi, founder of the Boar Clan, is the Fortune of Debts, in honor of the "back taxes" he paid to the Emperor after sixty years lost in the Twilight Mountains. (Gusai, naturally, is the Fortune of Ambition.)

Samurai of the Minor Clans, even more than their Great Clan peers, benefit from the less politically stratified atmosphere of Togashi's Rokugan. Although they may lack resources, there is more scope for exceptional individuals, regardless of family, to prove their worth and change the course of history at a pivotal moment.

As for a Minor Clan achieving Great Clan status, it requires something akin to Yoritomo's ascension to Kami status in the canonical history. GMs who wish to keep a tight limit on such things can require the Dragon of Thunder or a similar being to sacrifice its divinity (as in the case of Yoritomo); a GM who prefers greater flexibility can permit alternative methods.

The canonical Fox Clan may or may not exist in the Empire of the Togashi Dynasty, since the Lion Clan is less likely to carry out its historical aggression against the Ki-Rin lands and in this Rokugan the Fox Clan would not be nearly so unique in its connection to the spirit realms. It is up to the GM whether the left-behind fragment of Shinjo's followers become the Fox Clan, become a different Minor Clan, are absorbed by one of the Great Clans (most likely the Owl), or simply remain in their ancestral lands until the Unicorn return and re-unite with them.

The Imperial Families

Monastic Order: The Ise Zumi

Obviously, the identities of the Imperial families are radically different in this timeline – instead of the Otomo, Seppun, and Miya, they are the Mirumoto, Agasha, and later the Kitsuki, as well as the order of tattooed men. Their numbers are much lower than in canonical Rokugan, and the techniques of their respective schools are closely-held Imperial secrets. The niten style of the Mirumoto is reserved exclusively to members of their small family, and its use by anyone else is a capital offense. Likewise, the alchemy of the Agasha is closely protected and forbidden to all others. (The GM may opt to substitute the mechanics of the Tamori school as a replacement or an alternative to the Agasha school.) The Kitsuki Method, while less of a secret, is alien enough to most Rokugani that its practice has not spread very far beyond Imperial magistrates. From the perspective of most samurai (let alone peasants), the Kitsuki ability to divine the truth from scattered shreds of evidence seems closely akin to magic.

Although they are not a family as such, and bear no family name, the ise zumi still exist. Desperate families (or those guided by spiritual signs) sometimes trust to the Fortunes and abandon their sons and daughters in the northern mountains, hoping they will survive and be taken into the tattooed order. On rare occasions, Imperial monks claim a child – sometimes a samurai, sometimes a peasant – for their own. Even more rarely, a youth or adult may undertake an arduous quest to join the order's ranks. The ise zumi are the special agents of the Emperor, appearing without warning to carry out mysterious tasks, then vanishing back to the High House of Light.

As for the Imperial line itself, Togashi's descendents become more human with time, but never fully shed their celestial draconic heritage. They are capable of living far beyond an ordinary mortal lifespan, and all display the ability to transform into a dragon, though the power of this form declines in later generations. Those few who do not inherit the throne most often join the ise zumi, and lose the effects of their divine heritage upon being tattooed.

The Kolat

Does the Kolat even exist in this timeline? In the canonical history, Togashi knew about the Kolat from the start and did not permit them to infiltrate his clan. How much more potent would a Togashi Emperor have been in this regard? On the other hand, as suggested in the "Dawn of the Empire" chapter in the L5R 4th Edition supplement Imperial Histories, a truly divine but remote and distant Emperor could actually have served as a rallying point for the Kolat cause, making them a much more serious threat. For that matter, since Togashi allowed the Kolat to continue their plots in the canon, he might do so in this timeline as well. Even the Kolat have their part to play in the destiny of Rokugan, after all.

Alternatively, the widespread reverence for spiritual matters in Togashi's Rokugan might undercut the Kolat's worldly philosophy, possibly to the point of rendering them powerless and irrelevant. It is up to the GM which path to take.

Notable Personages of the Togashi Dynasty

Obviously, the changed world of the Togashi Dynasty will contain many heroes who never appeared in the canonical timeline. Moreover, even those who bear the same names as in the canon will not always have the same destiny. This section offers three examples of notable Togashi Dynasty personalities, one a changed hero from the canon and the other two original to the setting, to serve as a starting point for GMs who wish to set their campaign in this world.

Togashi Hoshi

The Dragon's Son

Togashi's only son is the offspring of Bayushi Kuninoko, a spy from the Scorpion Clan. In the third century, Kunikoko's father Bayushi Oshiso (the Scorpion Clan Champion) sent her to investigate the reclusive Dragon Emperor. She spent some time among the Mirumoto, Agasha, and ise zumi, but eventually slipped away from their watchful eyes and traveled farther into the Great Wall of the North, seeking Togashi himself. She arrived on the doorstep of the High House of Light nearly dead from the cold, but was taken in and restored to health. She returned to her father only once, allowing him to think she was a ghost; he believed she had died following his orders, and never knew of her son.

Hoshi succeeds his father as the ruling Emperor because Rokugan needs someone who can bridge the distance between humans and the Heavens. Togashi's foresight bestows great wisdom in certain matters, but his nature as a celestial dragon and a Kami makes him too remote from the concerns of the Empire's inhabitants. Kuninoko's love of secrets lives on in her son, causing Hoshi to take a stronger interest in mortal affairs.

And yet, he is not fully mortal. Like all the Emperors of the Togashi Dynasty, he can take dragon form, and his lifespan is far longer than that of a human. Though he can be wounded, it takes more than mere weapons to kill him, and even his ultimate "death" is actually an ascension to Tengoku.

Over the course of his lifetime Hoshi takes a series of wives. His reasons for choosing them are idiosyncratic – or less politely, "inexplicable" – and none are chosen for political reasons, nor (as near as anyone can tell) for reasons of romantic attachment. The death of Isawa

Kusaeri suggests that each wife is chosen for a purpose, but most of those purposes remain known only to the Emperor himself. Despite these marriages, Hoshi has only one child, his son Togashi Satsu.

Togashi Hoshi, the Dragon's Son

Air: 5 Earth: 6 Fire: 4 Water: 5 Void: 6
Intelligence: 6

Honor: 7.0 *Status: 10.0* *Glory: 5.6*

School/Rank: Tattooed Order 5

Skills: Athletics 5, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 3, Courtier 4, Craft: Tattooing 5, Defense 6, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Intimidation 3, Investigation (Notice) 4, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Spirit Realms 4, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 7, Meditation (Void Recovery) 6, Sincerity (Honesty) 4, Tea Ceremony 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Balance, Enlightened, Inner Gift (Foresight), Social Position (Emperor)

Disadvantages: Antisocial, Ascetic

Special Note: Due to his half-dragon heritage, Hoshi is effectively immortal and has the ability to take draconic form as a Simple Action.

Isawa Kusaeri

Creator of the Dragon Veil

Born to a humble bloodline within the Isawa family, Kusaeri was marked from childhood for a destiny both great and tragic. The priest who presided over her birth ceremonies not only recorded the remarkable strength of her connection to the kami, but observed omens suggesting Kusaeri would die in the service of the Empire. He reported this privately to the Clan Champion, believing wiser heads than his should decide whether or not to inform her parents.

The Clan Champion chose to keep the omens a secret, but kept close watch over Kusaeri in her youth, occasionally sending anonymous gifts to help her with her studies. By the time she entered the Isawa shugenja school, she was as well-educated as students a year ahead of her, and she underwent her gempukku at a young age. Although her achievements sparked some jealousy, she worked hard enough to earn them that most of her peers accorded her respect.

Few knew about her probable fate, and none knew Kusaeri herself was aware of it. The night before she departed for the Isawa dojo, she was visited and marked by the Oracle of Air, and granted an answer to a single question. She asked what the greatest service was that she could do for Rokugan, and the answer she received was the Dragon Veil.

It did not take long before Kusaeri realized creating the Veil would require the sacrifice of her life. But the Oracle had assured her she would know when the time for it had come, so she vowed to learn as much as she could before then, to fulfill her duty to clan and Empire as well as possible. She rose through the ranks of the Isawa and eventually joined the Hurricane Initiates, focusing on the weather and deception aspects of air magic, and paying little attention to Imperial matters. She was therefore completely startled when the Emperor appeared in the temple one day to ask her to be his wife. Suspecting this was a necessary step along her path, Kusaeri accepted.

When the time to create the Dragon Veil came, she did not hesitate. Pouring her life into beseeching the air kami, she raised a wall of mist and illusion that would protect Rokugan for centuries.

Isawa Kusaeri, Creator of the Dragon Veil

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

Honor: 6.3 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 7.5*

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Air) 5 (Mist Legion) / Elemental Guard 1

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Investigation 3, Knives 2, Lore: Elements (Air) 6, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Theology 5, Medicine 3, Meditation 6, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft (Spell Research) 7

Advantages: Prodigy, Chosen by the Oracle of Air, Great Destiny, Social Position (Empress)

Disadvantages: Idealistic

Seppun Yoshun

Student of the Kenku

Born to a branch of the Seppun family in the early days of the Empire, Yoshun expected to follow in the footsteps of her ancestors by becoming a shugenja. Unlike her twin brother Jishun, however, she could not hear the kami. Her parents, not wishing to disappoint their daughter, assured her the ability might come to her later in life, but when she reached the age of fifteen and the time came for Jishun to be sent to study in the Seppun temples, she still could not hear them. This failure forced her from her brother's side for the first time in their lives.

Devastated, Yoshun vowed to seek out the Oracles and beg them for the ability she lacked. She journeyed across Rokugan, visiting first the Isawa, then shugenja of every other clan. When that failed she sought advice from monks; then, in desperation, she ascended into the Spine of the World and undertook a fast, hoping to purify her spirit enough to attract the attention of the Oracles.

Her fast lasted only one day before she heard alarming sounds nearby. When Yoshun investigated, she discovered a strange, bird-like creature, apparently the prisoner of a mortal who seemed to be preparing to sacrifice it. She attacked and killed the mortal, who was in fact a maho-tsukai. The liberated prisoner proved to be a kensai (sword-saint) of the ancient Kenku people. In gratitude for its rescue (and recognition of her courage), it taught her the fighting techniques of its people.



Her new skills gave Yoshun a way to remain at her brother's side as his yojimbo. She returned home, arriving just in time for Jishun's gempukku. In later years, at his urging, she married and had children in order to pass the Kenku techniques on to her descendants; nevertheless, Jishen's safety was always her first goal, and she continued to serve as his yojimbo until, nearly two decades later, she died protecting him from a Tsuno attack. In recognition of her honorable life and unique achievements, her children became the Yoshun family, the fourth family of the Owl Clan.

Seppun Yoshun, Student of the Kenku

Air: 5 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 4 Void: 4
Willpower: 4 Agility: 5 Strength: 5

Honor: 7.9 *Status: 6.0* *Glory: 5.3*

School/Rank: Hantei Bushi 1 / Kenku Swordsman 5

Skills: Athletics 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Defense 6, Etiquette (Courtesy) 3, Horsemanship 4, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu (Katana, Wakizashi) 8, Knives 3, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 4, Lore: Bushido 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Nonhumans 6, Medicine (Wound Treatment) 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 4, Spears (Yari) 3

Advantages: Ally (Kenku sensei), Great Potential (Kenjutsu), Multiple Schools, Social Position (family founder/daimyo)

Disadvantages: Driven (Protect her Brother)

Storytelling in Mystic Rokugan

The wind had long since frozen the feeling from Asahina Ryoji's hands. He had to place them by sight, dragging his body over the final ridge and into the snow-filled hollow beyond.

Here, at the top of the Spine of the World, there was no one to see his shame. Only the spirits would know when he committed seppuku without his lord's permission, allowing him the desperate hope he might yet spare his family that shame at least.

Even with only the spirits to witness, he was determined to perform this final act well. As soon as he regained a small measure of his strength, Ryoji descended to the middle of the hollow and began his preparations, laying out the blade and drawing his kimono aside. He recited his death poem to the wind, hands too numb to hold a calligraphy brush even if his ink had not frozen during the climb. Then he reached for the blade.

His fingers felt the touch. They were numb no more. And though the snow remained frozen, the air around Ryoji filled with warmth, coming from some hidden source below.

In a trance, Ryoji dug through the snow until his seeking hands found something warm and round and smooth. He drew it out: a pearl, colors chasing across its flawless surface.

Deep in his mind, a voice began to whisper.

As suggested on page 14 in the previous *Imperial Histories* supplement for L5R 4th Edition, this version of the Empire more closely resembles the mystic martial arts world of various Asian films. The earlier sections of this chapter give some sense of how the world of Rokugan would be changed by a Togashi Dynasty, but there are a few specific considerations to bear in mind when running a campaign in this setting.

The People

The balance between the different components of Rokugani society has shifted. Courtiers and bushi, though still a major part of samurai culture, no longer dominate to the extent they do in Hantei's Rokugan. A great deal of their power and influence instead goes to shugenja, who are more common than before (though still rare overall). Magic is more widespread, whether in the form of spells, *nemuranai*, or direct interference from the spirits, and shugenja are often both the cause and solution for problems.

Like their priestly brethren, monks exercise greater influence. As noted above, every Great Clan has at least one Brotherhood order associated with it, and these orders enjoy a considerable degree of patronage and protection by the local samurai. Even those Brotherhood orders unaffiliated with a clan, such as the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes, take a more active role in the Empire's affairs than in the canon. There are a great many *sohei* and cryptic teachers wandering the roads of Rokugan, and while samurai may shave their heads and retire to a

monastery, odds are good that something will eventually drag them back out again.

Artisans also occupy a more prominent position, due to their role in the creation of *nemuranai*. Artifacts both major and minor are everywhere. Not only do clans and families have powerful ancestral swords, but so do many ordinary bushi. Nameless Yojimbo #4 may be armed with ordinary steel, but PCs and important NPCs are almost guaranteed to be carrying a family heirloom with more than just a good edge to recommend it. Virtually anything in this setting may be a *tsukumogami* – an object that, through long use and care, awakens with a soul of its own.

The Tales

The Dragon Clan in the normal timeline valued individual enlightenment. In this setting, that philosophy is effectively extended to all of Rokugan.

Nearly everything in Togashi's Empire is touched by the supernatural and the personal. Conflict between the clans *en masse* is rare, but smaller feuds take on an epic dimension. *Nemuranai* and other artifacts are often lost or cursed, and as liable to be found in ancient ruins or atop unscalable mountains as safe in a daimyo's treasury. Spirits are easily angered and not so easily placated. One angry ghost can threaten the downfall of an entire Great Clan family. But although the nature of problems is often supernatural, solutions may not be; there is also space within this genre for tales of how ordinary bushi, armed with nothing more than an unawakened sword, call on the strength of honor to face something beyond human ken and defeat it.

This setting lends itself well to plots of a more "high fantasy" style than may be the norm in standard L5R campaigns, though such plots should be tempered with philosophical concerns to avoid devolving into a simple pattern of "kill monsters, take their stuff." As with any RPG, the player characters are often expected to perform grand deeds – but in Togashi's Empire that expectation exists within the game world as well. While family and clan still matter, any given samurai is less tethered to the requirements of others, more free to follow his or her own unique path.

Among other things, this means Rokugani become more footloose. The reduction of bureaucracy eases the restrictions on travel, allowing samurai to wander in search of their own destiny, mixing freely with those outside their own family and clan. They may still run afoul of local gatekeepers – a city governor suspicious of outsiders; a band of fallen monks who have claimed a forest as their own personal domain – but no travel order from their lord would smooth their path in such cases. They must win through on their own merits, or fail in the trying.

This also means there are more samurai who, either temporarily or permanently, renounce their families and even their clans to become anonymous heroes. They may do it to avoid bringing shame on their kin, or to protect loved ones from danger, or to see what they can accomplish without the benefit of their connections, or because a strange old monk told them to... but whatever their reason, these samurai embrace a status distinguishable from that of ronin only by virtue of their ideals.

The Spirits

Although the PCs in a Togashi Dynasty campaign are likely to still be humans, the world contains many stranger things than samurai, and GMs are encouraged to make use of them as storytelling opportunities. The "GM's Toolbox" section in the L5R Core Rulebook's *Book of Void* is a valuable starting place. The monsters introduced there offer a number of basic options for such encounters. The L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire* offers many others: Naga, Nezumi, Kenku, Ningyo, Orochi, Trolls, Kitsu, Tsuno, Zokujin, and more.

The various spirit realms are home to a wealth of entities that may interfere with humans for their own reasons. Some of these are detailed in *Enemies of the Empire*; others may be adapted from sourcebooks for earlier editions of the L5R RPG. GMs who do not mind doing a bit of work might even shift the playing field beneath the PCs' feet with a brief sojourn in Sakkaku or Chikushudo, which – while always a rare and wondrous occurrence – happens far more often to samurai in this Rokugan than in other timelines.

New Mechanics

Obviously, any alternate timeline which diverges from the canon history of Rokugan as much as this one does is going to see many changes in the development of the Empire's fighting arts, courtly ways, and spiritual practices. The mechanics presented here are for this timeline's version of Hantei's clan (the Owl Clan) and are intended both to facilitate play in this setting and to inspire GMs and players to pursue further ideas for alternate timeline and the Schools to go with them.

The Hantei Family

Hantei's family, regardless of which timeline it occupies, benefits from its founder's deep connection to the Heavens. Hantei was trained by the Celestial Dragons themselves before he confronted his divine father, and a touch of this divine favor is passed down to his descendents.

Benefit: +1 Void

The Yoshun Family

The fourth family of the Owl Clan is a small one, comprised entirely of those who can claim direct descent from its founder, Seppun Yoshun. By tradition all in the family train as warriors, though only the most worthy are permitted to learn the fighting skills of the Kenku.

Benefit: +1 Agility

Adventure Seed: Uncorrupted Ningyo Flesh

Challenge: A powerful Doji lord requests the aid of the PCs in obtaining a box offered for sale or trade by the Yoritomo daimyo.

Focus: The box contains the flesh of a Ningyo, which will bestow immortality on anyone who consumes it. What's more, the Yoritomo claim the flesh is uncorrupted; it does not carry the Ningyo curse of madness.

Strike: If the PCs obtain the box, they can give it to the Doji as per their agreement, or betray him by taking the flesh for their own, or they can destroy it out of respect for the Ningyo. It is up to the GM whether the flesh is truly uncorrupted or not.

Owl Clan: Hantei Bushi School

Hantei's Celestial fighting style was unmatched among the Kami. However, in the canonical history of Rokugan, Hantei never shared the secrets of his fighting skills with any of his mortal followers, and they died with him after the First War. In the timeline of the Togashi Dynasty, Hantei adapts his Techniques to his clan's new duty of fighting against nonhuman threats to the Empire, and it is in this form that an echo of his original peerless talent is passed down through the ages.

New Basic School: The Hantei Bushi School [Bushi]

- **Benefit:** +1 Agility
- **Starting Honor:** 6.5
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Etiquette, Kenjutsu, Kyujutsu, Lore: Nonhumans, any one High or Bugei Skill
- **Outfit:** Average clothing, light armor, daisho, bow, any one weapon, traveling pack, 4 koku

Techniques

Rank 1: The Blessings of Heaven

The basic lesson of Hantei is to call on the favor of the Celestial Realms to oppose those who stand against Heaven. When facing a "nonhuman" opponent, you may add either your Earth or your Honor (whichever is higher) to your Armor TN. You gain a +1k0 bonus to all your attack rolls with Samurai weapons.

Rank 2: Wrath of the Earth Dragon

The power of Celestial Favor can overcome any who presume to trouble Ningen-do or the Empire of Togashi. At the start of your Turn, as a Free Action you may spend a Void Point to let your attacks this Round ignore all the Reduction of "nonhuman" opponents.

Rank 3: Speed of the Air Dragon

The Celestial Dragons strike with speed beyond thought, and you seek to emulate them as well as a mortal may do so. You may attack as a Simple Action when you are wielding Samurai weapons or when attacking a "nonhuman" opponent.

Rank 4: Courage of the Thunder Dragon

Those who serve the Celestial Heavens care not who their opponent may be, for the strength of Heaven's favor cannot be withstood. After striking an opponent, you may spend a Void Point as a Free Action to ignore any one of that opponent's Techniques, armor effects, spells, special qualities, or creature abilities (except for Invulnerability) which reduce/mitigate damage.

Rank 5: Judgment of the Celestial Dragon

The final lesson of the Hantei School is that the divine strike of Celestial Favor may defeat any foe, even one so powerful as Lord Moon himself. Once per skirmish, after hitting your opponent, you may spend four Void Points to automatically inflict enough damage to reduce that opponent to Down/Out/Dead (whichever applies first). If your opponent is "nonhuman" you may activate this Technique for three Void Points instead.

It is GM's discretion whether this Technique can defeat exceptionally powerful or transcendent entities such as Fortunes or similar. As an option, the GM may allow the Technique to work on such foes if you voluntarily choose to die in order to activate it.

The Enemies of the Owl Clan

Hantei's Owl Clan is tasked to deal with nonhuman races and repel otherworldly threats to Togashi's Empire. Unlike the Crab Clan, who specifically do battle with the demons of Jigoku and all those touched by the Taint, the Owl Clan focuses on creatures like Naga, Kitsu, Ningyo, Zokujin, and Nezumi, as well as with interlopers from other Spirit Realms such as the hungry dead from Gaki-do, the slaughter spirits of Toshigoku, and the animal spirits of Chikushudo.

In order to avoid lengthy verbal duplication, the Techniques of the Owl Clan all refer generically to "nonhumans." In game terms, this specifically means the following: any nonhuman race of Ningen-do which is not Tainted, and any Spirit creature which does not come from Jigoku, Yomi, or Tengoku.

Likewise, the Skill "Lore: Nonhumans" listed under each of these Schools refers specifically to the creatures and races outlined here. It is strongly recommended this Skill not be allowed in games set in other versions of Rokugan, since it is likely to override and devalue other established Lore Skills such as Lore: Spirit Realms.

Owl Clan: The Otomo Diplomats

Hantei's Celestial fighting style was unmatched among the Kami. However, in the canonical history of Rokugan, Hantei never shared the secrets of his fighting skills with any of his mortal followers, and they died with him after the First War. In the timeline of the Togashi Dynasty, Hantei adapts his Techniques to his clan's new duty of fighting against nonhuman threats to the Empire, and it is in this form that an echo of his original peerless talent is passed down through the ages.

New Basic School: The Otomo Diplomat School [Courtier]

- **Benefit:** +1 Awareness
- **Starting Honor:** 6.5
- **Skills:** Calligraphy, Courtier, Etiquette (Courtesy), Intimidation, Lore: Nonhumans, Sincerity, any one High Skill
- **Outfit:** Court robes, fan, traveling pack, 5 koku

Techniques

Rank 1: Wisdom of the Owl

The basic technique of the Otomo Diplomat is to find ways to relate successfully to all parties, human and nonhuman alike, smoothing over misunderstandings and conflicts. You gain a +1k0 bonus to your Etiquette rolls. During any social interaction with "nonhumans," you may as a Free Action roll Lore: Nonhumans / Intelligence at TN 20 to remember an important aspect of social interaction with those nonhumans (the GM chooses the specific thing you remember, but it will always be something useful to the situation).

Rank 2: Unity of the Realms

Because the Otomo specialize in negotiating with the "nonhuman" races, they have many friends, allies, and contacts among them. Any time you encounter a "nonhuman" in a non-hostile environment, you may roll Courtier / Awareness at TN 25. With a success, the "nonhuman" will treat you as an Ally with Devotion 2 for the remainder of the encounter (unless you actively do something to threaten or harm it).

Rank 3: The Voice of Heaven

When understanding does not work, the Otomo have another method: cowing others by invoking the awesome authority of the Celestial Heavens. When you spend a Void Point on an Intimidation roll, you gain +2k2 instead of the normal +1k1. If the roll is made against a "nonhuman" opponent, the bonus is +3k2 instead. Either way, you do not lose Honor for using Intimidation in this manner.

Rank 4: Uphold the Peace

At this rank, the Otomo Diplomat is able to call on the awesome repute of the clan founder, Hantei himself, to impose peace on all manner of confrontations. At the start of a skirmish, or during your Turn on any later Round in such a skirmish, you may take a Complex Action to spend a Void Point and demand an immediate cessation of hostilities. You make a Contested Intimidation / Willpower roll against all those within hearing, gaining a +3k0 bonus against any of those targets who are "nonhumans." Any combatants who lose the roll must cease all offensive action until they are attacked or until three Rounds have passed.

This Technique cannot work against Shadowlands creatures or denizens of Jigoku or Tengoku. Using Intimidation in this manner does not cost you Honor.

Rank 5: Hantei's Mandate

The Otomo may now bring the full weight of Hantei's Celestial favor to bear against those who trouble Ningen-do. You gain an additional +3k0 bonus to your Intimidation rolls with your Rank Four Technique (this stacks with the +3k0 bonus against "nonhumans" in that Technique).

Owl Clan: The Seppun Shugenja

In this timeline, the Seppun are simply the shugenja family of the Owl Clan rather than the special servants of the Emperor. In keeping with their clan's duty to the Togashi Dynasty, the Seppun have learned to focus their magic on dealing with nonhuman threats and problems of all sorts.

New Basic School: The Seppun Shugenja School [Shugenja]

- **Benefit:** +1 Intelligence
- **Starting Honor:** 6.5
- **Skills:** Calligraphy, Defense, Investigation, Lore: Nonhumans, Lore: Theology, Meditation, any one High skill
- **Outfit:** Robes, wakizashi, bo staff, scroll satchel, traveling pack, 4 koku
- **Affinity/Deficiency:** Fire / Water

Technique: In Defense of Ningen-do

The Seppun shugenja exist both to communicate with nonhumans and spirits and to protect the Empire from their depredations when they act improperly. You gain a Free Raise on any spell which targets a "nonhuman." When casting a spell which inflicts damage on others, you may expend an additional spell slot (of the same Element or of Void) to have the spell ignore Reduction on the target(s) equal to twice your Void Rank. If the target is "nonhuman," this Technique also ignores all damage mitigation effects from creature abilities (other than Invulnerability).

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, 3 Fire, 2 Air, 1 Earth



The Scholars of the First Dawn

In the Togashi Dynasty, the Brotherhood of Shinsei affiliates far more closely with the samurai of Rokugan, such that each of the Great Clans has a specific monastic Order closely associated with it. The Sekisho, the Scholars of the First Dawn, are the Order affiliated with the Owl Clan. They maintain a vast library of esoteric knowledge on the ancient pre-human civilizations, and seek enlightenment through understanding the world that existed before the Kami fell and even the world as it was before human beings appeared in Ningen-do.

New Basic School: First Dawn Scholars [Monk]

- **Devotion:** Fortunism
- **Benefit:** +1 Intelligence
- **Starting Honor:** 5.5
- **Skills:** Etiquette, Jiujutsu, Lore: Nonhumans, Lore: Theology (Fortunes), Meditation, Staves, any one Skill

Technique: Way of the Ancient World

Your recognition that enlightenment and understanding transcend both race and time allows you to learn one additional Mystical kiho and grants you a +1k0 bonus on all Etiquette and Lore skills.

New Advantage: Sacred Weapon, Owl Blade [6 points]

The sacred Owl Blades, crafted by Seppun artisans, are 3k2 wakizashi. The spirits within them are so strong that the blades are considered to be equivalent to crystal for the purposes of harming otherworldly/nonhuman opponents. These weapons are greatly prized throughout the Empire of Togashi, especially by the Phoenix and the Crab; Otomo diplomats often gain many favors for their clan by offering Owl Blades as gifts.

New Item: Amulet of the Veil

This *nemuranai* is a special creation of the Agasha and is only given out to those few samurai who are judged worthy to pass through the Dragon Veil. Physically, it appears to be a golden nightingale (the Imperial bird), and is usually worn on a metal chain around the neck. Any samurai wearing the amulet is able to pass safely through the Dragon Veil's barrier of mist and illusions, and can bring up to twenty others of his choice with him safely.

Mechanical Option: Magic in Mystic Rokugan

The standard spell and Kiho mechanics of the L5R role-playing game are designed for a world where the mystical abilities of monks and shugenja are very much the exception rather than the rule. To increase the supernatural feel of the setting, GMs may choose to permit bushi to purchase Kiho as if they are shugenja, following the restrictions on Mastery Level and cost. They may also permit courtiers to learn spells along the same model, treating them as developed abilities rather than prayers to the kami.

In either case, the GM has the final word on which Kiho and spells are suitable for the paradigm of bushi and courtiers, and which must remain the sole province of monks and shugenja. A courtier invoking Benten's Touch is plausible; The Fist of Osano-Wo, less so.

The GM may also wish to expand on the effects of Spiritual Advantages and Disadvantages in this setting, and to make these a focus for character backgrounds and plots. It may be advisable to lower the Experience Point cost of Spiritual Advantages by 1 or 2 points. Due to the proliferation of *nemuranai* in this Rokugan, a similar discount might be appropriate for Inheritance and Sacred Weapon.

Chapter Two

The Reign of the Shining Prince

The Emperor of Rokugan sat quietly on his great Throne, looking at nothing in particular. Lord Moon, his grandfather, hung high in the sky, for the hour was late. Despite this, Hantei Genji found he could not sleep this night, much like the last night and many before it. For reasons he never truly examined, the half-divine man found that resting upon the Throne and observing the great empty audience chamber in perfect silence calmed his mind.

Of course, it was not truly empty; he was not alone.

"Uncle," Genji said quietly.

A subtle shift in the shadows indicated the presence of Bayushi. The master of secrets spoke softly. "You have dismissed your guards, my Emperor. Do you not know the threat of the night, or do you simply find it no threat at all?"

Genji rose to his feet and looked at the vague outline of his uncle in the corner of the room, behind the throne to the right. "I think it will be some time before I worry about an assassin in the late hours, Lord Bayushi. You seem to have little better to do than hover about my throne room in the dead of night."

"Indeed, Genji-sama. I would certainly wonder about one who had made such a habit," his uncle replied archly.

The young Emperor smirked. He was fond of all his father's brothers and sisters, but in the absence of Hida, only Bayushi seemed to make the kind of sideways comments that could draw his laughter. "I miss them," he said, answering Bayushi's unspoken question. "I still see them here, in my mind, standing in this very room when Shinsei spoke to my father for the last time before the Thunders left." He pointed vaguely at different places in the chamber as he continued. "Shiba stood here, near my father. Shinjo listened intently there. Hida waited near the door, as if he would race to the war on a moment's notice. Akodo waited on the other side of my father," Genji chuckled at the memory. "He still did not like the Little Teacher. I think he was waiting to cut him down at father's command."

"They are not gone," Bayushi said. "Simply carrying out your father's wishes." The Scorpion Kami looked to where Genji had indicated Shiba, and amended, "For the most part." His voice was a little quieter at the last.

"Do you miss him as well, uncle?"

"I miss my brother, yes. Both of them. Shiba was never fooled, and the world is a much duller place without such a man." Bayushi's eyes cleared and his voice regained its usual light nature. "However, I believe I miss my sense of immortality more. I hope you never know the shock of being divine but learning you can die. Besides, Doji is still here, in the Imperial City. She is excellent company, I should suppose."

The Emperor turned and looked at another corner, the one behind his throne to the left. "And you, my uncle," he

said, as if speaking to nothing. "I am grateful you have not left us yet."

Bayushi narrowed his eyes, and his simple mask creased slightly as though he frowned beneath the cloth.

Togashi stepped forward. "I serve the Emperor," he said aloud. The Dragon Kami had a habit of speaking without a voice, but very rarely entered Genji's mind in such a manner – from deference, the Emperor hoped. "You are troubled. The weight of light is crushing your shoulders. The sight of stone is blinding your eyes."

"Fascinating," Bayushi said softly. "I suppose the heat of cold is also burning him, brother?"

Genji held up a hand to silence Bayushi, but smiled again despite himself. "You are, of course, correct. I stand under the burden of divinity, but I am a man. I watch the Empire become more and more mundane, and it is all I can see."

Togashi slightly nodded, indicating his nephew had taken the lesson correctly.

"What remains after divinity fades? What is the step after the grand battle has been fought?"

"Vigilance in the unknown," Bayushi said.

"An unmarked path," Togashi replied.

Genji waited a while, then looked back to the room. "Perhaps," he said finally. "But there must be more than survival, more than forging through darkness. We must make what we fought for worth the fight."

The World of the Shining Prince

The reign of Hantei Genji, the only son of Hantei himself, began immediately after the first Day of Thunder, but extended into the middle of Rokugan's third century. It was a time of profound importance to the Empire, for it was in this two hundred year stretch that Genji completed the work his father had begun, transforming the scattered tribes and small villages of Rokugan into the civilized, cultured, and powerful Empire that endured for centuries to come. It was a time of peace in the sense that Rokugan faced no major external threats, but also an era of profound social and cultural transformation, with many underlying tensions as well as lingering threats from the First War and the barbaric world from before the Kami.



Over the course of his reign Genji will become known as the Poet Emperor for his artistic gifts and his sponsorship of culture, but many always refer to him by the title of his youth: the Shining Prince. Young Genji undertakes the momentous task of stabilizing a post-war Empire still led primarily by the other Kami and their first followers, all living legends. The loss of Hantei also marks the beginning of a period of time referred to by the more daring modern Rokugani historians as the "death of divinity." This description is considered borderline blasphemous by some, and conventional historians prefer to say that Genji's reign marks the beginning of the Thousand Years of Peace (despite the strife and conflict that crop up from time to time).

The history of the second half of the first century was briefly described in the "Dawn of the Empire" chapter in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*. This section describes those decades in more detail, and carries the timeline forward until the end of Hantei Genji's reign in the year 245.

The Reign of Hantei Genji

Year 46

- Several months after the departure of his father from the Realm of Mortals, Hantei Genji is declared Hantei's heir and the new Emperor, Hantei II. His younger brother Yamato gives up the Hantei name and swears fealty to the Otomo.
- 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 47

- The Isawa and Asako quarrel over the right to guard and control Isawa's Last Wish, a dangerous and indestructible magical construct which the Phoenix created before the First War but never finished. Hantei Genji decrees the Shiba will guard the Wish henceforth.
- The Dragon Clan presents a copy of *Niten*, the compiled writings of Mirumoto and his son Hojatsu on swordsmanship, to Hantei Genji. Genji is intrigued by the book's philosophies and arguments, which contrast sharply with those of Kakita's *The Sword*. He encourages the Dragon to copy and distribute the book around the nascent Empire. In response, the Crane also actively distribute copies of Kakita's work.

Year 48

- Hida Osano-Wo, son of Hida and the Thunder Dragon, is born.
- The second Tournament of the Emerald Champion is held to select a replacement for Kakita. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is won by Kakita's son and fourth child, Kakita Shimizu, a youthful friend of Hantei Genji.

Year 49

- In an attempt to brighten the spirits of the people of Rokugan, Doji finds a young woman she considers a suitable wife for her nephew Genji. She arranges a "chance" meeting between the two, and guides the Shining Prince through a long courtship whose twists and turns capture the hearts of many Rokugani, peasant and samurai alike. Even more than the earlier marriage of his father Hantei, Genji's marriage becomes a cultural archetype; many of the details and events involved in the courtship are considered fashionable and soon turn into universally accepted custom. Empress Oborozukiyo becomes known as the Lady of the Mists, and she is a model of a dutiful wife for those who come later.

Year 50

- Goaded by the stories of Kakita's insults against their founder, the Matsu launch an organized strike against the Kakita family's holdings south of Otosan Uchi. The fights are small-scale compared to the war of a few years earlier, but nonetheless create chaos in the Imperial Court as everyone discusses what such conflict could mean for the security of Rokugan. The Crane and Phoenix band together, suing for peace and suggesting such actions should be considered treason. Unexpectedly, the Scorpion intercede on behalf of the Lion, arguing true samurai should be expected to back their words with strength and steel. After some consideration, Hantei Genji decrees such actions legal and honorable... to a point. The security of the Empire as a whole and the safety of the Imperial Dynasty is never to be compromised by such actions, he declares, but samurai must nonetheless be allowed to settle their differences properly. The Empire must be a place where insult can be answered. The Matsu eventually halt their attacks, feeling they have proven their point, but the mutual hatred of Crane and Lion will not soon be abandoned.

Year 55

- Akodo presents the Emperor and the Lion Clan with *Leadership*, his treatise on warfare, honor, and combat, which he has been working on for several decades. The Lion Kami considers his earlier copies of this work to be imperfect, or at least incomplete. This final iteration focuses more on the intersection between a samurai's duty to his lord and the role of soldiers and generals in combat. It contains many lessons the other clans take to heart in one way or another. However, Bayushi muses in court about his brother's skill at deception in warfare, and notes that a canny general would either never reveal such hard-won wisdom, or share only lesser insights with outsiders. Akodo, to the surprise of many, never replies to Bayushi's indirect query.

Year 59

- The man called Soshi (actually the Scorpion Thunder, Shosuro) disappears from Scorpion lands. She travels to Dragon lands and pleads with Togashi to save her from the Shadow corruption which is consuming her. Sensing Shosuro still has a destiny to fulfill, Togashi imprisons her in a tomb of crystal.

Year 61

- After spending years studying the worship of the Fortunes and the Tao of Shinsei, Hantei Genji orders construction of the Shrine of Discussion, the first temple of an intertwined official religion which he calls Shintao. The Emperor uses this event to entreat the clans to spread the new sanctioned religion of the Empire among all their people. The Dragon and Phoenix eagerly agree, assisting in the construction and stewardship of the first temple and many more. The Crane and Crab embrace this new turn of events out of equal parts duty and reverence – the Crane find great worth in the beauty and harmony of the new faith, and the Crab believe such organized devotion is excellent for morale. The Scorpion and Lion accept the decree, but do not embrace it enthusiastically.

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 72

- Asako Sagoten seeks out the relic known as Isawa's Last Wish for his own purposes. He attempts to use it to alter reality and force his former betrothed, Isawa Akiko, to love him once more. (Their engagement was ended due to the quarrel over control of the Wish.) The unstable Wish, hurt and bitter after years of imprisonment, destroys Sagoten and unleashes enough energy to wreck the castle of Shiro Shiba as well. Afterward the Wish is once again contained by the Shiba family, but word of the incident spreads across Rokugan. The Scorpion make a point of mentioning the unstable, dangerous, and uncontrollable nature of magic to all who will listen

Year 79

- Kakita Shimizu dies after long service as the Emerald Champion. The third Test of the Emerald Champion is held later that year, in and becomes the first such tournament to be structured as a formal iaijutsu competition. The winner is again a Crane, Doji Sasumagi, one of many grandchildren of Kakita and Doji.

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, but Hantei Genji does nothing to actually stop Kaimetsu-Uo. Due to the remote location of the islands and the difficulty in reaching them with any kind of military force, none of the other clans or families attempt to test Kaimetsu-Uo's claim.

Year 83

- After years of searching for his lost love Shosuro, 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 89

- The remaining remnants of the Ki-Rin Clan petition the Emperor for assistance in combating bandits plaguing their lightly-populated lands. Genji orders the Lion Clan to deal with the problem.
- After taking the better part of a year systematically destroying the threat, the Lion refuse to vacate the area. Ikoma diplomats in the Imperial City make the case for the Ki-Rin to cede control of their extensive lands to the Lion, who can use them far better. They argue the Ki-Rin can no longer protect their lands and thus cannot fulfill their duty to the Emperor.

Year 90

- After a long winter of diplomatic wrangling, the Ki-Rin attempt to drive out the Lion Clan's occupying troops. (Some rumors suggest the Scorpion goaded the Ki-Rin into this action, though for what reason is unknown.) Their small army is swiftly crushed by the superior Lion forces.
- Hantei Genji, feeling he now has no other choice, accedes to the Lion annexation but awards the former Ki-Rin new lands in the south; he 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, thereby sparing the former Ki-Rin from any further aggression by the Lion.

Year 95

- A Crab shugenja named Kuni Nakanu begins studying the supernatural phenomena associated with the creatures of the Shadowlands. Kuni scholars have already noticed some manner of sickness or mutation found consistently among those who spend too much time in the Shadowlands wastes. While the Crab and the Empire at large already know that jade combats this corruption, few understand its true effects, how it spreads, or any other such details. Nakanu conducts his studies mostly in isolation, sending incomplete reports at irregular intervals.

Year 97

- Hida Osano-Wo is murdered; the assassin flees to Phoenix lands. Hida's heir, Kenzan, is too occupied by the Crab's endless conflict with the Shadowlands to travel so far on a moment's notice. Instead, he implores his half-brother Kaimetsu-Uo to avenge their father. Kaimetsu-Uo travels to the Phoenix lands seeking vengeance, but the Phoenix doubt the "Mantis Clan" founder's claim, and bar the gates of Kyuden Isawa to him. He calls upon his father's name, and in answer a bolt of lightning destroys the gate, awing the Phoenix into surrender.
- Hearing the tale of Osano-Wo's death and the subsequent intervention of the Heavens, Hantei Genji declares the heroic spirit of Hida Osano-Wo has now made him the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. This establishes the Emperor's power and right to elevate a worthy mortal to the status of a Fortune.

Year 99

- While overseeing the construction of the Ikoma Libraries and Hall of Ancestors, Akodo hears word of an invading monstrous force coming through the Seikitsu Pass. The creatures are Tsuno, but to the Lion scouts they are simply Shadowlands beasts. With few troops available in the area, Akodo chooses to face death on his own terms; he confronts the Tsuno in the pass and unleashes his last fading bit of divinity in a fierce battle cry. The Seikitsu Pass collapses on the creatures... and on Akodo himself.

Year 101

- Though his fall to the Realm of Mortals has removed the Kami Togashi's true divinity, he knows that he, like the other Kami, does not age and can potentially live forever. In order to avoid letting his divine power and immortal wisdom become a rival to the Hantei Dynasty, Togashi officially "dies" and is replaced by his son. In reality, he has merely changed his name and continues to rule the Dragon Clan. Due to the remote home of the Dragon, news of Togashi's "death" does not reach the wider Empire until months after the Dragon Champion's new guise is established.



Year 102

- Lady Doji learns of Togashi's death and believes herself to now be alone save for her brutish brother Hida. After making arrangements to pass power on to her heir, she stands on the headlands above Kyuden Doji and allows the sea to take her away.

Year 105

- Kuni Nakanu's research, despite gaining him much knowledge, finally destroys him. He has discovered the basic aspects of maho and amassed a great deal of forbidden power along with a small army of undead. But when the shugenja's vigilance slips at an inopportune moment, his undead creations turn on him, rending him limb from limb. Nakanu's library and laboratory are destroyed by the rampage of the undead horde; the Crab are eventually able to contain the threat and recover some of his research, but much is lost. Some of Nakanu's journals will later become the basis for maho-tsukai cults in the Empire's later history.

Year 108

- Following the retirement of Doji Asumagi, the fourth Test of the Emerald Champion becomes the first one to incorporate tests of etiquette, strategy, and martial ability. At the time, it is widely rumored that the other clans urged Genji to add these elements to the tournament in order to break the monopoly of the Crane on the position. Perhaps there is some truth to this assertion, for the winner is Akodo Saito, the first non-Crane to hold the office of Emerald Champion.

Year 110

- The Scorpion and Lion engage in a court conflict over a murdered Lion officer; the Akodo believe the Shosuro had him assassinated. The Lion call on the Kitsu spirit-walkers to commune with the slain man's spirit and name his murderer. After the spirit testifies, the Scorpion reveal the man in question is actually alive. In the face of such a display in the Emperor's own court, the Scorpion plead with Hantei Genji to disallow magic of any form during legal proceedings. Seeing little reason to do otherwise, the Poet Emperor agrees.
- The Badger Clan is founded, led by a man named Hida Ichiro.

The Story of Sun Tao

As noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* (page 230), there are two different stories about the ronin known as Sun Tao. One claims he lived during the reign of Hantei Genji, while the other credits him with living much later in Rokugan's history, perhaps as late as the reign of Hantei XVII.

If the GM chooses to have Sun Tao live during the time of Hantei Genji, the legendary ronin completes his treatise on warfare and military structure in the year 145, after spending years studying among the various clans. The book focuses on the common tactics of successful generals, his own insights into warfare, and comments about the shared philosophies between the families of the different Great Clans. The Emperor endorses the text as a valuable work of philosophy and learning on the honorable arts of combat, which helps give it legitimacy in the eyes of many. Despite Sun Tao's ronin status, Genji's sponsorship ensures his work is discussed and examined openly throughout the Empire.

Soon after delivering his treatise, Sun Tao departs the Empire in search of the Ki-Rin Clan, and is never seen again.

Year 150

- Doji Hatsuo, Champion of the Crane, wins the Test of the Emerald Champion, becoming the fifth Emerald Champion. Hatsuo is a friend and military advisor to the Emperor and strongly promotes the idea that the Empire should work harder at bringing peace and order to the outlying regions of Rokugan, many of which are still in a primitive state or plagued by banditry.

Year 151

- At Emperor Genji's command, Doji Hatsuo spends a year touring the Empire, studying the conditions in the outlying provinces. He discovers that law enforcement in the Empire is administered chiefly by local judges whose performance (and honesty) varies widely. Laws are enforced capriciously and many Rokugani do not know how the law works at all. He does, however, hear of one judge who is both honest and dedicated to the law: a man named Soshi Saibankan.

Year 152

- Hantei Genji secretly attends one of Soshi Saibankan's judicial proceedings. Impressed, he invites Saibankan to come to the Imperial City and help Doji Hatsuo to re-organize 0the Empire's law enforcement.

Year 163

- After ten years of planning and effort, Soshi Saibankan and Emerald Champion Doji Hatsuo officially issue their reforms, revising and streamlining Imperial law and founding the organizations which will become the Emerald Magistrates and the Imperial Legions. Over the next few decades the system of "judges" is gradually replaced by a network of clan magistrates and Emerald Magistrates.
- As part of Saibankan's reforms, the Emperor proclaims that iaijutsu will become the official way to settle quarrels and disputes between samurai, as well as to resolve legal cases that cannot be decided on the evidence. Genji declares the winner of a duel is chosen by the honor and spirit of samurai and the favor of the Celestial Heavens, making it a foolproof method. The pacifistic Phoenix beseech the Emperor to rethink his decision, believing it gives brash and idle samurai an excuse to kill one another over nearly any inflated insult, but Genji assures them the iaijutsu duel will remain sacred and not be invoked on just any matter. (Despite his assurances, many tales circulate of duels fought over minor and trivial problems.)

Year 169

- After many years of listening to Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Tangen criticize Akodo's *Leadership*, Hantei Genji commands him to author

a treatise of his own in response. Tangen's *Lies* is finished the next year, and creates a great deal of both interest and controversy. Many other authors write works and performances in response to the text. This pleases Genji, since his principle goal was to stimulate the arts and philosophies.

Year 170

- Bayushi Tangen dies suddenly in a Lion court, moments after forcefully telling a critic of *Lies* that "there is not a single lie in this book." After his death, his widow discovers his personal journal, containing his insights on the nature of treachery and the methods of the Scorpion. The journal, entitled *Shinriko* (Little Truths) is passed on to his heirs.

Year 175

- Soshi Saibankan dies. The Emperor elevates him to become the Fortune of Magistrates and Judges. Thereafter, magistrates are called 'saibankan' in honor of his accomplishments.

Year 210

- Feeling his clan is finally prepared to deal with its seemingly endless duty without him, Hida takes up his armor and weapons one last time. He travels into the Shadowlands in search of his lost son Atarasi and is never heard from again. Though it is unclear when Hida actually died, the Imperial Histories record the date of his departure as his official death.

Year 230

- The Scorpion Clan Champion, Bayushi Oshiro, sends his daughter Kuninoko to the Dragon lands to investigate rumors about the Dragon Clan Champion.

Year 237

- Bayushi Kuninoko briefly returns to her father; she is both blind and with child. She tells Oshiro the true identity of the Dragon Clan Champion (who at the time was going by the name Togashi Kuzejiro) before returning forever to the Dragon lands.

Year 238

- Bayushi Kuninoko gives birth to Togashi Hoshi, the only child of Togashi. The half-dragon grows up in seclusion within the deepest regions of the Dragon lands; his very existence is a secret to the Empire for centuries.
- Bayushi Oshiro meets with Togashi, accusing the Kami of kidnapping and assaulting his daughter. Togashi admits his identity to Oshiro and promises to share future information with the Scorpion... at his discretion. He also promises a favor to the clan in exchange for claiming Kuninoko as his own.

Year 243

- The blessed mirror that links to Shinjo's mirror goes dark, and in the heavens, the Ki-Rin's star vanishes from the sky. The Empire concludes that the Ki-Rin Clan has been lost; Hantei Genji declares an annual festival celebrating the Ki-Rin so the clan will always be remembered. For the month leading to up to the first festival, there is mourning throughout the Empire.
- The enterprising Crane daimyo Yasuki Tanaka creates the koku, allowing tokens to be exchanged easily for goods and services and thereby greatly streamlining the early complexities of the Rokugani tax system. Tanaka presents the prototype coins to the Imperial Court and they receive the blessing of the Emperor. The original molds for the coins are gifted to the Imperial dynasty and kept secure, which helps keep them from being forged.

Year 245

- The Lion and Scorpion fight what will later be known as the Battle of Cherry Blossom Snow Lake near Beiden Pass. The Akodo family marches toward Scorpion lands to respond to an accusation in the courts against one of their generals. The fight is complicated first by the presence of a large ronin bandit force (which throws in with the Scorpion hoping to gain fealty), and then when the Dragon Clan joins the fight on the side of the Scorpion as well. The Ikoma general retreats, but insists in the courts that the Scorpion consorted with bandits to win. The presence of the Dragon Clan is largely downplayed, since few can explain why they involved themselves at all. In fact, this was Togashi's payment of his debt of honor to the Scorpion Champion.
- Hantei Genji finally reaches an advanced enough age to feel he should retire. Genji looks upon the Empire and legacy, and is satisfied. A great festival is held to celebrate the rule of the Poet Emperor, and a week later, Genji vanishes from the Imperial Palace, never to be seen again. It is said the Shining Price did not die, but instead ascended the Dragon Road to the Celestial Heavens to rest with his father.



The Great Clans During the Reign of the Shining Prince

The end of the First War left a great shadow over Rokugan. The war had galvanized the emerging noble families who followed each child of Sun and Moon, but they had been forced to throw all their strength into the desperate effort to keep the fledgling Empire alive. The First Emperor lay dying, and while his son would eventually become one of the greatest leaders in the Empire's history, at the time many wondered if Fu Leng had truly failed in his dark design. Shiba was dead, Bayushi deeply affected by the loss of Shosuro, Shinjo would soon leave the Empire altogether, Akodo had lost his eye, Hida had became dark and brooding after the death of his son, and Togashi was even more distant than before. Only Doji seemed to carry hope for the future in her heart, but those closest to her knew that uncertainty plagued her mind.

But with the ascension of Hantei Genji as Emperor, the samurai and surviving Kami were able to turn toward solidifying the Empire's foundations both physically and metaphorically. The clans finally began to claim their territories in earnest and pursued the traditions and studies they would continue for centuries. Philosophers argue it was this era of pain and rebuilding that made Hantei Genji such a great Emperor; he was inspired to forge something that was worth the suffering and loss of the previous generation, and did not hesitate to make the leaders of the clans fall in step with his vision.

The Crab Clan

Hida's clan spent the majority of Hantei Genji's reign rebuilding from the damage of the First War and settling into its new role as the defender of the southwestern border against the Shadowlands. While the victory against Fu Leng meant the Shadowlands did not immediately threaten the safety of Rokugan, the demons and monsters from the blighted land did not simply vanish. The Crab faced the seemingly impossible three-fold task of truly settling the lands Hantei had given his brother while simultaneously ensuring the Shadowlands claimed no further territory from Rokugan... and also rebuilding from devastating losses within the last generation.

While Hida's followers were already known as the most tenacious and iron-willed of samurai in Rokugan, it was this test that turned the men and women from the early tribes into the true Clan of the Crab. At the end of the war, Hida relied on the friendship of the Scorpion Clan, with whom his own followers had grown close to due to their shared proximity with the lands the Shadowlands had overrun. With the Scorpion honoring the bond forged in war and protecting the Crab Clan's political and economic interests in the Empire, Hida turned his attention southwest. When the First Crab returned to these lands, he drove the oni, trolls, goblins, and Tainted madmen back and claimed the recaptured lands under his banner. This campaign eventually ground to a halt in what would become the Hiruma lands, but even then Hida seemed unwilling to stop until he was counseled by Hantei Genji to be content and secure the Empire's new border. The Hiruma never left the southwestern border of Crab lands, endlessly patrolling the lands of their enemy, and thus this was where the family made its official home.

The Crab saw the settling of their lands and the expansion of their army as precursors to resuming their attacks and eventually marching to the Pit itself. They spent many years stockpiling weapons and supplies, training their warriors, and building up their knowledge in the expectation that they would eventually press forward once more. Of course, the logistics of establishing cities and fortresses, defending the border, and training an ever-larger army made "just a few more years" a goal that never seemed to come any closer. Kaiu was never satisfied with the preparations, Hida felt his men must train harder, Hiruma required more intelligence, and Kuni felt the most important secret was always the next one. Every time they felt they were close, some horror or accident would convince them they must be stronger and more prepared. Eventually, when Osano-Wo took over the rule of the clan from his father, he re-focused the clan's efforts on more limited and achievable goals, such as destroying the remaining strength of the troll empire.

Crab peasants during this time were almost exclusively from one of two groups: those who were already sworn to Hida and survived against seemingly insurmountable odds, and those who felt duty to the Empire was a call important enough to endure the harsh life of a Crab resettler. Emperor Genji offered to order the other clans to send peasants to assist the Crab in their reconstruction, but Hida declined. The First Crab insisted those who would bear such a burden must take it on voluntarily, and the number who accepted the task pleasantly surprised the new Emperor. With the courage and dedication of these peasants as a foundation, the samurai of the Crab felt they could build anything; Kaiu took this sentiment more literally than the others, of course, and spent the rest of his life designing and building fortifications in all the key areas of the Crab lands.

It was during this era that the Kuni shugenja family truly came into its own, both as researchers of the darkness in the southwest and examples of what happened to those who faced it unprepared. During the first part of Genji's reign, a dedicated but arrogant shugenja named Kuni Nakanu began to conduct the first true studies of the Taint. It was he who recognized the connection between the Realm of Evil and the corruptive influence he would eventually dub the "Shadowlands Taint." It was through Nakanu's work that the Crab were later able to discern between mundane and supernatural causes of sickness, mental instability, and other such phenomena. Unfortunately, it was also Nakanu who mistakenly believed the Taint was little more than an unnatural Element (the "Element of Corruption" as it was called). He theorized it could be employed by strong-willed shugenja and used as a tool for the Empire. Of course, the man's dark studies eventually caught up to him, and the maho he practiced resulted in his being



devoured by his own zombie creations. The Crab had to contain the outbreak of undead from his studies... and explain the incident to the Emperor.

Nakanu's death led to further (and much more careful) research into the Taint, end eventually this produced a startling discovery: Fu Leng was not truly destroyed, for his spirit lingered in Jigoku, bound there by the Black Scrolls. The Taint itself was not a mindless plague or wandering sickness of the soul. It was, in effect, a corruptive touch often directed by the Dark Kami himself from beyond the Realm of Mortals. Nakanu had been a tool through which Fu Leng hoped to make the corruptive magic of maho a legitimate form of power in Rokugan. Thus, the Crab learned not only that their war against the Shadowlands threatened to become endless, but that the Dark God himself was not defeated as soundly as they had believed.

The Crane Clan

Doji and Hantei Genji were close allies during the first part of this era, and this helped cement the Crane's position as the Emperor's Left Hand (a term based on the tradition that the left hand did not grip a weapon). Though the Crane had fought without reservation against the forces of the Dark Kami, they were never a potent military power; however, due to the location of their lands and the relatively small numbers they could commit to battle, the Crane were also easily the least affected by the First War. This left them in the best position to work with the new Emperor and further his goals of bringing light and civilization to all parts of Rokugan.

This is not to say that the Crane endured no hardships. The loss of Doji and Kakita's eldest twin children to the fight against Fu Leng took its toll on the clan, and especially its founders. Kakita spent the first years after the War obsessing over his art and withdrawing from his friends. This change eventually led to his decision to engage the son of Mirumoto in a lethal duel during a minor skirmish where he was present merely as an advisor. Kakita felt that all he had to contribute to the Empire his children died for was his swordsmanship technique, and if it was flawed he had to know. Although Kakita won the duel, he was fatally wounded.

Lady Doji understood the pain and suffering her husband endured, did her best to help him deal with it, and accepted how it had to end. The Crane Clan did not consider Kakita's death to be the fate of a reckless man, but instead celebrated it as the fulfillment of a life dedicated to an ideal. It was in this spirit the Crane developed and embraced the ethic that endures to modern times: perfection.

Doji carried on building the Crane Clan without her husband, laboring unflaggingly to create the art, beauty, and civilization which the Empire needed. However, many of her contemporaries remarked that she was never quite so quick to laugh or as carefree as she had been in earlier days, before she saw her own brother corrupted and destroyed, before her children were sacrificed to defeat him, and before her beloved husband passed into Meido.

Lesser beings – even other Kami – might have fallen hopelessly into mourning and grief (indeed, Hida did just that when dealing with similar circumstances), but Doji redoubled her efforts to ensure Rokugan was a place of joy, learning, and civilized behavior. She commanded her remaining children and the heirs of Yasuki to build the Crane Clan in her image, and set the finest example of that image she could.

Doji spent many of the early years after the war in counsel with her nephew Genji, and eventually arranged for one of her vassals to have a seemingly-random encounter with him. She knew lady Oborozukiyo was a perfect match for the Emperor, and the wedding occurred only three years after Genji's coronation. A study of personal and official correspondence from this year suggests this wedding was perhaps the turning point, the moment when the fledgling Empire began shaking itself free from the melancholy and darkness of the immediate post-war era. The Empire fell in love with the Empress just as Genji did, and the people's faith in a bright future began to re-awaken.

Having accomplished what she had set out to do in the Imperial Palace, Doji moved on to begin spreading art and culture throughout the Empire. The Crane Kami did not simply spend her time in Otosan Uchi hovering over her nephew. She made contacts in all the fledgling noble houses, seeking out men and women who shared her passion for art, beauty, and joy. She visited them all across the Empire, visiting each clan in turn. The first clan she attended, one year after Genji's wedding, was the Phoenix, and it is possible that the long-standing friendship between the Crane and Phoenix was born from this simple choice.

However, it was also during Doji's visits that Rokugan first began to experience, on a small scale, war between the Crane and the Lion. The attack from the Lion threatened to undo all the peace and artistic development the Crane Kami had worked for. The Matsu claimed that the attack was repayment for insults and slights against their founder's memory. Many in the Empire knew of the enmity between Kakita and Matsu, so few were willing to intercede fully on one side or the other; it was difficult to discern if the attack was indeed provoked or not. Although the attack ultimately did not escalate into full-scale war (the first all-out inter-clan war would not come until the Yasuki War centuries later) it nonetheless set a precedent – the Lion and Crane would be embittered rivals for a millennium. Doji, usually warm and forgiving, never forgot what she saw as the reckless and short-sighted behavior of her brother's followers, and dedicated her clan to minimizing the Lion's power in any way possible.

After Doji's departure, her heirs continued to work at the tasks she had begun. It was in the latter part of Genji's reign that the Crane won some of their greatest cultural victories, such as the establishment of iaijutsu as the official method of settling disputes, the creation of the Kakita Artisan Academy, and the creation of the koku, promoting peaceful trade and prosperity.

The Dragon Clan

Because Togashi's initial followers were so few, the losses the Dragon suffered during the First War were largely overlooked. Nonetheless, the clan had sacrificed as much as any other. Mirumoto's students, who once numbered in the hundreds, were reduced to dozens. The precious handfuls of shugenja who had flocked to Agasha's side were not spared, and less than ten remained alive. Many of Togashi's ise zumi perished in the fighting as well. (Ironically, their strength recovered more quickly than the others, as more men and women heard the call of the northern mountains after Fu Leng's defeat.) The continued existence of a Dragon Clan seemed uncertain during this time.

Modern history records that Togashi and his clan retreated into the mountains to begin a thousand-year vigil over the Empire, but this is not entirely accurate. One of Hantei Genji's closest advisors was a quiet, hooded man simply referred to as Ino. He was seldom far from Genji's side, and was a permanent fixture in the Imperial court and the Emperor's entourage for five decades; on the rare occasions Ino spoke, the Emperor seemed to listen intently. Ino was, of course, Genji's uncle Togashi, who used this guise to share his insights into the past and future with the new Emperor. (Given his nature, Togashi had no difficulty being present in both his own lands and the Imperial capital as needed.) While Genji did not rely heavily on the Dragon Kami's advice, he greatly valued Togashi's guidance for its wisdom and its impartial nature during the turbulent era of the immediate post-war Empire. However, it should not be presumed that the Shining Prince's greatness as a leader was solely due to Togashi's influence; if anything, it was the opposite. Togashi learned much from his nephew, and Genji was able to discern for himself when his uncle's advice was too cautious or rigid for his vision of the Empire.

In return for his uncle's wisdom, Genji sheltered the Dragon politically for several generations. While the greater Empire generally dismissed the Dragon as withdrawn and uninterested in the affairs of Rokugan, this was at least partly because Genji discouraged others from visiting their lands. When dissident tribes and wanderers offered fealty to the growing Empire, Togashi (in the guise of Ino) would sometimes appear, and the new Rokugani might find themselves invited into the deepest recesses of Dragon territory.

All that being said, it should not be imagined that the Dragon were helpless or completely broken during this period. Mirumoto's descendents and students attracted new followers as stories of the Dragon Thunder's skill, courage, and technique spread. While Hojatsu, the Thunder's adopted son, became his heir and led the family, Mirumoto's biological son Yojiro established many of the traditions and philosophies that endured within the family. Always a curious soul, Yojiro worked closely with Agasha in cataloguing the natural and supernatural phenomena of their home. While Agasha herself was a pacifist, many of her students spent so much time with Yojiro that the

lines of study between bushi and shugenja began to blur. Within a generation it was not uncommon for the Mirumoto to understand a great deal about the Elements and the Fortunes, while many Agasha were competent in one or more methods of self-defense.

All of the families of the Dragon, especially the emerging Togashi order of tattooed monks, shared their founding Kami's deep respect for the teachings of Shinsei. When Hantei Genji ordered the Empire to accept the new religion of Shintao that combined the Little Prophet's teachings with Fortunism, the Dragon Clan was the first clan to embrace it, and sent students and emissaries to learn in the temples and shrines of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, as well as sponsoring many new temples of their own. It was the last major contribution the Dragon Clan would make to the political and societal landscapes of the Empire for centuries to come.

Of course, there was one other incident of great importance to the clan during this era: the birth of Togashi's son, Hoshi. The unusual circumstances of this event, in which Togashi essentially kidnapped the daughter of the Scorpion Clan Champion, had many long-term consequences, including pervasive covert contacts between the Dragon Champion and the leaders of the Scorpion.

The Lion Clan

Akodo was never particularly known for a warm nature, but he felt close to his brother Hida and sister Shinjo; when the Ki-Rin Clan left the Empire and Hida settled into guarding the border with the Shadowlands, Akodo believed the responsibility of guarding the Empire's heart had fallen entirely on his shoulders. The lands granted to the Lion by Hantei were fertile and wide, perfect for supporting a vast army, and that was exactly what the Lion Kami intended to use them for. With the First War over, he focused on perfecting the art of soldiering, to create an army unmatched by any other. His trusted lieutenant, Ikoma, served as his roving eyes and ears among the trainees, ensuring their performance was exemplary... but also that Akodo's divine drive did not break the mortal men and women who followed him.

It would be unfair to say Akodo was obsessed with the need to create a flawless army, but military excellence did become the driving goal for the Lion Clan. Though he was not as eloquent as his sister Doji or brother Shiba, Akodo in his own way cared deeply for the Empire he and his siblings founded, and the thought that something else might threaten it again affected him strongly. He was driven by a mixture of pride in his own prowess, duty he owed the Hantei Dynasty, and the need to prove the Empire could destroy any possible foe. He did not act alone or unwisely, however, and conferred regularly with the new Emperor, his own advisors, and even ambassadors from the other clans.

The Matsu were given the task of training the Lion Clan's shock troops and forming the majority of their armies. Akodo realized such men and women made poor generals but excellent soldiers. His own students, masters of theory and logistics, were tasked with the coordination of all levels of the Lion army. While Matsu officers would be promoted for field use, it would be the duty of Akodo's family to ensure the Matsu were not outmaneuvered, caught unprepared, or left without direction. Ikoma's followers served in a wide capacity during this time, taking cues from their master as diplomats, historians, and soldiers as the clan required. Finally, the newly-discovered Kitsu (whose true nature Akodo had discovered just two years after the First War) agreed to train those few among the Lion who showed the talents of shugenja. These men and women were tasked with the sacred duty of communing with the ancestors and safeguarding the purity of the clan's soul.

While this division of duties between families is a well-known arrangement in modern times, one mirrored in all the other clans, few modern Rokugani realize that Akodo's structuring of the Lion Clan was the first of its kind. Up until that time, the emerging noble houses of the various clans pursued their own goals, sometimes overlapping with one another, benefiting their clans out of coincidence and convenience more than anything. But when they saw

Alternate Paths: Togashi the Bachelor

The birth of Togashi's son Hoshi – the half-dragon who was destined to eventually replace Togashi as ruler of the clan – is a major event in the reign of Hantei Genji, though at the time only a tiny handful of people even know about it. It also represents a point where a creative GM can send Rokugan's timeline in some very interesting divergent directions.

For example, what if Bayushi Oshiro had decided to take more drastic action in retaliation for the kidnapping, blinding, and impregnation of his daughter? The Scorpion might have become bitter enemies of the Dragon, pursuing both overt political and military enmity as well as covert campaigns of assassination and blackmail. The enmity between the two clans could easily have become as deep and bitter as that between Lion and Crane – or even moreso, given the capacity of the Scorpion for holding grudges.

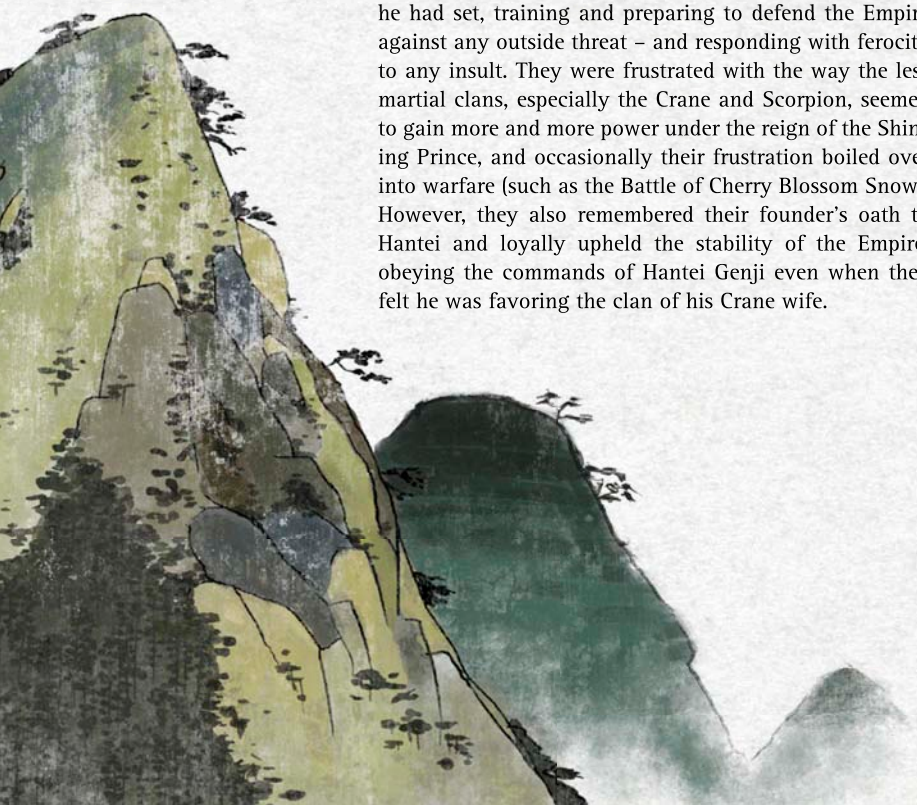
On a more extreme note, what if Oshiro never sent his daughter to Dragon lands at all? This would have only a minor influence on events during Genji's reign, but would have a huge impact on the history of the Empire in the twelfth century – without Hoshi, there would be no leader to rally the resistance to Hitomi's tyrannical rule, and thus the Dragon Clan might fall altogether under the dominion of the Lying Darkness.



the remarkable success of the Lion Clan's ordered structure, other families took note and quickly solidified their respective duties to their own clans.

Akodo was still alive when the Matsu family attacked the Kakita, but chose not to interfere, believing the Matsu cause was honorable. Many vilified the Lion for their actions, but Akodo felt the Empire could not survive if it became a place where insult could be given without fear of retribution. However, he also did not allow the Matsu to escalate their attack into a full-fledged destructive war against his sister's people. It is possible the Crane Clan owes its continued existence to this early decision. But while extermination was averted, Akodo's point was well made: honor, like land, would be defended with steel.

After Akodo's death, the Lion continued on the path he had set, training and preparing to defend the Empire against any outside threat – and responding with ferocity to any insult. They were frustrated with the way the less martial clans, especially the Crane and Scorpion, seemed to gain more and more power under the reign of the Shining Prince, and occasionally their frustration boiled over into warfare (such as the Battle of Cherry Blossom Snow). However, they also remembered their founder's oath to Hantei and loyally upheld the stability of the Empire, obeying the commands of Hantei Genji even when they felt he was favoring the clan of his Crane wife.



The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix did not suffer losses in the First War in the same raw numbers as the Dragon, Scorpion, Lion, or Crab, but the deaths of both Isawa and Shiba left the young clan without a clear direction at first. Indeed, for a short time Lady Asako was the most influential leader in the Phoenix. After Shiba returned in spirit to lead the clan and Isawa's siblings and students formed the Council of Five, the clan recovered its cohesion, but the three families were less well-coordinated than almost any other in Rokugan – a division clearly demonstrated by their later quarrel over Isawa's Last Wish, a quarrel so fierce that Hantei Genji had to step in to resolve it.

One thing on which all three families of the Phoenix agreed was their interest in the secrets and wisdom of the Tao, and one of Hantei's dying wishes was for Seppun to spread Shinsei's words throughout the Empire. When Hantei Genji declared the Tao and the worship of the Fortunes to be the true religion of Rokugan, the Phoenix accepted the decree eagerly, and were already prepared to spread the teachings the first Emperor had so loved. Scholars from all three families traveled through the Empire, spreading the words of Shinsei and the lessons of the Fortunes. Genji was deeply impressed with the Phoenix Clan's devotion to his command, and they were greatly favored for the remainder of his long reign. While the Phoenix would never command the political clout of the Crane, they were commonly viewed as sacrosanct during the Shining Prince's reign.

It was also during this time that the Isawa truly came into their own as the young Empire's masters of Elemental magic. The lessons of the Little Teacher were more than short quotes of wisdom and practical behavior – they hinted at the deeper mysteries of the Celestial Order and the workings of the universe. The Tao helped the Isawa understand hidden truths about the Elements, the kami, and the world, to the point where their previous "mastery" of magic under Isawa began to feel like a mere child's understanding. They shared some of these secrets with the Empire's other emerging shugenja orders, but kept the most dangerous (and powerful) to themselves. This was not so much out of greed or jealousy, but rather simple distrust of those lacking their experience and wisdom. After all, the Tribe of Isawa had already spent generations studying magic before the Kami fell. Who was to say these new inexperienced shugenja would be able to use such power wisely or carefully?

The Isawa also spent the first century of Genji's reign struggling to integrate themselves into the rest of the Empire's social structure. Though Isawa had made his bargain and his tribe was bound to it, they were still ill-at-ease with the customs and authority of outsiders, and many of them preferred to stay in their own lands. Their discomfort among others was exacerbated by the attitudes

of other noble families formed by followers of the Kami, for these men and women had difficulty accepting the fact that Shiba had knelt before a mortal. The Akodo in particular took great issue with having to treat the Isawa as equals, and tended to pointedly favor the opinions and diplomatic efforts of the Shiba Champion over any representatives from the Elemental Council.

The Shiba were content in these early generations to embrace their role as the protectors of the clan while studying the meditative arts of the Tao. While the Soul of Shiba directed the family (and in theory, the clan) there was little need for guidance, as the Isawa led the clan and insisted on the ways of peace that would become the enduring characteristic of the Phoenix Clan. The rivalry between the Isawa and the Asako was already in place, for Lady Asako had refused to share the secret wisdom of the henshin with any others, but both families shared a devotion to peace and enlightenment.

Sadly, this period of relatively good relations between the families of the Phoenix would be slowly degraded by Isawa's Last Wish. The story of the Last Wish is recounted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans (pages 174-175). At first, the Wish was a matter of debate among the families but not of actual conflict. As the years passed by, however, the Isawa declared themselves the only shugenja able to handle it safely, the Asako claimed Asako Yogo and Asako Sagoten's work on the artifact meant it was theirs by right, and the Shiba maintained it should be guarded and left alone. As the rancor between the noble houses increased, the families began to bicker with each other in more personal and emotional ways. The Isawa thought the Shiba's ideas were useless and the Asako were acting as naïve children. The Asako feared the Isawa were being reckless and the Shiba would cause harm through ignorance. The Shiba simply felt neither family could be trusted to handle such power safely. Eventually, Hantei Genji himself had to intervene, and while the word of the Shining Prince was inarguable, his action ultimately did little to cool the tempers of the noble houses.

This crack in the foundation of the Phoenix's internal relations would only grow as the centuries wore on. As the Isawa solidified their control over the clan, they ensured the Shiba had less and less of a voice on internal matters, while the Asako were reduced to a family of high repute but little influence. By the time Hantei Genji left the mortal world, the Phoenix Clan had frozen itself into these patterns, which would hold all but unchanged until the twelfth century.

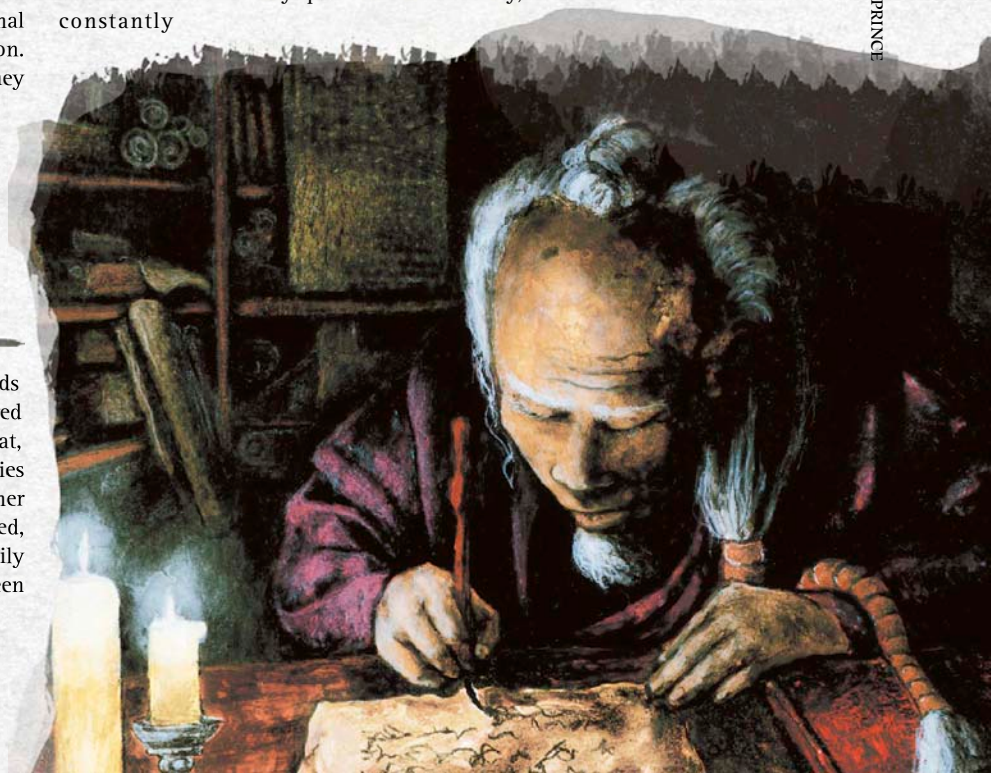
The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion found themselves at a great crossroads after the First War. Their lands and soldiers suffered hardship similar to the Crab, though not nearly as great, and they had suffered exceptionally heavy casualties in battle against the minions of Fu Leng. On the other hand, their surviving troops were skilled and experienced, and they had just founded a second shugenja family (the Soshi, following onto the earlier Yogo). It had been a Scorpion, Shosuro, who survived the Thunders' battle and brought word back to the Empire of Fu Leng's defeat, and the Emperor had entrusted the care of the Black Scrolls to Bayushi in consequence. Their clan was held in high esteem by many, and they could easily have made themselves a major power in the young Empire.

The Scorpion Kami, however, did not follow that path. He had learned well the lessons of the tournament against his brothers and sisters. His people were not meant to be great heroes or the mightiest army of the Empire, and Hantei had commanded him to undertake the unsavory tasks others might not have the fortitude to do in the name of the Throne. To this end, Bayushi quietly forged deals with his brother Hida, moving some of his most experiences troops to the command of the Crab. He commanded the Yogo to work their magic in secret, deterring others from finding interest in them. The Shosuro were to serve the Bayushi just as their founder had served the Kami – quietly staying to the shadows, doing what even the Bayushi could not do so. The Soshi, still few in number, were committed to this same course, to serve the Bayushi family with their many gifts... no matter the task.

With this policy firmly in place, Bayushi observed the Empire and considered the lessons of the past decade. A threat large enough to threaten the Empire as a whole must never again be allowed to surface. In this light, he saw what the followers of his brothers and sisters were building... and grew wary. The Phoenix were creating powerful magic that even the Yogo had to admit confounded them. The Lion were amassing an army with little direction but with overwhelming might. The Crane were quickly making themselves nearly unstoppable in trade and the courts. All of these Bayushi saw, not as admirable developments, but as potential threats to his nephew's rule.

The Lion and Crane proved to be solutions for one another. It was an easy matter to have Scorpion ambassadors constantly provoke their rivalry, constantly



stoke the fires of the quarrels between the Kakita to the Matsu. While the Scorpion knew inter-clan warfare had the potential to ruin the Empire, they felt it was better to keep these two clans at each others' throats than to let them amass enough power to be a threat to the Empire as a whole.

The Phoenix were another matter entirely. The Scorpion plotted for generations to curb the unchecked power that powerful shugenja represented. Ironically, their greatest advance in this regard was achieved against the Lion, not the Phoenix: the Scorpion showed the testimony of an ancestor spirit was fallible (the "spirit" in question belonged to a man who still lived), and in response Hantei Genji forbade the use of magic in any kind of testimony. This allowed the Scorpion to greatly reduce the threat of magic to the social order; the Lion were essentially collateral victims of a plan aimed largely at the Phoenix.

The Scorpion themselves, however, were unknowingly facing a serious internal threat from the Lying Darkness, which had already begun to infiltrate the clan via Shosuro. The Soshi family, founded by Shosuro under a false name, almost immediately began studying the ways of Shadow magic, and the Shosuro family already began to offer a "tithe" of its members to the Lying Darkness due to Shosuro's sinister bargain. Eventually, Shosuro herself realized she was being consumed by the sinister power she had brought back from the Shadowlands, and in the year 59 she fled to the Dragon lands and imprisonment by Togashi. This in turn led to Bayushi's departure from the clan in the year 83, searching futilely for the follower he had always loved. Control of the clan passed to his son Bayushi Ubane in an orderly fashion, but Ubane was not his father, a semi-divine being who could be in many different places with only a moment's notice. Thus, after this transition the Bayushi family began to rely more heavily on the Shosuro, strengthening the bond between them but also strengthening the Shadow's ability to infiltrate the clan.

After Ubane's ascension, the Scorpion also drew back their earlier alliance with the Crab, both for opportunistic reasons and as a matter of duty. The Bayushi had no intention of letting the Crab lose their endless war with the Shadowlands, but they realized the Crab were unlikely to receive support from the rest of the Empire so long as they had an alliance with the hated Scorpion – and besides, if the Crab grew too strong, they might be tempted to forsake their duty in favor of ambitions within Rokugan.

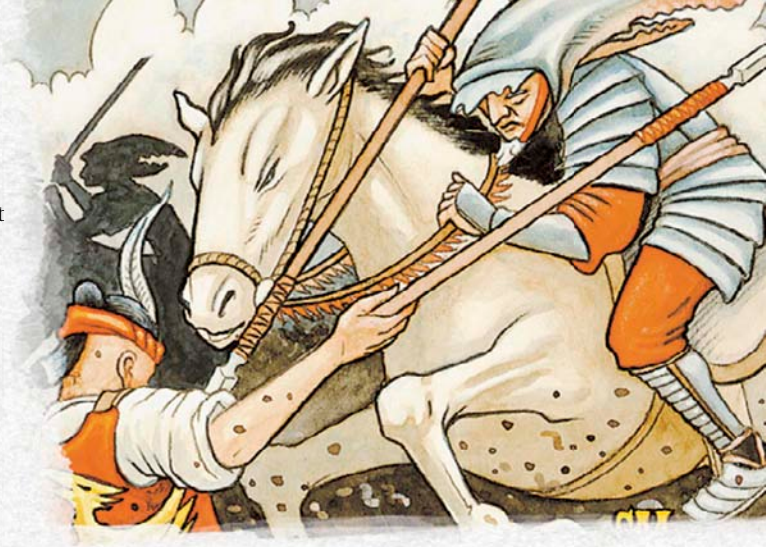
In the later years of Genji's reign, the Scorpion Clan increased its political influence considerably thanks to the career of the famed judge Soshi Saibankan. Saibankan's reforms of the Empire's early and rather primitive legal system were a huge boon to Rokugan, but they also ensured the new uniform legal system was one the Scorpion could easily manipulate – particularly through the supreme emphasis on personal testimony and the corresponding devaluation of physical evidence. This era also saw the peculiar career of Clan Champion Bayushi Tangen, the author of Lies and the first Scorpion to earn the dubious title of "junshin" for his reluctant adherence to Bushido. To this day it is not known whether Tangen was assassinated or merely died unexpectedly of natural causes.

Alternate Paths: Shosuro and the Shadow

Although the Empire remembered the first Day of Thunder for the defeat of Fu Leng, almost as consequential in the long run was Shosuro's secret deal with the Lying Darkness. The Shadow agreed to help her return alive to Rokugan and to share some of its powers with her (and her descendents), in exchange for her accepting its influence and pledging a "tithe" from future generations of Shosuro. At the time this doubtless seemed to Shosuro to be her only option, but within a few years she would realize she had actually made a very bad bargain indeed, and in the year 59 she fled to Togashi in search of help.

Changes to these events would have a significant impact on Rokugan both in Hantei Genji's reign and in later centuries. For example, what if Shosuro rejected the Shadow's offer of "help"? Perhaps she would have died in the Shadowlands and never brought the Black Scrolls back to Rokugan – in which case the entire future of the Empire would be in doubt. Or perhaps she would be saved by Shiba and the Empire would be spared – at least for a long time – from the influence of the Lying Darkness. This would mean Shosuro would never be forced to flee the Scorpion lands, and she and Bayushi would both live out their lives normally. Indeed, in this circumstance Bayushi might have outlived most of his siblings. And of course, there would be no Soshi family, no Shadow magic, and no sinister "tithe" of Shosuro students to the Darkness.

At the opposite extreme, what if the Shadow had managed to overwhelm Shosuro's psyche more quickly? The Scorpion Clan might have rapidly succumbed to the influence of the Lying Darkness, greatly accelerating the progress toward its eventual attempt to unmake the Empire (and all of reality). It is possible Bayushi himself might succumb to the Darkness' control, a dire consequence indeed for Rokugan.



The Ki-Rin (Unicorn) Clan

The Clan of the Ki-Rin began their famous journey beyond the borders of Rokugan shortly after Hantei Genji took the Throne. Much of what occurred during this period later became known to the historians of the Empire when the Ki-Rin finally returned as the Unicorn Clan: the encounter with the Ujik-hai, the encounter with gaijin sorcerers, the vision of the Unicorn and the birth of Shinjo's children, and the battle with the rocs and their barbarian riders. These events helped define the clan and the nature and roles of its various families. However, because the Ki-Rin Clan did not maintain written records during its journeys, many other incidents and details were lost in later years. Thus, for a campaign set among the Ki-Rin, there are an almost infinite number of potential stories to be told about this era in their history.

Once the Ki-Rin split into four groups, the accounts of the clan's travels become even more hazy, with dedicated exploration secondary to the goal of surviving as a people and finding a way to return home

The Minor Clans

The first two official Minor Clans are recognized during the reign of Hantei Genji: the Fox (founded in year 90) and the Badger Clan (founded in year 110). Although the Mantis Clan also comes into existence in this era when Kaimetsu-Uo leads his followers to the Islands of Spice & Silk, the clan will not be recognized by the Imperial Throne for centuries. Historians and scholars of Imperial Law in modern times debate just why the Poet Emperor allowed the Mantis Clan to claim its title and banner without Imperial sanction or retribution. Some believe Genji knew the samurai of the Mantis would likely refuse his order to disband, and did not wish to assault his own subjects when he had more pressing issues to deal with. Others think he was advised (or believed) that men and women such as the Mantis should be allowed to make such bold claims and then attempt to defend them – with all the corresponding potential consequences, good and bad.

In reality, Genji believed the Mantis had managed to take more land for the Empire than was originally claimed by the Kami, and therefore he was hesitant to punish them – though he sent several missives to Kaimetsu-Uo explaining to the young man that his "clan" would have no official protection in the courts or under Imperial law. If any of the other clans had bothered to try and cross the water to fight the Mantis for their new land, they likely could have taken it; however, the Great Clans were all busy solidifying the hold on their own territory and had little interest in a few islands across the dangerous seas.

The true Minor Clans - the Fox and Badger - held little influence or presence during this time. The Fox were held in high esteem by many of the clans, as they were the last remnants of Shinjo's followers, but that did not translate into political or military power. The Crane, ever disgusted by the warmongering of the Lion, were exceptionally friendly towards the Fox for centuries. Some believe this was not just out of altruism, but because the Fox held the special favor of the Emperor, which in turn endeared him further to the Crane.

The Imperial Families

Like most of the other noble houses, the Otomo, Miya, and Seppun spend much of Hantei Genji's reign developing their traditions, taking on specific duties, and establishing the enduring traits that become the hallmarks of their line. The Seppun family commands perhaps the greatest respect in all of Rokugan during this time period, for Lady Seppun was known to be a close personal friend and advisor to Hantei himself, and her followers were known from the beginning to be honorable, just, and wise in all of their dealings. The word of a Seppun was seen as the word of the Emperor, especially since the Emperor could not be everywhere at once.

Alternate Paths: The Mantis are Punished

Historically, Hantei Genji chose not to punish the self-proclaimed "Mantis Clan" for its temerity, but also did not extend any recognition or protection over them. What if one of the other Great Clans had decided to undertake its own punitive action against the Mantis? At the time, Kaimetsu-Uo's clan was tiny, numbering only a couple of hundred samurai at most, and its population growth was slow. Any of the coastal clans could easily have assembled a large enough fleet to overwhelm the Mantis and conquer their islands. Kaimetsu-Uo would not have simply accepted such a defeat, of course. He might have led his followers into the interior jungles of the Islands of Silk & Spice to wage guerilla war against the invaders, or – if staying on the islands proved untenable – he might have built up a pirate fleet to raid and harass the enemy clan or even the Empire as a whole. It would not be difficult, in such a changed history, to foresee the Mantis becoming a perpetual scourge upon Rokugan, a force of embittered exiles waging perpetual war against their former home.

The Miya and Otomo families were both exceptionally small during the early years of Genji's reign, initially numbering less than ten samurai apiece. While the Miya would never attain the influence of the other Imperial Families, they quickly won the friendship of many samurai families across the Empire, and their efforts to carry Imperial decrees to the far-flung corners of Rokugan probably did more than almost anyone else to tie the Empire's disparate territories together into a single unified civilization. Their efforts were not without cost, for in those early decades the Empire was still plagued with bandits, rogue tribes, and occasional Shadowlands creatures. More than one Miya herald perished from these threats.

The Otomo, initially without significant influence, gained a great deal of political clout when Genji's brother Yamato joined their ranks. However, they did not yet have their future role as the administrators of Imperial bureaucracy (indeed the bureaucracy itself did not exist and would not do so for another two centuries); thus for the most part they were little more than prominent residents of the Imperial City, parlaying their connections to the Emperor into personal influence and advancement.

Threats: The Shadowlands, The Kolat

At the beginning of Genji's reign, the forces of the Shadowlands were beaten but not destroyed, and some centers of power still remained within Fu Leng's realm – notably the corrupt kingdom of the trolls. Driven by the will of Jigoku, the Tainted beasts would attack the Empire's borders from time to time, as well as trying to infiltrate and sow discord and destruction within Rokugan, but they did so without any central direction. After Hida Osano-Wo destroyed the troll kingdom, it would be many generations before the Shadowlands could pose a true existential threat to the whole Empire. In the meantime, they would be confined to scattered, unfocused incursions into the Crab lands. The major victories for Jigoku in this time period came in quieter and subtler forms: unknowing samurai lured by the power of the Taint before they knew the cost (most notably Kuni Nakanu). Until Rokugan truly understood the effects and dangers of the Shadowlands Taint, the insidious corruption it represented could easily spread once it gained a foothold.

The Kolat conspiracy was still in its infancy in this era. Although the leaders of the organization had developed their philosophy of the Rule of Man, they did not yet have the power to do more than observe and, very carefully, to recruit. Their one notable achievement in this era was the acquisition of the mysterious artifact known as the Oni's Eye, which would become vital to the conspiracy's later success.

Notable Personalities During the Reign of the Shining Prince

Much like Hantei Genji himself became a legend for bringing on an age of art, learning, and civilization after the defeat of Fu Leng, many of the Empire's other great noble families were led by men and women of note who undertook great works. Some simply did all they could to fulfill the responsibilities given to them, while others left their individual marks on the growing Empire. The following section includes a brief selection of such notable figures.

It should be noted that, as mentioned in the previous L5R 4th Edition supplement Imperial Histories (pages 36-37), many of the Empire's basic Schools were not fully developed during this time period. The statistics of the NPCs presented here depict them at the height of their influence and power, which may or may not be when their relevant School had a full five Ranks... or even existed yet.

Hantei Genji

the Shining Prince, the Poet Emperor

History records the son of the First Emperor as a decisive, driven man with a vision for the future of Rokugan. Because of this, many historians and scholars cannot help but wonder if the Shining Prince was ever plagued by uncertainty, self-doubt, or any of the other insecurities to which normal mortals are prone. However, in truth Genji was every inch the leader the histories record.

In his youth, the young prince took the lessons of his honorable father and graceful mother to heart. He wanted to bring everything they represented to every corner of the growing Empire. This ideal was only strengthened as the forces of Fu Leng threatened to destroy everything the Kami had wrought. To Genji, the First War symbolized everything that would happen if the Empire failed, if it did not flourish and become a bastion of order and law. Men and women of strong hearts, honor, and discipline had to be found and nurtured in order to prevent this, and such was a task the Shining Prince set himself to at an early age.

The young Hantei sought be become known to all of the noble houses, using his influence to ensure worthy individuals gained the attention of their superiors and were promoted to more important positions. While many others would have stumbled under the weight of his position, Genji – who was, after all, the son of a god – stood alongside legends like his uncles and aunts, exerting the authority of a true Emperor. He knew he lived in a time when someone of vision could shape the world, and he chose to do so. After he became Emperor, many attributed his infinite patience and goodwill to his divinity, while others believed it was his mortal soul that allowed him to empathize so perfectly with his subjects – even the commoners. Genji himself never spent time examining

any philosophical questions about his nature, instead simply fulfilling his place in the Celestial Order as well as he could, expecting the Heavens to judge him.

During his reign, the Empire was much lower in population, and many traditions and social customs had not yet been fully established. Because of this, Genji was possibly the most accessible Emperor of the Hantei line despite his half-divine nature, and he devoted a great deal of time to his subjects. His actions, both in and out of the Imperial Court, were topics of discussion all across the Empire, and often his simple choices became the foundations for traditions that survived for centuries (such as the Cherry Blossom Festival).

As a half-divine man, Genji lived far beyond the span of a normal mortal, and when he finally decided the time had come to pass the title of Emperor to his son he was still as mentally vibrant as the day he took the Throne. Indeed, Genji could easily have lived on and reigned for decades more, but he believed the time of the divine walking the land had passed, and thus it was proper to move on. The legacy Genji left for his people was felt through every part of Rokugan, just as he had intended, and few later Emperors could even compare to his legend.

Hantei Genji, the Shining Prince

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

Awareness: 7 Willpower: 7 Intelligence: 7 Perception: 5

Honor: 9.1 *Status: 10.0* *Glory: 8.5*

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 5 (Insight Rank 9)

Skills: Artisan: Ikebana 3, Artisan: Painting 5, Artisan: Poetry 8, Calligraphy 5, Courtier (Manipulation, Rhetoric) 9, Etiquette (Conversation, Courtesy) 10, Games: Go 5, Games: Letters 4, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 6, Kenjutsu 7, Lore: Spirit Realms 5, Lore: Theology 10, Perform: Dance 6, Perform: Oratory 8, Perform: Song 6, Perform: Storytelling 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 9, Tea Ceremony 5.

Advantages: Allies (many), Benten's Blessing, Clear Thinker, Great Destiny (forge the Empire), Sage, Sensation, Social Position (Emperor)

Disadvantages: None

Matsu Kiriko

Matsu Family Daimyo, Daughter of Battle

Matsu Kiriko was every inch the heir of her legendary mother, Lady Matsu. Known as the Daughter of Battle, she revered the memory and legacy of Matsu as if the woman was a Kami. It is thus no surprise that she did everything she could to prove the superiority of her family's ferocity and drive over the more calculated and reserved ways of the Akodo family. While Kiriko never showed the slightest disobedience or disrespect toward Akodo (not even in her own heart), she firmly believed the way of her mother was the superior way of war.

Kiriko influenced the history of the Lion Clan (and the entire Empire) at two key junctures: the Lion Clan's conflict with the Kitsu race, and its feud with the Kakita family. She shared Akodo's zealous attitude in hunting down and destroying the enemies of the Empire, and when the Kitsu were first discovered she urged the First Lion to war. Their inhuman nature and stealthy nature, hiding away in the mountains, made them very similar to the creatures of Fu Leng the Empire had just defeated, and the Emperor had commanded all such threats be eliminated. In true Matsu fashion, Kiriko embraced this duty and called for an all-out assault on the creatures.

Although the Kitsu were eventually revealed as something else entirely, no blame fell on Matsu Kiriko's shoulders. Indeed, Akodo noted several times that the voice of the Matsu daimyo was an important one, and said Matsu herself would doubtless have urged the same course.

Years later, it was also Matsu Kiriko who attacked the Kakita. She declared the right of vengeance against the Kakita for both their founder's actions against Matsu and for their many insults and belittling actions since that day. The political backlash for her action was extreme, but she received no reprimand from her Champion. However, she recognized that to destroy the Kakita completely would draw the wrath of the Emperor and would leave her clan subject to dire recriminations. After destroying the estates of several Crane courtiers who she regarded as especially dishonorable, Kiriko made a suicidal attack on a reinforced Crane stronghold. With her actions she showed the Empire that words had consequences, and with her death she bought the Lion immunity from the Crane's retribution.

Matsu Kiriko, Daughter of Battle

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

Reflexes: 4 Stamina: 5 Agility: 5

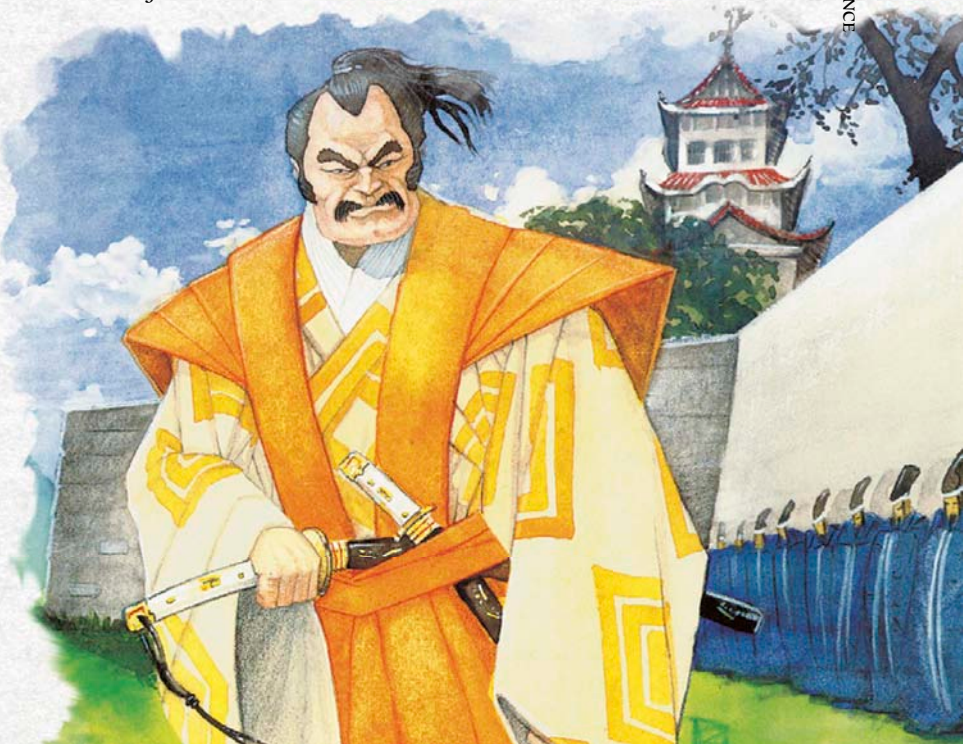
Honor: 7.2 *Status: 7.1* *Glory: 5.5*

School/Rank: Matsu Berserker 3 (Insight Rank 4)

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 4, Horsemanship 2, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: History 3, Polearms 4, Spears 4.

Advantages: Heart of Vengeance (Crane), Leadership, Social Position (Matsu family daimyo)

Disadvantages: Brash



Kaiu Norio

Heir of War

After Kaiu founded his own noble house, he was offered a bride by the Crab Clan's allies in the Bayushi family. Kaiu Norio was his eldest son, a clever and stubborn man who merged his father's positive traits with the cunning of his Scorpion mother. Norio grew up after the First War, in devastated lands the Empire spent decades rebuilding. To him, his father was probably the greatest hero of the age, flawlessly creating order and structure out of chaos and ruin.

What set Norio apart from his younger brothers was his early realization that few were willing to cooperate solely for the sake of a better Empire. As Norio's father traveled through the Crab lands, repairing damage and building new castles, he was constantly challenged by issues of logistics, politics, and trade. The Lion might supply ore for the Crab war effort, but they wanted armor made by the legendary Kaiu. The Phoenix might supply lumber, but they wished to oversee Kuni's research. The Crab war effort benefited the whole Empire, yet the samurai of the other clans wanted their own selfish interests satisfied as well.

Many Crab were angered by this frustrating reality, but Norio was one of the first to embrace a method of dealing with it: beat the others at their own game. While he was an honorable man, Norio believed an individual samurai's honor was nothing compared to the duty and honor of the clan. Once he assumed the rule of his family he began to personally oversee many of the negotiations and construction plans for the clan, and quickly gained a reputation as a cunning negotiator who was not above polite (or overt) threats to get what he required. In one instance, Norio assisted the Crane in creating a stronghold in their southern holdings, then mentioned he had some concerns about the materials he had used in constructing it. They had been given to him by the Lion, he explained, who knew they were going to be used for the Crane. Then he mentioned if the Yasuki and Doji would be so kind as to provide a sufficient quantity of higher quality materials he would be more than happy to reconstruct the fortress. The excess supplies, of course, went back to the Crab.

Norio earned a fair amount of notoriety (and not a few personal enemies) with his approach, but the Hida never had reason to complain about the results, and few were willing to openly raise a complaint against the Kaiu daimyo. After all, the enmity of the greatest engineer of the age meant the enmity of all of those who wished to retain his favor.



Kaiu Norio, Heir of War

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

Honor: 5.1 *Status: 7.6* *Glory: 6.8*

School/Rank: Kaiu Engineer 3 (Insight Rank 5)

Skills: Battle 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 4, Craft: Armorsmithing 6, Craft: Weaponsmithing 5, Defense 3, Engineering (Construction, Siege) 9, Heavy Weapon 5, Intimidation 5, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Architecture 8, War Fans 3.

Advantages: Allies (Bayushi Family), Social Position (Kaiu family daimyo), Soul of Artistry (Craft)

Disadvantages: Driven (bolster the clan's war effort)

Founding a Religion: Genji, Shinsei, & the Fortunes

The Shining Prince made many contributions to the political and social traditions of Rokugan, but no single one of them was as great as his work to incorporate the words of Shinsei into the worship of the Fortunes, creating a unified Imperial religion. Before the coming of the Kami, the scattered tribes of humanity worshipped the Fortunes in a very primitive fashion, offering devotions, tributes, and sacrifices, praying for their protection and blessing. Traditions of worship varied widely from place to place, and few understood what the Fortunes perceived as correct behavior.

Like many elements of the Celestial Order, the Fortunes' concept of morality was rooted in maintaining a correct relationship between different things – in this case, between the Realm of Mortals and the Celestial Heavens. Little else mattered to the Fortunes. If a tribe acted incorrectly or did not show piety, the Celestial beings would punish the mortal realm in one way or another. Death, famine, disease, catastrophe, and curses were all among the tools the Fortunes used to push the mortals back to the correct path, making examples of the unworthy.

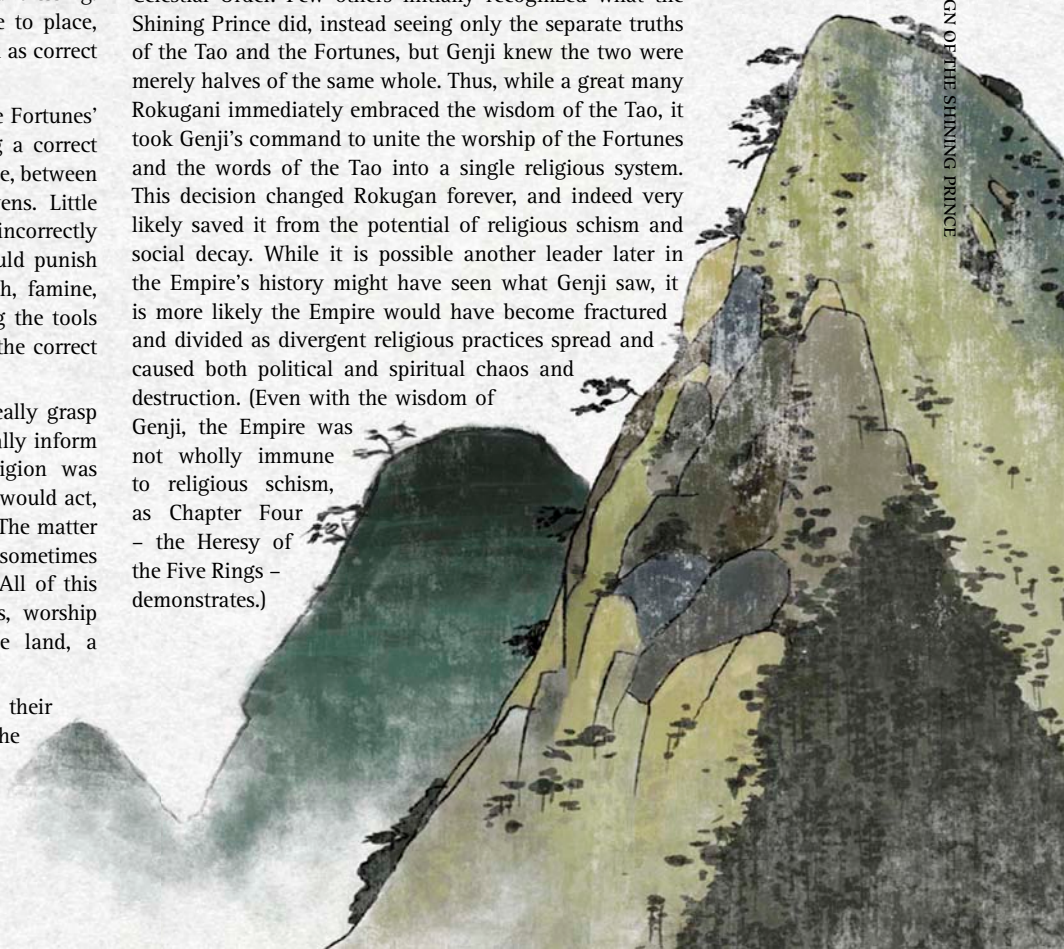
Unfortunately, the Celestial beings did not really grasp the perceptions of mortals and did little to actually inform humans of what must be done. Instead, religion was essentially a matter of trial and error: the tribes would act, and hope the Fortunes would smile upon them. The matter was further complicated by natural tragedies sometimes being mistaken for the wrath of the Fortunes. All of this led to a complicated array of different rituals, worship traditions, and devotions scattered across the land, a hodgepodge of correct and incorrect behavior.

When the Kami fell, the Fortunes lessened their punishment of the mortals, for the Children of the Sun and Moon created a perplexing question to Heavens: could the Kami be reprimanded for incorrect behavior? They were, after all, children of the highest beings in the Celestial Order. The Fortunes watched the mortal realm now not just for the behavior of the men and women, but also out of interest in what the Kami would do. When the Kami instructed the mortals on proper worship, the Fortunes found this largely acceptable, although they soon saw that sometimes the Kami would contradict each other.

The rise of Fu Leng, the corrupted child of Sun and Moon, put an end to the question in the mind of the Fortunes. Clearly, Fu Leng had been corrupted by the Realm of Evil and was no longer infallible. By the same vein, the other Kami had been corrupted by the Realm of Mortals, and their words and deeds were no longer above question. However, the Fortunes had given Ningen-Do tacit approval for many things during this period, and to go back upon this did not seem like the correct course of action.

When Shinsei appeared to Hantei and the others, an answer was found. The Little Teacher was a truly remarkable mortal with tremendous insight into the nature of the Celestial Order. His words spoke of how harmony of the self mirrored harmony in the Heavens, how all things followed the great pattern in one way or another. His words opened the eyes of both mortals and the Kami to the full depths of that pattern, the design the Fortunes had seen all along as obvious but had been unable to communicate to the mortal world.

Hantei Genji, a man both divine and mortal, saw this truth for himself immediately. He knew Shinsei's words were not just the wisdom of the age, but a guide for those who were seeking to align themselves properly within the Celestial Order. Few others initially recognized what the Shining Prince did, instead seeing only the separate truths of the Tao and the Fortunes, but Genji knew the two were merely halves of the same whole. Thus, while a great many Rokugani immediately embraced the wisdom of the Tao, it took Genji's command to unite the worship of the Fortunes and the words of the Tao into a single religious system. This decision changed Rokugan forever, and indeed very likely saved it from the potential of religious schism and social decay. While it is possible another leader later in the Empire's history might have seen what Genji saw, it is more likely the Empire would have become fractured and divided as divergent religious practices spread and caused both political and spiritual chaos and destruction. (Even with the wisdom of Genji, the Empire was not wholly immune to religious schism, as Chapter Four – the Heresy of the Five Rings – demonstrates.)



Alternate Branches of Development

While the war against Fu Leng was a desperate time for the Empire, its aftermath was also a turbulent period in which many social, political, and military changes shaped Rokugan forever. During this part of history, a misspoken word, an overly ambitious general, or any number of seemingly minor differences could have created a very different Rokugan. The following sections explore several such possibilities.

The Diminished Dragon

As noted earlier, the Dragon Clan suffered greatly during the war, and it the direct attentions of Hantei Genji played a significant role in the clan's later recovery. However, the Shining Prince did not have to agree to let his uncle's few followers retain the status of a Great Clan. With so few Dragon samurai left, Genji could have just as easily have granted their lands to the stewardship of the Lion or the Phoenix, or simply allowed the Empire's borders to shrink.

But what would have happened to Togashi and his fledgling clan? Genji could have declared them the first Minor Clan, as he did with the Fox decades later. While the Dragon's situation would be starkly different than that of the Fox Clan, the decree would be for much the same reasons of protection. In this scenario, the Dragon would be granted lands closer to the Imperial City and the Togashi family would be an amalgamation of the Togashi, Mirumoto, and Agasha. Of course, Togashi remains a close advisor to the Emperor for centuries, and the Dragon – with their unique blend of magical, meditative, and martial gifts – become the de facto agents of the Emperor in the wider Empire. While the Miya remain the Emperor's heralds, the Togashi become his judges, witnesses, and resourceful hands far from Otosan Uchi.



Alternatively, the Dragon could have been named an Imperial family, in which case the Seppun become more scholars and courtiers and the Togashi become the implacable protectors of the Emperor and his city. Fusing the mystic power of Togashi's tattoos and the enlightened sword techniques of Mirumoto together, the Togashi guard the Imperial line and take a more active role in the politics and intrigues of the Empire.

Finally, the complete loss of the Dragon Clan would be a much more serious change to the Empire, for a great number of reasons. Togashi himself would remain hidden in the northern mountains, his presence a matter of rumor and speculation save to the few privileged with the truth. The Dragon Kami would do what he could to affect the course of the Empire, but with fewer resources and the status of a myth, this would be much more difficult for him. The lack of an ise zumi to trap Iuchiban's spirit in the seventh century, for example, would have dire repercussions for Rokugan. The Kakita, lacking a rival swordsmanship school to set themselves against, might have never pressed their own swordsmanship to greater and greater heights. The lack of a Dragon Clan to assist Hantei Yugozohime in breaking the Gozoku might have allowed the conspiracy to prevail and maintain its power. And while Togashi might still have trapped Shosuro in a crystal prison, but who would take Mirumoto Hitomi's place centuries later to free her? Indeed, who would stand in Hitomi's place at all on the second Day of Thunder?

As can be seen, while the Dragon may outwardly seem to have largely stood apart from Rokugan, in fact they affected the Empire's destiny a great many times through the Empire's history – even if official records do not recognize this. The impact of losing the Dragon Clan is limited only by the GM's willingness to create changes, whether great or small.

The Phoenix Secede

After the death of both the Phoenix Kami and of Isawa, the Tribe of Isawa might have simply refused to honor Isawa's bargain. While this might seem to be a dishonorable breaking of oaths, many among the Tribe were never comfortable with their leader's agreement, and would have seen the death of a supposedly immortal Kami as proof the bargain was not made in good faith. Since Rokugan was still recovering from the First War, there would be little the Empire could really do to enforce the loyalty of the Phoenix. Those sworn to Shiba's name would likely break with the Isawa, returning to Otosan Uchi to serve the Imperial house directly, or finding a home among their like-minded peers in the Mirumoto. It is even possible Shiba's twin, Bayushi, could have persuaded them to join the Scorpion.

In any case, the fate of the Shiba would have less of an impact on the Empire than the loss of the Isawa. After all, the Tribe of Isawa taught the shugenja of Rokugan a great deal about magic, not just during the First War but after it as well. Elemental magic was something the Tribe of Isawa had already spent generations learning; everyone else was talented but without any such structured understanding.

Without Isawa guidance, a shugenja's gifts would be poorly understood at best. The foremost shugenja in the Empire would be the distant Agasha; the Scorpion would be likely to hide any such expertise, while the Kuni and Kitsu would focus tightly on their specific areas of interest rather than pursuing a broader scope of magic. With the Agasha as the pre-eminent shugenja of Rokugan, magic study would be greatly stunted, and the Dragon Clan would have a powerful advantage over the others. Of course, without the assistance of the Isawa the Agasha would take centuries to become as adept as they became in the canon history only a few decades after the war.

The Crane, who took their shugenja tradition from a former Phoenix, would perhaps never develop a shugenja family at all. This in turn would leave them at a serious disadvantage against the Scorpion. In fact, the Doji would be almost totally ignorant of how such tools could be used. Rokugan as a whole would be much less prepared to handle supernatural and spiritual threats such as maho, the Bloodspeaker Cult, rogue shugenja, and the like. Such problems would be rarer, of course, but far more potent when they arose. The Seppun and the Imperial City would be far less able to protect the Hantei Dynasty from threats of this nature, and this would inevitably lead to a great deal of divergence from known history.

The Isawa themselves would be left without the guidance of the Tao. After all, they broke from the Empire, and many of the Tribe would in turn look upon the words of the Little Teacher (so valued by Shiba) with scorn. Lacking such insight, the Isawa would not rise to the greater heights of magical power they attained in canonical history – indeed, they would not understand the nature of the Shadowlands Taint that would begin to corrupt their blood magic. It is likely that within a few generations the Tribe of Isawa would be reduced to a corrupted faction where authority derived from power and ruthlessness. And unlike the Bloodspeakers, this corrupted Tribe of Isawa would be far larger and more organized, posing a serious threat to the northern border of the Empire.

The Death of the Crab

Though Hida was known as the most resilient of the Kami, he was not invulnerable to the hordes of his brother Fu Leng's army. If Hida were to perish in the First War, the Crab would not only be robbed of their great leader but would also lose an endless source of inspiration and endurance. Though Hida's son Atarasi would still go on to help defeat Fu Leng at the Day of Thunder, he would be the last of his line, and the Crab would be crippled. The handfuls of survivors would most likely throw in with their brothers-in-arms, the Scorpion, or else be recruited by Akodo.

The loss of the Crab Clan would have a great impact on the entire Empire, but none would feel it so much as the Scorpion, who would now be the clan closest to the border with the Shadowlands. It is possible the Scorpion would be content to turn a blind eye to a threat so far away, separated from them by a wide expanse of empty and ruined lands... until the threat came to their doorstep. Or, just as possibly, Bayushi and his followers might have recognized the threat immediately and moved to contain it as Hida did, albeit in a different manner. In either case, the Scorpion would be a poor substitute for the Crab against the threat of the Shadowlands – none of them could replace Kaiu's skills, for example, at crafting structures and engines of war. The warriors of the Scorpion would attempt to use guile and subterfuge against an enemy uncaring or unmoved by such trickery. And while the Yogo shared the Kuni family's devotion to fighting against the Shadowlands, they were far less willing to delve recklessly into the secrets of the Taint.

In short, the Scorpion Clan would adapt... or they would die. Faced with such a choice, the Scorpion of this Empire become a much more militarily inclined clan, but one without even the mild pretense of honor the Crab maintained, a clan more resembling the Spider Clan of the twelfth century than anything from the Empire's early history. They would apply the credo of "victory at any cost" in their war against the Shadowlands, turning them cold and ruthless. Their courtiers and ninja would be employed to manipulate and provoke the clans of the Empire into assisting in their war against the Shadowlands. This would leave the Doji practically the uncontested masters of the courts, though it is unlikely the Crane Clan would be able to maintain its southern holdings in this timeline.

However, for all their ruthlessness the Scorpion would never match the Crab Clan's fortitude and patience for a protracted war, nor would they have the skills to eventually contain the Shadowlands with a powerful wall. Eventually, a major Shadowlands leader such as the Maw would likely push the Scorpion back all the way back to the Spine of the World Mountains. These mountains would become the Empire's new southern border, and this event would perhaps also herald the death of the Scorpion Clan.

As if all this weren't enough, without the insight of the Kuni into the nature of the Taint, Rokugan would be far more exposed to its threat. While the Isawa would eventually compensate for this, they would have no reason to study the phenomenon as intensely as the Crab. Knowledge would come slowly and in many cases far too late. All in all, a Rokugan without the Crab would be a dark world indeed.

Fu Leng Redeemed

The Day of Thunder could have ended differently. Though many wonder what might have happened if Fu Leng had bested the Thunders and marched over Rokugan, something else could also have occurred: Isawa's magic could have stripped the touch of Jigoku from the Dark Kami.

Fueled by the wrath and power he gained in his time in service to Jigoku, Fu Leng's retribution upon the monsters of the Shadowlands would have been great indeed. The Dark Kami would have destroyed the First Oni and returned the bodies of the Thunders back to Rokugan, throwing himself upon Hantei's mercy for his crimes. Without a need to save the Thunders, Shiba would have lived on, and Shosuro would have never had to bargain with the Lying Darkness for her survival. In recognition of their familial bonds, anxious to reconcile with his brother before his death, Hantei would have granted Fu Leng leave to establish a Great Clan like his siblings.



With Fu Leng's insight into the ways of Jigoku and his burning hatred for the Shadowlands, his clan would have become steadfast allies with the Crab. His followers would share secrets of Jigoku with the Kuni and Hida, as well as knowledge on how to defeat its minions. In a matter of a generation, the threat of the Shadowlands would be all but eliminated, as Fu Leng's clan and the Crab would march to the lands surrounding the Pit and create a fortification – perhaps an earlier version of the Great Carpenter Wall – to enclose it.

Without an endless war to occupy them, the Crab would become far more involved in Rokugani power struggles, and the clan of Fu Leng would struggle to find its own place in the Empire. Much like Fu Leng himself, the Kami's clan would find itself outshone in many ways by the other clans, creating resentment and division. Tensions between the clans would ebb and shift in different ways once the threat of the Shadowlands became not just remote but effectively nonexistent. In this Empire, there would be no great outside danger to push the clans together, and warfare between them would become more common.

And, of course, the second Day of Thunder awaits, a thousand years in the future. Jigoku must find a new champion.

Clan Spells of the Early Empire

As the Empire began to flourish in the aftermath of the First War, the art of spellcraft was being explored in ways never before seen. Even the mighty Tribe of Isawa found that the mysteries of the Tao allowed them to unlock previously unknown depths of elemental understanding.

The following spells were developed during this time, and are rarely seen outside their clans. These spells represent some of the fundamentals of magical understanding that led the clans to the deeper secrets they would later learn.

Earthen Wave

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 3
- **Range**: Self
- **Area of Effect**: One 10` x 50` area
- **Duration**: Instantaneous
- **Raises**: Area (5 feet to either dimension per Raise)

Developed by the Kuni as a way to deal with the swarming masses of Shadowlands beasts they would frequently encounter, this spell sends a rolling shockwave through the ground, knocking the unsteady from their feet. The shugenja chooses a direction, and this force shakes the ground immediately in that direction in an area of effect based on the spell and any Raises. All creatures caught in the area of effect must make a Contested roll with their Strength against the Caster's Earth Ring or be knocked prone as if they had been hit with a Knockdown maneuver. Creatures with more than two legs gain two Free Raises on this roll.

Blessed Wind of Lady Sun

- **Ring/Mastery**: Air 2 (Ward)
- **Range**: Self
- **Area of Effect**: 10 square feet around caster
- **Duration**: Concentration
- **Raises**: Area (5 square feet).

While the Crane would go without an organized shugenja family or order until the Asahina would be founded centuries after the clan's founding, a few of Doji's followers had a talent for speaking with the kami. They focused on the arts of peace and meditation, and this spell was one of their first attempts to bring the harmony of the Elements to a samurai. While this spell is active, all rolls based on Void and Awareness gain a +1k0 bonus when made within the area of effect, and all hostile actions suffer a -1k0 penalty. Hostile actions based on Awareness (such as threatening someone with Intimidation) suffer a -2k0 penalty instead of the previous, self-negating, effects.

The caster of this spell may use the Meditation Skill without breaking the concentration required to maintain it.

Elemental Crucible

- **Ring/Mastery**: Fire 1
- **Range**: Touch
- **Duration**: Instantaneous
- **Raises**: Area (1 cubic foot)

A precursor to the secret elemental transformation spell that Agasha would devise later, this spell stripped a touched object of unwanted Elements, leaving a single Element behind. When the spell is cast, the caster declares a single Element (except Void) that he wishes to reveal. The rest of the elements are destroyed in a fashion appropriate to their type (water boils out, earth crumbles, fire dissipates, air creates a vacuum), leaving behind the desired element. The loss of certain elements may have different effects, based on the item. A lack of water means

an item might lose any pliability or movement, a lacking earth means the object becomes brittle, and so on.

The form of this remaining element is left to the GM, and the GM may rule that certain objects (such as a katana) have too many closely intertwined elements to be affected by this spell. This spell may only affect a single object of 1 cubic foot in total size, plus an additional cubic foot per Raise.

Judgment of Yomi

- **Ring/Mastery**: Water 2
- **Range**: 50'
- **Area of Effect**: One individual
- **Duration**: Concentration (Special)
- **Raises**: Range (10'), Targets (+1)

While the Lion are known for practically refusing to bring shugenja to battle in most circumstances, the first human Kitsu devised several spells to protect them in combat during the tumultuous time of the early Empire. This spell is one such way in which the Kitsu believed that the spirits of those who came before would be ready to judge and punish the unworthy. When this spell is cast, the target immediately feels the gaze of the Realm of Blessed Ancestors upon them - indeed, the Kitsu was able to bring the attention of the restful dead upon their enemies practically at will. Those who are judged unworthy find their strength sapped and themselves forced away from the caster.

If the target is human, for every Social or Spiritual Disadvantage the victim possesses, he suffers a -1k0 on all physical Skill checks. In addition, he must make an Honor check at a TN of 20 or find he cannot move any closer to the caster than the maximum range of this spell (but is not pushed back if he is already closer). There are no other penalties for failing this Honor check. The penalties of this spell last for a full Round, or for as long as the caster maintains concentration on its effects.

Balance in All

- **Ring/Mastery**: Void 2
- **Range**: Self
- **Area of Effect**: Self
- **Duration**: One Round
- **Raises**: Duration (One Round)

One of the most powerful lessons the Isawa took from the Tao of Shinsei was a deeper understanding of the connection between the various Elements. With this insight, their gifted Void shugenja were able to manipulate these connections to further their spellcasting potential before exhausting themselves. Once this spell is cast, you may cast spells of any given Element as if they were a different Element - affecting the Ring that is used to roll it, the number of spells of that Element you may cast per day, and any relevant Affinity, Deficiency, or other mechanics.

The GM should feel free to interpret how using different Elements for a spell might affect the spell in various ways - a Katana of Fire cast as an Air spell, for example, might create a blade of nearly invisible, burning wind.

Heart Betrays Eyes

- **Ring/Mastery**: Air 2
- **Range**: 50'
- **Area of Effect**: One individual
- **Duration**: Three rounds
- **Raises**: Duration (One round), Range (10')

An early attempt to use the magic of Air to gain advantage against the unwary, the Soshi family devised this spell to delay those who had stumbled upon their Clan's machinations, or to cover their tracks. Once this spell is cast, the next thing the victim sees that seems unusual or out of the ordinary instead appears completely normal to them. This does not change the victim's reaction, it simply clouds their perceptions such that they believe they are seeing something they expect to see, or at least something not unusual at all. A guard under the influence of this spell, for example, might walk through his regular patrol and see an undisturbed room rather than the ransacked mess a thief had left behind.

This spell only affects vision, so the victim is allowed an Investigation roll against a TN of the caster's Air x 5 if there are subtle clues betraying the illusion (such as stepping on a bit of spilled sake). Any major clues (such as screaming coming from the changed scene or tripping over an object covered by the illusion) ends the effect immediately.

Command

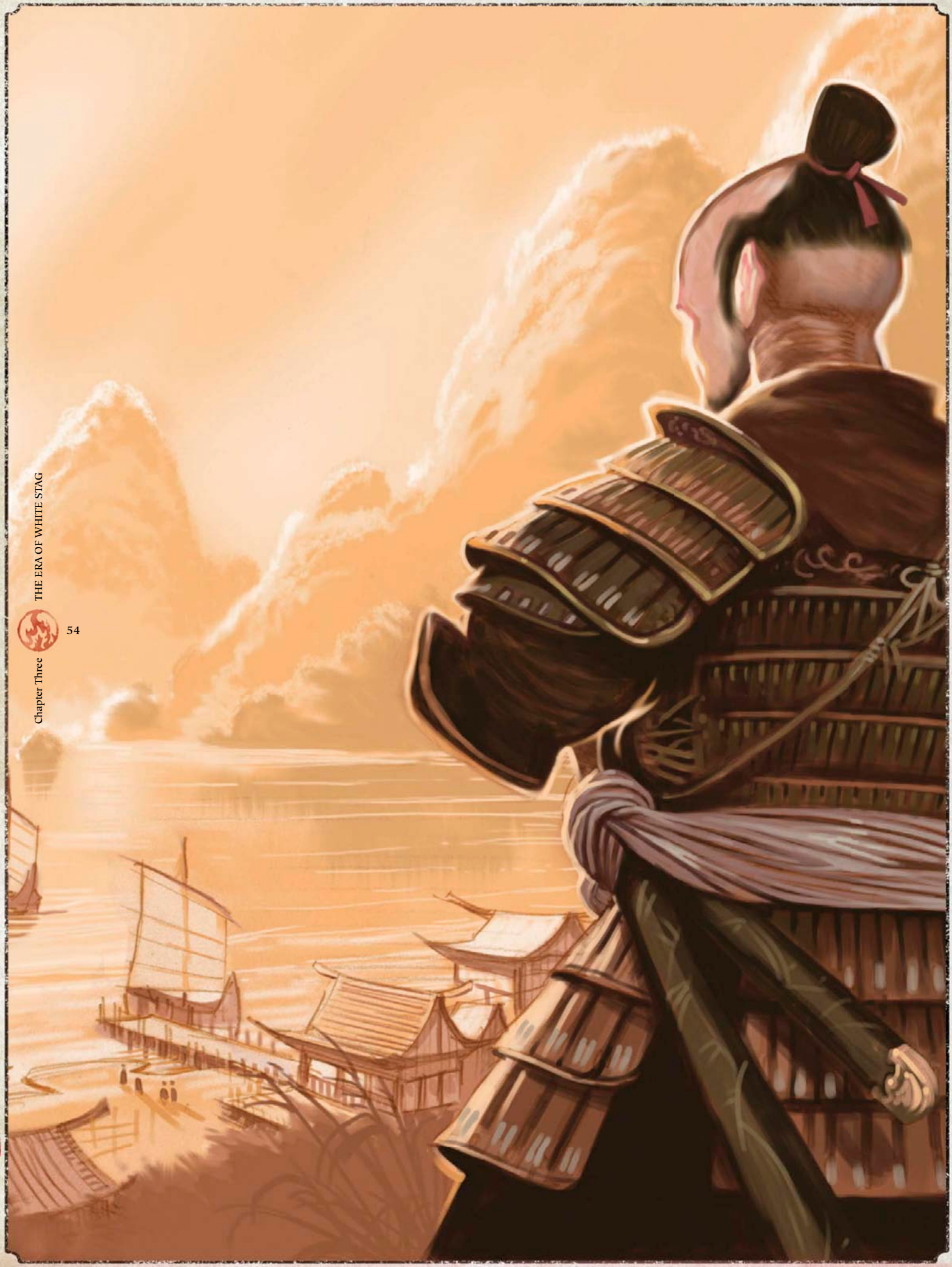
- **Ring/Mastery**: All 1
- **Range**: 30'
- **Area of Effect**: 1 cubic foot of affected material
- **Duration**: Permanent
- **Raises**: Area (+1 cubic foot), Range (+10'), Special

A controversial spell devised by Iuchi during the Ki-Rin Clan's exile, this spell eschews the traditional method of entreating and praying to the elemental spirits in favor of commanding the Elements directly. Outside of Rokugan, where the kami were quiet or altogether silent, this spell was used to great effect, but inside the Empire, it brings the wrath of the spirits down upon the unwary.

This spell can be cast in any of the four standard elements. Once this spell is cast, the caster may create a quantity of the element in question (per the Summon spell) or affect the shape of an existing quantity of that element. A stone table, for example, could be commanded to break, or change its shape so that it is round instead of square. The GM may require Raises for more complex uses of this spell (such as attempting to create a complex shape out of fire).

Using this spell within Rokugan (or anywhere that the elemental kami exist) can be dangerous, as it forces the will of the caster over the spirits rather than beseeching their aid. Every use of this spell increases all of the caster's Spellcasting rolls in the commanded element for the next 24 hours to be at +5TN.

This spell may also be used in place of Commune roll when Importuning. If this is done, the Spellcraft roll is automatically successful, but the penalty for casting spells of that Element is +10 to the TN rather than +5 (including the spell being Importuned) if in Rokugan.



The Iron Empire

Usagi Oburo lifted his bajozutsu *reverently from its resting place on the daisho stand. Nearly five decades old, it was just as pristine and deadly as the day of its forging. The lacquered handle was flush with the wooden saya, for they were carved and fitted from the same piece of stained wood. Closed, one could almost mistake it for a small sword, perhaps an odd-handled wakizashi, until Oburo drew it from the saya with a gentle click, exposing the ornate brass matchlock, the curving serpentine, the balanced trigger, and the long iron barrel adorned with snaking dragons. This weighty pistol, this* bajozutsu, *was one of the finest crafted by the hands of Kakita artisans, his family's only firearm and his most prized possession.*

That it was once a gift from the Crane was a particularly stinging irony.

Laying the pistol in his lap, Oburo reverently cleaned the weapon with practiced hands. The prayers to his ancestors hovered lightly on his lips, his eyes flicking to the matching katana and wakizashi waiting patiently on the same stand. The ancestral weapons of his fledgling clan. As he recalled the first day they were entrusted to his service, he also remembered his promise to lead the Hare into a bright future. He wondered... had he simply failed in this task, or could it have been helped at all?

A young man burst into the study. Oburo did not look up; the brash steps identified the visitor as his son. He continued cleaning the weapon, carefully scraping the inside of the iron barrels. The sculpted dragon engulfed the slender cleaning rod with a gaping maw.

"Father." The visitor knelt in a folded-over seiza, gazing up with intense eyes. With a glance, Oburo saw his son's dire expression. He maintained his On, *looking unconcerned as he continued the ritualistic cleaning.*

His son licked his lips. "The Daidoji will be testing the steam-cart today." His voice barely contained his anger.

Oburo nodded. Continued his work.

"They have begun building a more permanent residence," he continued. "It seems they will be here for some time." A pause. "They have commissioned furniture." Every word was more heated than a last. Any minute the young man's trembling On would slip.

Oburo set aside the cleaning rod and lifted the silk, calmly wiping the handle.

His son slammed the floor with an open hand. The servants in the room jumped. Oburo paused, but did not look up.

*"My sister," he hissed, "...***your daughter***... is making a table for them as we speak."*

After a silence, Oburo replied, "That was her decision."

His son glared for long moments. "So," he finally said. "That is what we are reduced to. Labor. We are samurai no more."

Oburo stopped. Slowly, he met the gaze of his son. The servants pointedly looked away as the two stared into one another's faces.

"Were it not for your grandfather's wisdom," Oburo said, "you would never have been samurai, my son."

"And this is what grandfather earned?" The young man gestured to the window, though the view outside was blocked by lacquered panels of wood. "They take our land, they reduce us to craftsmen, they undermine our purpose, and we do nothing."

"I have felt your anger myself," the older man replied. "I do not blame you, my son."

"Then why don't we fight?!" The boy sprung to his feet. His fists clenched around the archer's bracers on his forearms. "If they won't listen to our protests, why do we not make them listen?!"

Oburo turned away. His gaze rested on the daisho stand. "Let me tell you a story about your grandfather," he said. "In his days without a master, he once came upon a village that was built too close to a nearby river. One day it flooded, and all their preparations were for nothing. They begged him, the only Bugei they knew, to help them gather sandbags to stop the flooding. Instead, he evacuated as many as he could, carrying children on his shoulders and dragging protesting women away. He saved nearly everyone, but could not save the village itself. When the flood was over, the men grew angry at him. They demanded to know why he didn't stand with them in holding back the river." Oburo looked back to his son. "Do you know what your grandfather said to them?"

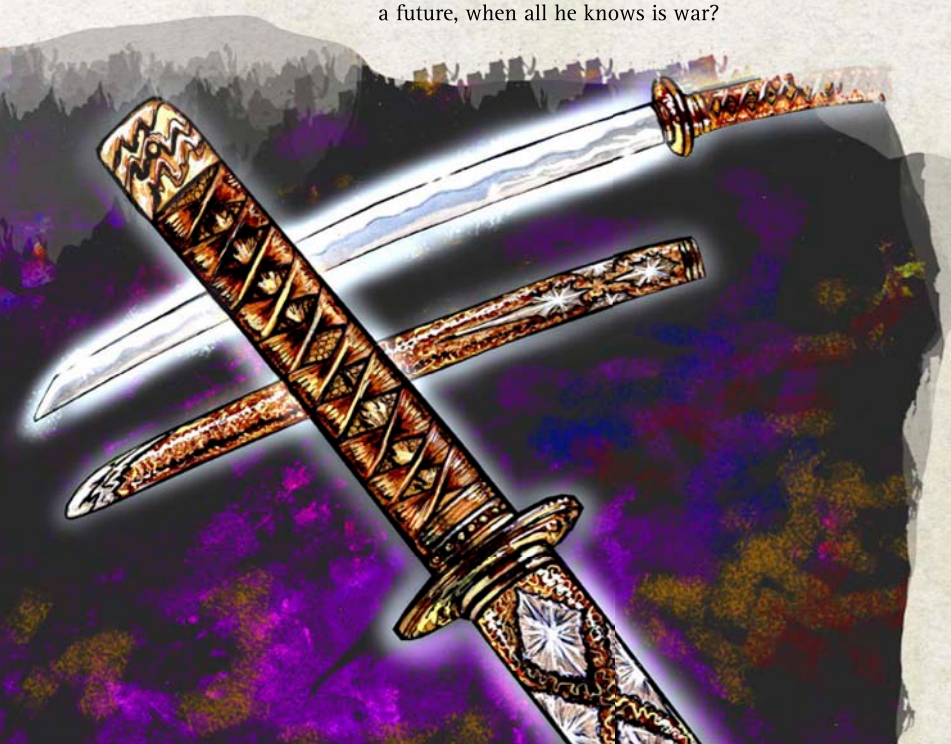
Thunder erupted suddenly from outside. The two men jerked their faces towards the window. The nearest servant wound the brass crank set into the wall, and the lacquered panes separated, exposing the outside. The clockwork behind the walls churned; the room rotated, the window-view swinging towards the Usagi farmlands, bisected crudely by a railroad under construction. The fluttering banners of the Daidoji waved above the tanned backs of toiling heimin. Raw materials piled high, mounding in the muddy waters of ruined rice paddies. The thunder bellowed again; a pillar of black smoke billowed from the oppressive iron sheath of a cast-iron cart, slowly propelling itself down the completed sections of the track.

The gathered workers cheered while white-haired samurai in blue watched, their satisfied smirks plain even from this distance. Plumes of smoke blackened the sky above the iron smokestack, shaped into the maw of a yawning dragon.

Oburo did not look at his horrified son. "You can't stop what's coming," he said. His eyes lifted past the marred landscape into a smoke screened and vanishing horizon. "In the end, you can't stop what's coming..."

It is often said the strength of a samurai can be found in three measures: the skill of his blade, the strength of his honor, and the path of his ancestors. In a land as traditional as Rokugan, these become objective forces that guide a samurai through every aspect of his life. But there is a fourth aspect that is often forgotten: the will of the samurai's lord. Ultimately, the role of the samurai is to serve, and to one day die, for his master. What happens when these things are in conflict? When the will of a samurai's lord conflicts with the path of his ancestors, which choice is the right one?

And what if the samurai's lord no longer has need for him? When the servant is cast aside, when the world has changed and he is no longer relevant, he is expected to simply fade away. What becomes of a man who is denied a future, when all he knows is war?



An Iron Empire

This chapter presents an alternate Rokugan set in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, although the elements of this setting can be used for any time period after the Battle of White Stag. It depicts a Rokugan where certain aspects of foreign cultures have been embraced, where the use of foreign technology is endorsed by the Emerald Throne and the wheels of progress have ignited an early age of proto-industry. Trade with foreign nations and exposure to new technology, combined with the ingenuity of the Great Clans, leads to advancements in metallurgy, engineering, farming, and the development of unique firearms.

But even as the Empire marches forward, the samurai do not forget the ways of their ancestors, and the distrust of gaijin permeates all responses to change and progress. As more technology is developed and incorporated into daily life, the face of the Empire begins to change. Widespread use of firearms renders the old ways of warfare obsolete, and new technologies bring the lower classes much closer to the elevated samurai class. This culminates in a new project undertaken by the Imperial families: a railroad and steam engine named the "Iron Dragon" that will unite every province by Imperial decree. In the face of these changes, many samurai begin to wonder if their traditional ways are still relevant. A cultural schism develops in the Empire between those who have embraced this new path and others who warn these new ways are not endorsed by Heaven. A charismatic

leader rises with the goal of preserving the old way of life, in a movement the *Kuge* nobility interpret as a revolt. As a wave of disenfranchised samurai and traditional monks seek to break away from the Empire to form their own nation, forces loyal to the Throne and the New Way try to end the uprising, unaware that their greatest foe comes not from the ranks of the disenfranchised *Buke*, but from among themselves...

"Iron Rokugan" is an example of how a GM can create an entirely new setting by changing very specific aspects of Rokugan's history and then taking them to the most extreme conclusion. It incorporates themes of disenfranchisement, the futility of traditionalism, the fragility of social order, and the conflicting duties of a samurai, both to the present day world and to his ancestors. These are all classic themes of samurai drama and frequent subjects of Japanese cinema, especially the films of Akira Kurosawa. This setting provides an opportunity to explore the social implications of rapid change without philosophy, the conflict between traditional beliefs and the ideal of progress, and what it means to not belong in a world you have pledged to serve.

And of course, there's always the inherent appeal of arming your samurai characters with hand-cannons and fire-lances while duking it out on a moving train.

The Timeline of Iron Rokugan

In canonical history, the clash with gaijin at the Battle of White Stag (year 442) resulted in an Imperial edict that banned all gaijin influence from the Empire, outlawed firearms, and made Rokugan an entirely isolationist nation for nearly eight centuries. However, if certain factors were mitigated by the intervention of heroic samurai, the Empire could have taken a completely different path...

The contact with gaijin and thus the foundation for this setting is chronicled in the third chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*, pages 72 to 75. This alternate history diverges from that canon in the year 442, but the main setting presented here takes place in the year 796, at a crucial point in the Iron Empire's history that could decide its future.

The Past

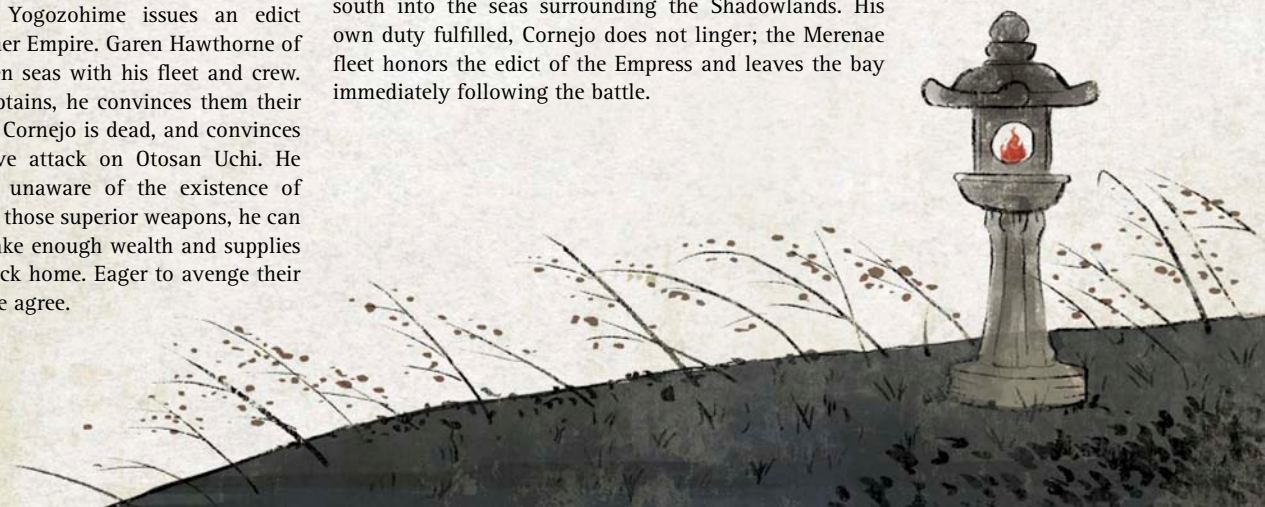
After the disastrous negotiation attempt by Miya Sasuke, Empress Hantei Yogozohime issues an edict dispelling all gaijin from her Empire. Garen Hawthorne of Thrane escapes to the open seas with his fleet and crew. Meeting with Merenae captains, he convinces them their expedition leader Teodoro Cornejo is dead, and convinces them to launch a punitive attack on Otosan Uchi. He knows the Rokugani are unaware of the existence of *polvora* (gunpowder); with those superior weapons, he can crush the Rokugani and take enough wealth and supplies to last the long voyage back home. Eager to avenge their fallen captain, the Merenae agree.



But Cornejo is not dead. When fighting breaks out in the Imperial City, Cornejo escapes, thanks to his allies in the Dragon, Crane, and Centipede. Taking refuge in the residence of Agasha Kasuga, Cornejo converses with his rescuers for three days until they collectively decide to help him escape the city. Exhausting their political favors and at great risk to themselves, the samurai manage to smuggle Cornejo from Otosan Uchi and into the hands of the Mantis, who escort him to his Merenae fleet. Cornejo promises to remember this favor. History remembers the names of the samurai who assisted Cornejo at his time of need: Agasha Kasuga, Mirumoto Tanaka, Doji Naomi, and Moshi Setsuko.

With their captain returned to them, the Merenae see Garen's treachery by its true face. When Cornejo learns of Garen's planned attack, he is horrified. Having fallen in love with the rich culture of Rokugan and its people, and remembering the honorable samurai who risked their lives and honor to save him, Cornejo resolves to thwart Garen Hawthorne.

When the Merenae ships fail to arrive, Garen decides to proceed with his attack regardless. The subsequent Battle of White Stag is at first the same as in the canonical history. The Rokugani, ignorant of gunpowder technology, are taken by complete surprise and suffer gruesome casualties. The Lion Clan Champion is killed in battle, and the Empress herself is nearly killed by cannon fire; she escapes death only due to the timely intervention of the Merenae ships, escorted by a fleet of Mantis vessels, who assault the Thrane vessels from the sea. The Rokugani are surprised yet again to see the gaijin battling each other. The samurai on land rally under the legendary general Ikoma Genmuro, who gleaned insight into the gaijin's tactics through his conversations with Garen Hawthorne at court. Through the courage of the samurai defenders, the tactical prowess of Genmuro, and the support of the Merenae fleet, Garen is utterly defeated. Escaping with only his own ship, *the Revenant*, Garen is last seen heading south into the seas surrounding the Shadowlands. His own duty fulfilled, Cornejo does not linger; the Merenae fleet honors the edict of the Empress and leaves the bay immediately following the battle.



In the battle's wake, Agasha Kasuga receives an Imperial audience. He asks for patronage over the Merenae-aligned gaijin still within the Empire, both the prisoners and those evading capture. After successfully divorcing the Merenae from the Thrane before the court, the Empress agrees, proclaiming Kasuga the leader of the Tortoise Clan and granting him the White Stag peninsula. He takes those few gaijin remaining in the Empire as his vassals, as well as his immediate family and those allies most loyal to him. Their duty is to re-establish diplomatic contact with the Merenae.

Gaijin Diplomacy

Over the following years, the Empire gradually accepts trade with the Merenae, although the foreigners are still regarded with great caution and suspicion. Gaijin are only permitted into the Empire with the explicit blessings of the Emperor and must keep documentation of this permission at all times, similarly to traveling papers. Even if Imperial sanction is given, gaijin are still treated with a superstitious and distrustful air. Rokugani tend to lump all foreigners together, and even though the Merenae ultimately came to Rokugan's aid they still view the whole battle as gaijin doing. Thus, while a samurai can generally depend on the honor of another samurai, even a gaijin of high standing must prove his character time and time again. Only a handful of gaijin are ever given explicit approval to enter the Empire, and usually they remain exclusively within the Imperial City.

Due to the tireless diplomacy of the Tortoise, a small Merenaean embassy is established in the Forbidden City. Only one Merenae representative and his immediate family are allowed residence, and although the ambassador is permitted to attend the Imperial Court, he is forbidden from speaking while it is in session. As a gaijin, he has no place in the politics of the Empire, relegated to a mute observer. Although he is a diplomat, the Merenae representative has all the clout of a mere *Buke* class samurai, and even that is only extended as a courtesy. The Merenae accept this treatment with patience and stoicism, recognizing that trade with the Empire is potentially valuable enough to endure any amount of abuse without complaint. Many Rokugani come to quietly respect the Merenae diplomats, and as the years pass more and more are willing to seek audience with them while court is not in session. A slow spread of ideas results from this contact. Traditional Rokugani reject the Merenae's philosophical notions and religious practices, but are fascinated by their material culture... and their technology.

In exchange for their patience, the Merenae are permitted to maintain their trade with the Empire, although all exports must be overseen exclusively by Rokugani by Imperial order. Demand for silks, spices, examples of Rokugani art and literature, and other exports steadily increase in their homeland, but none are quite as valued as two resources the Rokugani have in abundance: gold, and their unique folded steel. The Mantis are willing and eager to handle the Rokugani side of this trade, and as the years pass the Gusai family becomes wealthy and influential enough to rival even the Great Clans.

A New Empire

Hantei Yogozohime ruled the Empire until her eldest daughter Retsuhime comes of age in 453. Retsuhime proved every bit as honorable and lionhearted as her mother. However, exposure to the Merenae diplomats from an early age and the realities of change driven by trade predisposed her to be less traditionalist than her mother. She was the first in the line of Hantei to be open to the possibility of "progress."

To Retsuhime, progress was not about the revision or improvement of Rokugani ways. How could one improve upon mandates passed down from the Heavens? The material comforts of gaijin technology likewise were of little concern to her. Material existence, after all, is but one facet of the jewel of life, and to cling to any one facet is to invite disharmony; such is below a true samurai. In the end, there was one fact that directed the Empress towards the horizon of the East: the rest of the world had access to wonders unknown to the Empire, things they could not defend against. If they were not prepared, the Sun would one day set on the lands of her ancestors forever.

Retsuhime knew if Rokugan could not keep up with the outside world, that world would pass it by. She remembered the destruction wrought by the gunpowder weapons of the Thrane, remembered the power of their massive and advanced ships which soared through the water without so much as a single oar. When the Merenae spoke of the wonders of their homelands, she pictured an ironclad sentinel marching inexorably towards the Emerald Empire. That sentinel was time. That sentinel was the future.

It could either destroy them or make them stronger.

Thus, Hantei Retsuhime issued an Imperial Edict to the clans in her service: the Empire would create their own such advancements, so that if danger ever returned from beyond the Empire's borders they would be ready.

In this way, the traditions of the Empire were preserved while their technology progressed, divorced from meaningful impact to their ancient society. Or so it was hoped...

An Empire of Iron and Silk

By the end of the eighth century, Rokugan had fully embraced the use of firearms and enjoyed boons from many other technologies that trade and limited contact with the Merenae had encouraged. A great inventor in the early sixth century, Agasha Hisau, had used a new type of black powder created by the Agasha family to design a native-built firearm, one that did not carry the inherent blasphemous connotations of the Merenae weapons. This allowed the Great Clans to follow suit, and within a decade, the Empire had its own examples of firearms and cannon, uniquely Rokugani and unlike anything the land had ever before seen. As samurai began to master these weapons, the face of warfare changed, subtly at first, then more dramatically.

One advancement brought another. Requiring stronger metals for firearms, the Kaiu discovered new ways to refine their clan's ironworking, creating a superior hardy

metal that could be applied to many uses. To solve the problem of banditry along the rivers and canals, a new technology called a "lock" was developed that could raise or lower water levels, aiding in navigation or halting boats in their paths. This in turn led to innovations for agriculture, irrigation technology making lands fertile that had previously been fallow. From stories and images imported from the Merenae, the Rokugani adopted the use of windmills for grinding grain and many other purposes. Mantis ships adopted Merenae sailing designs and techniques, with the other clans following more slowly. The invention of the land-sailing carriage, a cart using sails to propel riders by wind, became a courtly curiosity for a time until it was ultimately abandoned in favor of more reliable transportation.

These technologies also brought new professions into being. Inventors became fully-fledged artisans, their craft endorsed by the Emperor and funded by patrons within their clans. Intellectual pursuits gained the same weight as martial ones; the prestige of inventing something new was an avenue into influence and honor, one every clan eagerly pursued. Courtiers and shugenja were encouraged to study multiple disciplines in the hopes that one would uncover a new invention or discovery. With access to better tools and technologies, astronomers began to map the paths of Amaterasu and Onnatangu in the sky and created more accurate star maps. In the seventh century, a diviner named Isawa Kuo calculated a more accurate measurement of the astronomical meridian and discovered true north, a discovery that quickly revolutionized both astronomy and sea navigation. This also led Moshi Chisawa to invent the clock tower in the same century, utilizing the first chain drive ever seen in Rokugan. By the mid-eighth century, the clockwork of Chisawa's invention was used by a former Kuni of the Brotherhood of Shinsei to invent rotating book cases and temple rooms, powered manually by a system of cranks and pulleys. Meanwhile, the Miya developed a superior method for making paper, which led to movable-type woodblock prints and eventually to banknotes, making it possible to carry large amounts of currency without carrying bulky coin. It also led to a flourishing of the arts, endorsed by the Imperial Families, since novels, pillow books, and woodblock art could be reproduced almost flawlessly in massive quantities. These advances benefited the samurai, but they also benefited the heimin, who saw a gradual increase in the quality of their lives.

In many ways, however, the Empire remained much the same. Samurai culture was carefully preserved, the lands were still governed by a feudal society, the sword was still venerated, iaijutsu still the means for resolving disputes of honor. Although there was now access to firearms, cultural conservatism meant these weapons were used like archery on the battlefield, valued only until swords were drawn; there was no embrace of volley fire or musket-and-pike tactics of the sort used by the Thrane and Merenae. And while it was less taboo to demonstrate knowledge of foreign nations in public than it had been in Empress Yogozohime's time, less embarrassing to claim ownership of some artifact, tapestry, spice, or text that came from

The Winding Path of History

Over three hundred years pass between Hantei Retsuhime's decree and the eighth century struggles of the Iron Empire. Certain historical events, such as those foretold in prophecy and astrology, are destined to occur. Others could be altered due to the existence of imported technologies and the steady spread of new ideas. The increased importance of wealth, the degradation of the samurai class, altered social norms, and the shifting political climates resulting from these changes may have stifled certain events before they ever began... or exacerbated them! Ultimately, it is up to the GM to decide what did or did not occur in the Empire's history. Here are a few suggestions:

- Year 510 - According to canonical history, this is the year in which Gusai Rioshida attempts a coup by holding the Emperor's son hostage. In this timeline the Mantis are in a much better position and far less desperate, so this event never occurs.
- Year 622 - In this year Seppun Hanako writes the Articles of Heaven, which sets many legal reforms including the regulation of torture and the treatment of prisoners. In the Iron Rokugan timeline, the abuse of Rokugani firearms during the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum results in the Articles of Heaven also including a requirement for the Great Clans to submit accurate records of all their firearms to the Imperial Treasury. It classifies "samurai firearms" as Tanegashima and forbids heimin from ever using them; a safekeeping measure to ensure the Great Clans do not equip their peasant levies with such devices.
- Year 716 – As described in Chapter Six, in this year a massive Shadowlands force attacks the Crab provinces, of a size unseen since the dawning of the Empire. Shiro Hiruma would be lost... if not for the utilization of cannon and mortars, which allow the Hiruma to defend their castle against the massive onslaught. Thus the Hiruma lands are never taken, the original Hiruma techniques are never lost, and the Kaiu Wall is never built.
- Year 760 - The Lion take offense at a Tonbo's comment in court and are permitted to defend their honor. The mobilized Lion armies arrive at Tonbo lands before any Dragon defenders. The Lion are the only army present with firearms when the battle begins; they utterly eradicate the Dragonfly before Imperial and Dragon forces can intervene. Only a handful of Tonbo survive the battle, and they are folded into the Dragon as a vassal family. It is an ominous event, warning of the tremendous power of firearms on the battlefield.

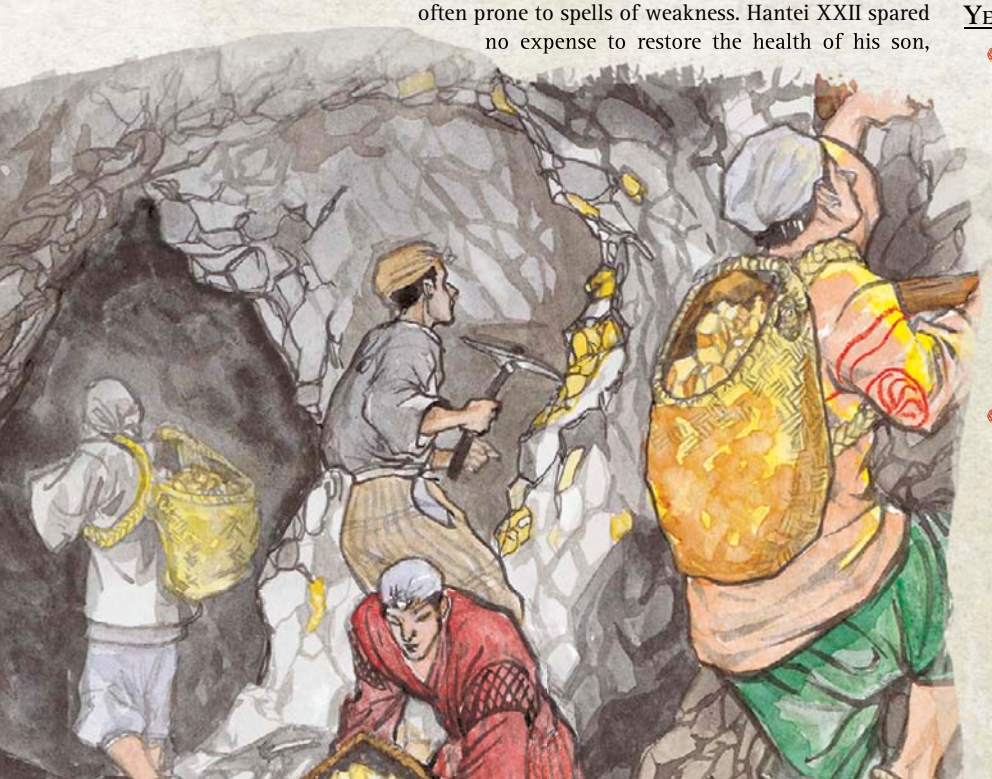
another nation, these things were still generally agreed to be inferior to that which was born within the Rokugani borders. Technological advances were not allowed greater consideration than the edicts of Heaven or the honor of samurai. Thus, despite many changes Rokugan was still essentially an isolated feudal nation ruled by a warrior class.

But beneath this appearance of stability, problems were brewing. Many of these warriors were now warriors only in name. From the dawn of the seventh century onward, the profession of the bushi was in slow decline, while the profession of the courtier was on the rise. In fact, by the end of that century courtiers and other non-bushi outnumbered warriors nearly two-to-one within the samurai caste, even in clans that were traditionally more militant. This shift was gradual, almost unperceivable save by those few with the vantage to notice. The traditional samurai found this trend disconcerting, yet could not identify an apparent cause. They could not make the connection to the subtle changes in their land brought on by the embrace of firearms, the advances in farming, the many ways in which warfare and readiness were undermined or mitigated by their modest technological steps. They could not know that, in fact, they were witnessing the slow erosion of the samurai class itself.

The Present

A turning point in the Empire's history began in the year 780 with the birth of the Emperor Hantei XXII's second child. Born as Okiko, the girl would eventually be known as Hantei Meisho. The Emperor already had a son who was four years her elder, who would one day take the name Hantei Ieyasu.

Ieyasu was a clever and philosophic soul, even as a child. As the oldest son, he was the heir to the throne, destined to be the twenty-third Emperor of Rokugan. However, there was a complication during his birth that forever compromised his health. Ieyasu was frail and ill, often prone to spells of weakness. Hantei XXII spared no expense to restore the health of his son, going so far as to import exotic teas and remedies and even assigning expert shugenja of the Isawa and Seppun to restore the boy's spirit, but nothing ever seemed to work for very long.



Eventually, a third child and second son was born, a man who would one day take the name Hantei Kano. At this time, it was tradition for the Throne to pass exclusively to male heirs. When Kano was born, many believed he was the likely heir to the throne, for Ieyasu's health grew worse by the year and many suspected he would not survive many more of the cold Rokugani winters. But after his latest near brush with death, the Merenae ambassador made a suggestion that would forever change the course of Rokugani history: he offered his estate in Merenae to the Emperor as a winter home for his son, claiming the milder climate would be better for the boy's health. To the surprise of the court, the Emperor agreed. For the first time in Rokugan's history, members of the Hantei family would live, albeit briefly, outside of the Empire.

Year 776

- After a failed attempt to find a bride in the year 743, a short marriage that produced no heirs, and decades of accumulating concubines with no results, Emperor Hantei XXII finally produces a son. There is Empire-wide celebration at the arrival of a new heir, yet this jubilation is short-lived; the child is sickly and of poor constitution, and it is predicted he will not last beyond a year.
- Somehow, the child lives through his first winter. This is taken as a sign of the blessings of Heaven. The boy, Ieyasu, is formally embraced by the Hantei and named the heir of Rokugan.

Year 780

- Another consort produces the Emperor's second child: a daughter he names Okiko.

Year 784

- A third and final child is born to the Emperor. Another son, this boy is hardy and strong. There is Empire-wide rejoicing.

Year 789

- After an especially harsh winter, the heir of Rokugan takes ill and lies close to death for many days. Shugenja from the Isawa and Seppun stand vigil over him, waiting to herald him into the next world. Okiko, faithful to her older brother, never leaves his side. But the thirteen-year-old boy's will is strong and he survives against all odds.
- The Merenae ambassador approaches the Emperor and offers his estates as second home for Hantei Ieyasu. All expect the Emperor to refuse the offer, but he agrees, to the shock of the Imperial court. Hantei Ieyasu departs for the Merenae lands, accompanied by his mother, twenty-five loyal samurai, one hundred servants, and his younger sister Hantei Okiko.



During their time abroad, the two children of the Emperor see many wonders. The marvels of the Merenae kingdom leave strong impressions, especially on little Okiko. In her innocence, she asks herself why such wonders do not exist in her own homeland.

Meanwhile, the Emperor begins to seriously consider the possibility that he might have to pass his throne to his second and less-favored son, Kano. He fosters the boy to the Scorpion so he might learn the ways of the court. That the Crane are not chosen for this task is considered a sign of that clan's weakness, and the Crane soon find themselves harassed by Lion and Scorpion enemies.

When the Imperial heir returns to Rokugan after five years in the Merenae kingdom, he arrives in a tense political climate. His health has greatly improved, and the Emperor holds the Merenae ambassador in greater esteem; trade restrictions relax during this year. Ieyasu is immediately courted by every Great Clan, and many samurai predict he will be a wise ruler. While Hantei Kano is happy that his brother is well again, he grasps enough of his Scorpion training to know how close he came to being named the Imperial Heir, and secretly resents his brother from this day forward.

Year 795

- Hantei Ieyasu is arranged to marry a Doji bride, in keeping with tradition. As a part of this arrangement, his sister is taught the ways of the court by the Doji family. They also teach her the way of the sword, which she takes to with enthusiasm.
- During the same year, Ieyasu receives a copy of the Tao as a gift from the Asako family. Fascinated by the text, which he has never read before, he soon requests further instruction on the lessons of Shinsei.

Year 796

- The first signs of illness return to Ieyasu. He keeps this a secret from all others, even his sister. Seeking understanding and balance, he calls upon an honored Togashi retainer to teach him proper meditation. Before the end of the year, Ieyasu's interest in philosophy has lead him to begin deep study into the Tao and other related texts. His people begin calling him "The Awakening Prince."

Year 797

- The Emperor suffers a fluke riding accident that costs him his life. At the time, Ieyasu is away from the Imperial Capital, visiting temples of the Brotherhood and other Shinseist shines. When word reaches him of his father's fate, he makes haste to Otosan Uchi.
- Instead of accepting the throne, Ieyasu surprises the court by immediately abdicating his rule. He reveals his illness is returning and announces his intention to live his last days in an aesthetic lifestyle, studying the Tao and seeking inner peace. But then, in a move that shocks the court, he appoints his sister as his heir.

When Hantei Ieyasu makes his announcement, his sister is visiting Kyuden Doji, completely unaware of the events in the capital. Famously, she is informed of her father's fate and her brother's decision in the midst of one of her lessons. It is said that even though her eyes shone with the tumultuous storm of emotions brewing in her heart, her face did not flinch in the slightest. Her sensei praised her *On* and announced training was complete.

Upon returning to the capital, Okiko undergoes her gempukku. Combining the kanji from the names of her mother and her father's mother; she takes the name Hantei Meisho, the Twenty-Third ruler of Rokugan. Among her first acts is to grant her older brother his wish for a religious pilgrimage and retirement. She also grants her mother a resting place in the Imperial tombs, a position she would otherwise not be afforded as a mere concubine.

Year 799

- The Emerald Champion reaches retirement and is relieved of his station. During the following Test of the Emerald Champion, a Seppun named Tadaka wins. A young man, he is celebrated as a prodigy by his family. The Empress seems to take an interest in her new champion, and the two foster an open friendship during the Winter Court of the same year.



Year 800

- The youngest scion of Hantei XXII passes his gempukku, taking the name Hantei Kano. His sister, the Empress, bestows him with the title of Imperial Advisor during the next winter court. She also decrees he be allowed to retain the Hantei name instead of swearing fealty to the Otomo. These decisions are meant to appease those clans who had prepared for the younger brother to obtain the throne.

Year 801

- Empress Meisho is troubled by the state of her Empire. In spite of so many advancements, there is still much suffering. Thinking back to her childhood, she recalls the marvels she saw in the Merenae lands, and she begins to foster a new vision for Rokugan. During an important court, she unveils her plan for the Empire: a new roadway, with a self-propelled vehicle utilizing a new device called a "Steam Engine." The Golden Road and its Iron Dragon will connect every province in the Empire, with Otosan Uchi as the hub.

The idea for a railroad to connect all of Rokugan's provinces was unheard of in the Empire, but it existed elsewhere. The Merenae had developed a steam engine and plans to build locomotives, and during her childhood Meisho had seen artist renditions of the proposed railroad and train. As Empress, she believed this improvement would allow for the fast transport and distribution of goods, which could alleviate considerable suffering in her populace. She also believed it would end the squabbles between the clans and bring the Empire together. In truth, not many saw the practicality of the project (indeed, most of her advisors did not really comprehend what she was proposing), but since she was the Empress, none spoke their doubts.

Her brother Kano was not nearly as idealistic as she was. He knew the infighting of the Empire was what kept the samurai strong during these times of peace. To try and end that was folly. As the months passed and the Empress' plans began to take shape, he looked upon the project with growing disdain. He began to feel he could make better use of the Empire's resources, and from that point, it was only a small jump to conclude that he would make a better Emperor.

Year 802

- During the Imperial Winter Court, Meisho has a few handpicked artisans demonstrate the concept of the Golden Road, using materials and tools imported from overseas. She issues a command for the Great Clans to make her ideas reality. She already has the backing of the Merenae, who, while doubting such a thing could ever come to fruition in Rokugan, nonetheless see it as a lucrative opportunity. Most samurai do not see the point, but the younger courtiers are as captivated as their Empress. The clans begin to lobby for the honor of backing the project. By the end of the winter, virtually every Great Clan is involved in the project in some way.

Year 803

- Spurred by a woodblock print that makes it easy to produce copies of the Tao, the Brotherhood begins to teach certain heimin to read the noble script. This begins a spread of literacy to the common people. The samurai do not learn of this change for some time.

Year 804

- The first rail is laid down for what will eventually be the Golden Road. Multiple clans have dutifully taken up the financial burden of constructing the railroads and building the Iron Dragons. This project, and which aspects are controlled by whom, becomes the center of political maneuvering and scheming for the entirety of its duration. Leadership over specific roles changes hands frequently as the Great Clans vie to become the masters of the slowly-expanding railways.

Year 805

- A monk of the Brotherhood delivers Hantei Ieyasu to the court. The Awakening Prince is deathly ill, but at peace. He dies within the Imperial Palace soon after, with the Empress by his side. An entire week of mourning is observed throughout the Empire, and a thousand floating lanterns are released into the bay to guide his spirit to the worlds beyond. Empress Meisho dons her white obi for six months following her brother's death.

Year 806

- Progress on the Golden Road slows to a virtual standstill as the clans continue to struggle over who will control what parts of the railways. Conflicts with existing laws, designed for roads rather than for railways, exacerbate the problems. A struggle between the Scorpion and the Crane over who owns a Crane-backed railway constructed on Scorpion lands escalates into a skirmish that lasts for days before Imperial forces can restore order. Several duels of honor follow the incident. This is merely the harshest of the many conflicts over the railways. The Imperial families attempt to smooth over the incident, but many begin to grow weary of the project.

Year 807

- Thus far the Empire has had no success at developing a steam engine capable of meeting the Empress' vision, but now the Kaiu suddenly have a breakthrough. At the Winter Court they demonstrate a new kind of steam engine, developed in cooperation with the Asako family, that is finally able to provide the power to move a massive cast-iron clockwork engine along the railway. It is hailed as a success and production of a prototype Iron Dragon begins immediately. The Emperor's Blessing is awarded to the Kaiu in recognition of their accomplishment.
- The Merenae ambassador quietly reports the Rokugani advancement to his homeland; the rulers of his kingdom, shocked that the Rokugani invention works so well, command their own inventors to study Rokugan's advancements.

Year 808

- Seeking to cut off the Crane influence over the railways in their lands, the Scorpion use black-curtain deals and political maneuvering to divert the direction of the Crane-backed rails into the plains south of Ryoko Owari. The Crane suddenly find themselves backing a railway going into the remote lands of the Hare Clan, and are too deeply invested to back out. Intent on lessening the Scorpion's unexpected victory, the Crane elect to take the cheapest path for the new rails, which brings the line uncomfortably close to the Usagi farmlands. The Usagi family is not consulted for this decision.
- When work on the new tracks begins, the Usagi make numerous protests to the Crane, the Scorpion, and finally the Imperial families, but their words fall on deaf ears. By the end of the winter of 808, the Usagi daimyo feels he has no choice; the survival of his clan depends on stopping the construction.

Year 809: The Usagi Rail Incident

The Usagi Incident grew almost by chance out of the rivalries between the Crane and Scorpion; Scorpion political machinations led to a Daidoji-backed railroad project being diverted through the lands of the fledgling Hare Clan. Frustrated by this unexpected event, the Daidoji opted to build the track along a path that would minimize the impact of the diversion and shift the connection to a better position for the Crane. As a result, the rails were laid alongside the Usagi farmlands, and the Daidoji saw no need to consult the Hare Clan before commencing construction – after all, they had the implicit blessing of the Imperial Throne to construct the railway, and all the land ultimately belonged to the Empress.

Needless to say, this was not well-received by the Hare. The Usagi lobbied for months with the Daidoji daimyo and eventually the Crane Champion, but as buke they were mostly ignored by the kuge of the Crane. The Usagi tried to involve the Scorpion, but the results were the same; the Scorpion did not wish to risk undoing their victory by assisting the Usagi. At last the Usagi daimyo, Usagi Oburo, lobbied for the Empress' intervention, but he was never even granted an audience. Powerful courtiers with interests in the railway blocked his attempts, and so the Empress remained unaware of what was unfolding in Hare lands.

Oburo feared the worst. He was present during the demonstration of the Kaiu's new steam engine. The sound alone would shake the walls of Shiro Usagi, frighten game, and banish fish from the nearby rivers. He feared the smoke would blacken his farmlands. The path of the rails would surely impact the yield of the crops, and the already-poor Usagi could not afford to move their rice paddies to less-fertile fields. Finally, because the Scorpion and Crane land disputes over the railways had not been resolved, he feared there would be similar disputes within their own lands, disputes he would have no political leverage to argue. The Hare had no trust for the Daidoji; when Bloodspeakers had attacked the Hare in the year 750, their pleas to the Daidoji had gone unanswered. The samurai of the Usagi grew alarmed as the railway continued to advance under fluttering Daidoji banners.

Usagi Oburo meditated in his father's shrine for three days. When the third day was done, he decided he had little choice but to take matters into his own hands.

From that point on, strange occurrences plagued the railway construction. Segments fell apart long after their completion. Metal arrived rusted and useless. Engineers suffered accidents or perished under mysterious circumstances. Soon all construction ground to a halt.

The Daidoji suspected, of course, that the Usagi were sabotaging their work. They required no evidence; the truth was plain in the glaring eyes of every Hare samurai. And so the Daidoji did as honor demanded... they fought back. A silent war began in Hare lands, unacknowledged by either side and unmentioned in public. Samurai lived peacefully in the daylight and died in midnight skirmishes. To the unknowing eye, all was quiet (if tense) in Hare lands, a reality constructed over an undercurrent of bloodshed.

During the spring of the year 809, the commander in charge of the Daidoji efforts, Daidoji Nakuro, approached the Usagi daimyo and offered to purchase the lands where the rails were built. Oburo took insult and sent him away. That evening, a group of Usagi samurai made an attempt on Nakuro's life, but were foiled by his yojimbo. During the skirmish, a section of the tracks caught fire. Imperial cartographers saw the resulting smoke-plumes from Ryoko Owari, and this finally brought the problems to Imperial attention. The Emerald Champion investigated, bringing with him a single squadron of *ashigaru*.

The Daidoji testified they were attacked by Usagi samurai without provocation. From their standpoint this was perfectly sincere, since the Usagi were always the aggressors. The Usagi could not reveal the full circumstances surrounding their actions without losing face, and so the Emerald Champion ruled in favor of the Crane. Oburo was ordered to pay reparations to the Crane and allow the construction to continue.

Oburo's son, a brash young man just past his gempukku, declared the decision of the Emerald Champion to be a slight on his family's honor. He led the Hare samurai in an open attack on the rails, intending to drive all non-Usagi from their lands once and for all. The Emerald Champion made a snap decision and ordered his *ashigaru*, equipped with muskets, to defend the rails. What followed was a massacre of the attacking Hare forces. With their superior weapons the single squadron of *ashigaru* wiped out virtually every attacker, reducing the Hare Clan's standing forces by half in less than an hour of fighting. For the already tiny Hare Clan, it was enough to leave their entire future uncertain.

Staggered by these events, Seppun Tadaka pardoned Oburo for his son's brash actions. There was no more fighting after that day. And the battle left a lasting impression on the Emerald Champion. If a single squadron of *kakiyari*-armed *ashigaru* could defeat an equal number of samurai, of what relevance were samurai? Seppun Tadaka began to worry for his people's future, for the future of the entire Empire.

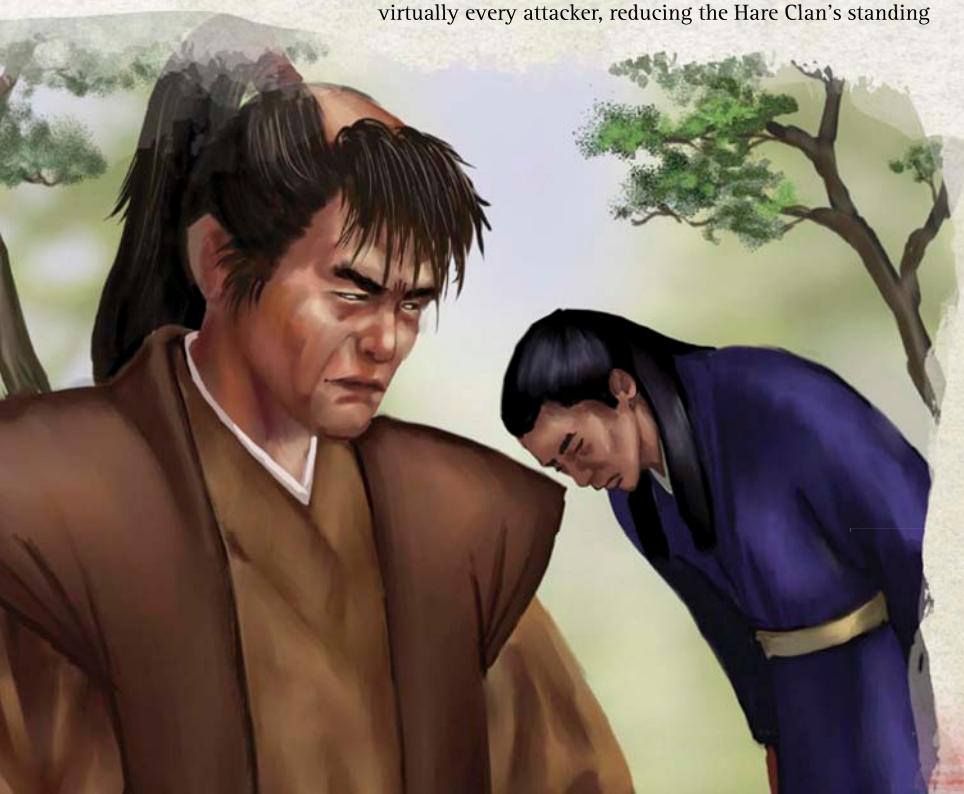
- The spread of literacy among the heimin becomes known to the samurai caste. The leadership of the Great Clans frowns on this, but none are willing to openly oppose the Brotherhood for fear of Heavenly retribution. Some lobby the Empress to intervene, and the Imperial Advisor supports this, but Hantei Meisho refuses to do so.

Year 810

- Due to the lack of progress on her Golden Road, the Empress meets with her advisors to determine the cause, and learns about the political disputes taking place over the railways. Intent on ending this infighting, and spurred by the lack of cooperation from the land-holders who are hosting the railways, the Empress declares an end to the practice of feudal succession, adopting the practice of court-ordered appointments instead. This effectively requires all ancestral lands to be returned to the control of the Empress, to be bestowed as she sees fit. She appoints her closest advisors to the task of re-distributing the lands, suggesting they be earned by virtue, not by bloodright.
- Only those samurai supporting the construction of railroads are appointed the new lords of these specific provinces. To appease the lords who backed the construction of specific railroad segments, the edict grants ownership of the lands surrounding those segments to their financial backers, in spite of whichever clan the lands originally belonged to.

This edict results in mass resentment from samurai families throughout the lands, who see it as a complete violation of their ancestors' traditions. Initially, however, few dare to openly speak against the Empress, for as samurai their place is to serve. As a result of the edict, the families of the Great Clans change drastically. Disputes erupt within each clan as attempts are made (and in some cases resisted) to maintain control over their own lands. Cartographers are ejected from offended samurai's lands, often by force, mistaken for Imperial representatives come to seize property. This edict is the final straw for many of the most traditional members of the samurai class, who begin to see their positions as irrelevant in the face of the modern Empire. Many daimyo commit *kanshi* in protest of the changes, and many of their loyal samurai follow suit.

- Late in the year, the redistribution of lands spurs an armed uprising in the provinces of several minor Scorpion lords. The Scorpion Champion attempts to quell the uprising, resulting in a civil war. His rebellious vassals arm their heimin with





tanegashima, an act forbidden by Imperial law, and thus manage to hold off his forces. Shamed, the Scorpion Champion calls for Imperial aid. It is a tense winter in Scorpion lands.

Year 811

- The Emerald Champion arrives in Scorpion lands at the head of a large force of Imperial Legionnaires. Seppun Tadaka's superior tactics manage to defeat the usurpers, but not without great casualties. Tadaka seizes the occupied provinces by force, placing them into Imperial hands. The Scorpion Clan Champion meets with Tadaka and, shocking those present, defends his rebellious vassals, proclaims that the way of the samurai is no longer relevant in this new Empire, and commits *kanshi*. Seppun Tadaka, shaken to his core, returns to Otosan Uchi to report the concerns of the samurai class to his Empress.
- Shortly before the winter, the Emerald Champion appears before the Empress and gives a voice to the grievances of the disenfranchised samurai. He believes their friendship means he is the only one who can reason with her and sway her course. But instead Meisho sees his actions as a betrayal; she hardens her heart and banishes him from the court. He requests *seppuku*, and she grants him permission.
- That evening, a group of disenfranchised samurai appear before Tadaka and convince him to stay his hand. They take him north, vanishing into Dragon lands. It is the beginning of the Restoration movement in Rokugan.

By fleeing his *seppuku*, Tadaka disgraces himself in the eyes of the Imperial court. Hantei Meisho declares him a ronin and calls for his head. However, Tadaka has earned the respect of the disenfranchised samurai class for sacrificing his honor to give them a voice. He finds no opposition as he makes his way north, and indeed he gathers a small following from virtually every samurai family in the land.

Year 812

- Seppun Tadaka stumbles upon the High House of Light in the lands of the Dragon. He and his followers are welcomed by the Dragon Clan Champion, Togashi Nakakuro. Nakakuro speaks with Tadaka for many hours in the ancient chambers of the daimyo's quarters. Their conversation is not recorded, but others claim that when Tadaka emerges he has a new light of certainty in his eyes. He announces to his followers that they will found their own city, carving out their future in the lands beyond the Empire. In this place they will preserve and continue the ways of the samurai while the corrupted Empire takes its own course. Tadaka offers his followers the choice of returning to the Empire, but none step away. They pass through the Great Wall of the North and vanish from the eyes of Rokugani.
- In the mountains frequented by the Yobanjin tribes, Tadaka founds the City of Two Rivers. There The Restorationists settle, intent on remaining apart from the Empire and preserving the way of Bushido for as long as they can. They collectively agree to cast aside the technology of firearms as well as any other advancements that cause upheaval in their lives. Having accomplished more than he ever expected in his life so far, Tadaka sets aside his swords and retires to a life of thoughtful contemplation. However, one among the Restorationists has her own agenda: an ally of Hantei Kuro named Shosuro Takawe. Takawe leaves the city and returns to the Empire to share what she has seen with her true master. Kano's patience and planning are about to pay off...

Year 813

- The railroad nears completion. The working prototype of the Iron Dragon is finished in the spring of this year. By now, *bugei* represent only a fourth of the *buke*, a mere fraction of the samurai class. The rest are courtiers, artisans, shugenja, and other non-warrior professions.
- Restorationist shugenja of the City of Two Rivers divine portents in the heavens; a constellation has dimmed, and certain bodies are vanishing from the skies. They take these as evidence that Heaven does not approve of the path the Empire is taking. They also observe a new star in the sky and wonder if the Heavens have taken notice of their little city. A debate ensues as to whether or not someone should return to the Empire to warn the Empress of this portent.
- The Imperial Winter Court is held in Kyuden Bayushi. In the midst of the court a message arrives for Empress Meisho, a message seemingly written by Seppun Tadaka. It announces the existence of the City of Twin Rivers and pleads with the Empress to allow the way of the samurai to be preserved there, apart from the Empire. The Empress does not respond well; she declares the "City of Traitors" must be abolished. Her new Emerald Champion, Doji

Ryobu, is eager to prove himself and gain favor for his clan, and he readies the Imperial Legions (now mostly ashigaru with few samurai, and all equipped with firearms and siege cannons).

Year 814

- As the snows thaw, the Empress – acting against the advice of her retainers – announces she will preserve the honor of the Hantei herself, accompanying the army into the mountains. She proclaims her intentions to kill Tadaka with her own sword.
- Unknown to the Empress and her loyal followers, the letter from Tadaka was actually a forgery, written by her brother Kano. He has spent the last decade maneuvering the two sides into conflict, fanning the fires of disenfranchisement in the populace, and infiltrating the Empress' guard with samurai loyal to him. Now Kano prepares to enact the final phase of his plan: the Empress will be conveniently slain during the fighting, while Tadaka (who Kano sees as his greatest pawn) will be killed by overwhelming forces. Meisho's death without an heir will allow Kano to claim his birthright and become the twenty-fourth Emperor of Rokugan.
- As the Imperial Legions prepare for conflict against the unsuspecting Restorationists, the sun rises on an uncertain future for the Empire. Tragedy will befall all sides if there is no one to stop the machinations of Hantei Kano.

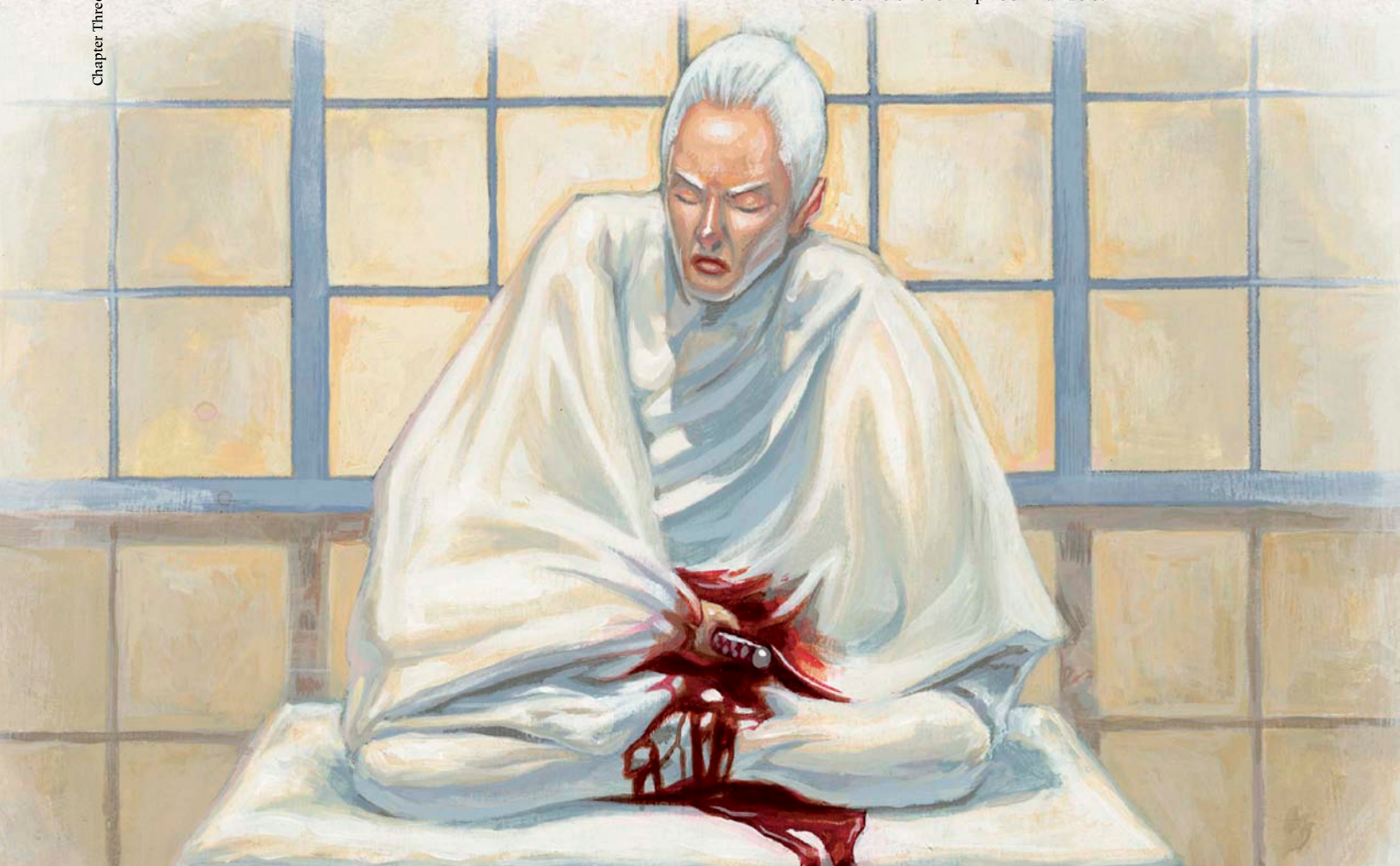
The Future

What lies in the future of an Empire driven out of balance? If the Restorationists are correct, the blessings of the Heavens will be withdrawn, and only the traditional samurai who honors the past will find the guidance of the Fortunes. But even if this is the truth, what happens if the Restorationists succeed in establishing their own nation? The challenges facing such a group would be daunting, especially for PCs; the fate of an entire generation would rest on their shoulders!

And what of the Empire? If no one intervenes, Kano's gamble might pay off. Thus far, the traditionalist attitude of the Imperial Court has preserved Rokugani culture, even in the face of an eroding warrior class and advancing technology. With a radical like Kano seated in the Emerald Throne, such cautions will be tossed to the wind.

The march of time cannot be stopped. The Unicorn will return in 815; what happens when they approach Crab defenses outfitted with cannons and other such weaponry? When the Clan Wars arrive in the wake of the Scorpion Clan Coup, how will the advances of the Iron Empire impact the fighting? Can the Empire even survive a civil war where black-powder weaponry has come to the forefront?

And one must not forget... the second Day of Thunder is still looming on the horizon. Unknown to all within the Empire, the Thousand Years of Peace will eventually come to a close. What is the face of the Empire that Fu Leng returns to? With an erosion of the samurai class, what will become of the Empire's Thunders?



In the end, all of this is all for the GM to determine and the players to decide. Even in the ever-fraying strands of history, one constant remains true: Rokugan will live or die on the virtue of its heroes, and honor will always be a force more powerful than steel.

The State of the Clans

The Crab Clan

The Crab are one of the Great Clans that benefits the most from the study and reinvention of gaijin technology. The Kaiu are especially quick to adopt cannons, and all the clan's border fortifications are outfitted with these weapons to help drive off Shadowlands incursions. Numerous other forms of progress, such as woodblock printing, make communication across the vast and often-hostile Crab lands much easier, allowing Crab samurai to concentrate on more pressing matters. While it is perhaps too much to say the Crab embrace progress, they seem to enjoy it well enough.

In truth, the Crab also enjoy a newfound political influence in this new age. Engineers like the Kaiu are much in demand, and as one of the few clans with lands rich in iron mines, the Crab receive constant petitions for iron from the other clans. Only the Crab can supply the massive amounts of raw iron required for the Empress' railway project, and in exchange for meeting this need they are granted a great deal of autonomy. In fact, the Imperial families themselves begin to hold the Crab in higher esteem, lending the words of Crab ambassadors much greater weight than in years past. This is something the Crab could easily take advantage of to wrench political control from the other clans... if they themselves were aware of it. Fortunately for the Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix, they are not. Indeed, even as the Crab accept the practical value of each technological advancement as it comes, they still remain apart from Rokugani politics and from events in the Empire at large. As the conflicts around the railway grow, the Crab remain disengaged, ignoring what they see as the Empire's petty squabbles. Their purpose is to stand watch against the Shadowlands, and the waves of unrest crossing the Empire do little to change that. They participate in these events only to the degree they are absolutely required, always prioritizing their own duties. They do cooperate with Imperial officials preparing to lay tracks, but because of the nature of their lands most of the Crab provinces are given the lowest priority. Most within the Crab Clan see the construction of the Golden Road as something coming eventually, as opposed to something already there.

When the Imperial decree ending feudal succession reaches Crab lands, the Crab response is simply to ignore it. The Imperial City is far away from Crab provinces, after all, and the Crab have always cooperated with the Imperials before. With all the troubles popping up in other provinces, the Crab expect they will be overlooked, and this is not far from the truth. By adhering to the principle of *Mokusatsu*, they avoid the most severe shifts caused by the Empress' decree. The Crab as a whole become a mostly neutral force in the greater Empire. Individual Crab samurai may lean one way or the other, but a Crab who becomes involved in the political climate is likely to give long consideration to how his actions might impact his own clan before taking a stand. Thus, there are fewer Crab among the Restorationists than from any other Great Clan.

The Crane Clan

The changing times put Crane politics to the ultimate test, for the Crane are slow to adapt to the new age that is washing over Rokugan. Once the most influential of the clans, steadfast allies of the Imperial families, the Crane now find themselves conflicted over the recent events in the Empire, forced many times to prove their worth. As the stewards of Rokugan's culture, the Crane are a living reminder of Rokugan's past even as they try to master the new ways of an Empire that embraces technological change. While they have some successes over the years (maintaining iaijutsu as the primary means of resolving disputes, for example, as well as preserving the arts free of gaijin influences and maintaining close ties with the Imperial family), they have felt their influence wane in all those areas where progress and practicality are valued. Indeed, so thin is the Crane influence in this time that they are utterly unwilling to yield any inch of what they still have. Not even to the Hare clan during the Usagi Rail incident, nor to their longtime allies in other clans.

One might expect a decline in the influence of the Kakita family as a result of the emerging predominance of firearms among samurai, but in fact this is not the case. The Empire still has need for artisans, after all, and *bajozutsu* crafted by Kakita artisans are prized possessions. Iaijutsu remains the primary method for testing a samurai's technique and resolving disputes of honor, and thus the family founder's teachings are still relevant. When confronted by the arrival of firearms, the Kakita throw themselves into mastering the new weapon's art, incorporating the family's philosophy of "one strike" into their *bajozutsu* practices. While study of the sword is still proclaimed the most important warrior art for a samurai to learn, the Kakita Dueling Academy does introduce techniques for utilizing the *bajozutsu*. Incorporating their



iaijutsu techniques, they developed methods for drawing the weapons as quickly as possible while retaining accurate aim. Some of the finest marksmen the Empire ever produces are students of the Kakita dojo.

But despite these accomplishments, as the influence of tradition wanes, so too does the influence of those who safeguard tradition. A quiet schism forms within the Crane families, between the old and new generations. The old generations look upon the new and shake their heads, worried for the lost glory of their clan. The new look upon the old and see relics of a departed world. It is a struggle the leadership of the Crane labors to contain throughout the most recent decades.

When the Imperial families call on the clans to aid in the funding for the Golden Road, the Crane are the first to answer them, seeing this as a chance to rebuild their waning influence. Even with new advances in farming, the Crane still possess the most productive lands in Rokugan, making them one of the richest clans and in prime position to answer the Empress' call. The Daidoji, who understand commerce and trade, are nearly alone among the Crane in understanding the value of owning railway tracks outside their own lands, and they deliberately finance tracks being laid in the lands of other clans. Over the ensuing years the Crane become the primary financial backers of the Golden Road. To their mind this gives them the final say in all decisions regarding its construction, second only to the Empress herself, and this viewpoint brings them into frequent conflict with other factions as they dispute and lobby against the decisions of engineers, architects, and the other railway backers. Meanwhile, of course, they are careful to maintain control over the railroad construction in their own lands, choosing sites to leave the serene palaces of the Doji, Kakita, and Asahina undisturbed.

Ironically, the Empress' edict ending feudal succession is considered a victory for the Crane. The foresight of the Daidoji proves invaluable, since the family now owns large tracts of land in the provinces of other clans simply by virtue of having backed the railroads there. Yet even in spite of this victory, the Crane are not untouched; the Crane Champion is appalled by the edict, which threatens to strip his inherited title. Being forced to defend his own right to rule his clan is an insult to his honor, and it requires every fiber of self-discipline not to publicly protest this decision. There is mass disenchantment throughout the ranks of the Kakita and Doji, who believe the edict is proof their way of life is in jeopardy. Inevitably, large numbers of these Crane join with the Restorationist movement... which creates a particular and acute problem for Doji Ryobu, the Emerald Champion, when he assembles the Imperial Legions to attack the City of Two Rivers.

The Dragon Clan

As the world changes outside their mountains, the Dragon Clan remain as they always have been: quiet, observant, and mysterious. Although there are Dragon ambassadors and representatives in every major court throughout the land, the Dragon are generally an uncommon sight in the Empire as a whole. The other clans believe the Dragon to be the smallest and least influential clan in the Empire, but in truth, they are hiding their numbers and, as so often, biding their time.

The clan is led by Togashi Nakakuro, a man known to the Empire only by name. Of course, Nakakuro is actually Togashi himself, the founder of the clan. Togashi has watched the change overtaking Rokugan from the High House of Light, but so far he has chosen not to intervene. He still prepares for the second Day of Thunder, and if something threatens the Hantei line before the time is right, he will act. Otherwise he has little concern for what is happening.

Despite their isolation, the Dragon do not remain uninfluenced by the change and technological progress spreading across Rokugan. The Ise Zumi develop the skill of disarming foes equipped with firearms, as well as techniques for making themselves into more difficult targets. The Agasha, already expert alchemists and possessing a keen understanding of the Elements, find new purpose in the creation and development of black powder and firearms – in fact, it is the Agasha family that first developed a new form of gunpowder which the Emperor declares to be not blasphemous, unlike that used by the Thrane invaders. Spurred by this progress, the Agasha embrace a new role as the Dragon Clan's pre-eminent blacksmiths, creating sacred weapons and whispering prayers to the kami as they outfit the clan's samurai. They view this not merely as a craft but as a sacred act meant to appease the kami of Fire and Earth.

The Mirumoto, practical as always, embrace the development of firearms more than any other Dragon family. After the invention of the *bajozutsu*, daimyo Mirumoto Tanaka develops a way of fighting with a katana and a firearm, using the *bazozutsu* in place of the wakizashi to fire on enemies at range and then deflect blows with the thick gun-barrel. Of course, this merely confirms to the rest of the Empire that the adaptable art of *Niten* is truly "the Coward's Way," the same judgment imposed on it since the days of Mirumoto himself.

The Dragon finally become somewhat involved in the larger affairs of the Empire when the disgraced Emerald Champion Seppun Tadaka makes his way into Dragon lands with a gathering of loyal followers, the nascent

Restorationists. Togashi opens the path to the High House of Light, eventually meeting with Tadaka in person. It can be construed it was Togashi's guidance that led Tadaka to leave the Empire, founding a place outside the borders where the traditions of samurai families and the Code of Bushido can continue without the influence of technology or gaijin ways. Why Togashi would do this is a matter for some debate. He has allowed an insult to the Imperial court to stand, which would seem to weaken the Hantei dynasty. But perhaps he is acting with a greater goal in mind. It is possible he knew retribution would come for the traitor Tadaka, and was merely intervening so justice could catch up with him. Or perhaps he had a different reason entirely. Tadaka, after all, had followers from every clan. Maybe Togashi was creating a place where the reincarnated Thunders could one day be reborn...

The Lion Clan

For a clan as staunchly traditional as the Lion, the advancements after the era of White Stag are deeply troubling and conflicting. The Lion originally opposed any extended contact with nations beyond Rokugan's borders, but with the endorsement of the Emperor all protest ended.

The Lion armies are among the first to fully realize the potential of firearms. While samurai are always considered superior warriors and ideal soldiers, the Akodo knew from the start that a unit of heimin outfitted with kakiyari could be trained quickly and cheaply, and such a unit could outmatch traditional infantry. As *tenegashima* became more common, the Lion were in the best position to take advantage. They adapted their tactics to utilize every aspect of the new weapons and to counter the weapons of opposing forces. But even as each military advancements was weighed, studied, incorporated, and ultimately embraced into the Lion's collective mastery of warfare, the implications of these changes were met with equal measures of wariness and disdain. The other clans often muse that the Lion always offer the greatest opposition to each technological advancement from which they benefit. Indeed, the Lion have become the most powerful army in the Empire, yet they do not look to the future with any optimism. It is as if they can see something on the horizon the other clans cannot.

Of course, military technology is not the only advancement that aids the Lion. Agricultural advances make their provinces more prosperous, with greater yields greater and more abundant croplands. An army marches on its belly, and with more efficient farming techniques the Lion can field larger armies with fewer restrictions. Similarly, woodblock printing proves a boon for sensei who wish to pass down their wisdom to their students. To all appearances the Lion find themselves in better conditions than ever before. Yet even as their bodies and minds flourish, the Lion feel as though they have forsaken the soul of their clan. They are the first to recognize the erosion of the samurai identity, and as the years pass they feel their way of life is becoming less and less relevant. The samurai of the Lion remain faithful to the Imperial Throne, believing the ways of the warrior will never be completely forsaken even in the light of so many changes. But the Akodo know the samurai's place on the battlefield is not quite what it was before, and the Matsu and Ikoma see the decline of the warrior's social predominance as a dark sign indeed.

Even more than the other families, however, it is the Kitsu who are truly alarmed by the path the Empire has taken. Fewer and fewer of the Lion's ancestors visit of their own accord, and in the most recent decades the ghostly song echoing through the Hall of Ancestors has grown fainter and dimmer. The Kitsu daimyo believes it is a sign the Heavens themselves disapprove of the direction the Empire has taken, but has little proof to back his claims.

So the Lion remain steadfastly supportive of the Imperial Throne even as disenchantment steadily spreads through their ranks. No Lion dares mention his feelings out loud lest he shame his family, his sensei, and his ancestors by losing face for speaking against the Imperial Throne. During the later years of Empress Meisho's reign, a new practice rises within the ranks of the Lion Clan: every morning, Lion Clan samurai leave their homes, stand before their ancestral shrines, and yell into the morning sky with all their might. All who hear this cry know it comes from a frustrated and anguished heart, a futile protest directed toward the heavens themselves. None speak of this new tradition; to do so would go against Bushido itself. And none question why the samurai of the Lion do this. They do it because they feel they can do nothing else.

The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix Clan of this age is different from Phoenix Clan of the past. They come into the new age of invention and discovery with unbridled enthusiasm. What was once primarily a clan of traditionalists transforms into a far more innovative one. This is not to say the Phoenix have cast aside their identity or their duties; they are still a clan of shugenja, offering spiritual guidance and balance to the Empire. But they balance their spirituality and cos-



mic understanding with a zeal for progress, and over time they become a clan of inventors. They look upon each advancement with positive eyes, seeing new chances to unlock the mysteries of the Elements. As scholars and researchers they stand at the forefront of every development, and by knowing how to implement them as they come they enjoy the full benefits of these changes.

Among the advancements credited to the Phoenix are more efficient farming techniques and devices, which they share with the Empire as a whole. They are second only to the Kaiu in answering the call of the Empress for brilliant minds to make her Iron Dragon a reality. The Isawa take advantage of this strength to place the clan in a favorable political position, and the Phoenix gather more favors and influence almost daily. The Asako particularly embrace the sudden swell of technological progress, the family contributing much to the research that creates these new developments. In fact, there is much support for naming the late Asako Hisau, the creator of the *kakiyari* and over thirty other devices, the Fortune of Invention.

The exception to this progressive attitude, however, can be found in the Shiba family. The Shiba are leery of the embrace of firearms, and quietly oppose the incorporation of *tanegashima* into the martial arts of the samurai. Among other things, the introduction of these weapons greatly complicates the duty and role of a good yojimbo, and the Shiba watch in disapproval as their centuries-old techniques have eroded in the face of new and simpler ways to conduct war. (It is thus quite an irony that Shiba Artisans create many of the clan's firearms.) They also see the eradication of the Dragonfly by Lion troops as a warning of the unsettling power of these new weapons and the threat they pose to peace in the Empire. For a time, many Shiba lobby for Imperial orders to remove all *tanegashima* from the Empire, but this movement is ended by the orders of the Elemental Council. The Isawa are pacifists, but they do not believe the new weapons to be more dangerous in the hands of trained samurai than a katana or naginata. The Isawa and Asako both look on recent changes with optimism, and the Shiba are ultimately only the servants of the Isawa; thus the Shiba remain alone in their traditionalist stance.

The Empress' edict on feudal inheritance changes that. The redistribution of lands is a shock to the Phoenix Clan, and for the first time their leaders begin to see the complications wrought by unbridled technological progress and to realize the political sway their clan grasped for has unbalanced them. The leadership of the Phoenix re-evaluate the path of the clan, especially after the discovery of a subtle change in the constellations, which some Phoenix believe is a sign the Heavens do not endorse the path chosen by the Empress. Thus the Phoenix find themselves with a difficult choice: remain loyal to the Empress, or remain loyal to their duties as the mouthpiece of the Heavens. The decision divides the clan, and not a few Phoenix join the ranks of the Restorationists.

The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion Clan remains mostly silent as the years pass after White Stag, maintaining their usual policy of letting the other clans underestimate them. They benefit from the incorporation of new technologies into their ways, and stand as always with the authority of the Imperial Throne. However, they are acutely aware of the disenchantment among the samurai class as the years pass by. The Scorpion exploit these shifts as they come, slowly maneuvering themselves into a superior political position. As the influence of the Crane wavers over the years, the Scorpion move to fill at least some of the gap in power.

However, the Scorpion – while loyal to the Empress – do not fully agree with the changes that have swept through the land. They see these changes as a threat to Rokugani identity – a viewpoint, ironically, which they share with their traditional rivals in the Lion Clan. Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Hiwake has faith in the guidance of the throne, but struggles to instill this faith in his followers. While they accept the introduction of firearms as a necessity, the majority of Scorpion samurai believe the Empress is misguided. Even the clan's courtiers, who enjoy more power in an age where the relevance of the bushi is fading, feel similarly. The Scorpion Champion knows he faces unrest, and avoids speaking of it to save face, hoping in time to convert his followers by his own example.

When the Empress makes her decree on feudal inheritance, it is the final straw for many Scorpion samurai. Heedless to their Champion's commands, minor Scorpion lords rebel against the redistribution of their lands. Arming their heimin with tanegashima (something explicitly forbidden by Imperial law), these lords manage to hold off the Imperial Legions for some time until the arrival of the Emerald Champion himself finally restores order. When Bayushi Hiwake is brought before Seppun Tadaka to answer for his subordinates, his fellow Scorpion expect him to denounce their actions. To their surprise, he defends them, committing kanshi in protest. It is this action that moves Seppun Tadaka, in turn, to reconsider his own allegiances.

In the aftermath of this incident, most of the Scorpion lands are occupied by Imperial forces. The Scorpion submit to them, of course, but final judgment on the clan is stalled by the distraction of the Imperial court and the need to choose a new Emerald Champion. Many Scorpion secretly support the Restorationist faction, with a few leaving the Empire to join its ranks. Others are more conflicted, torn between their beliefs and their clan's tradition of loyalty. The future of the Scorpion in this strange new Empire is uncertain indeed.

The Minor Clans

The centuries after White Stag are not especially kind to the Minor Clans. While technology has increased the overall quality of life for the populace, the Minor Clans have not had access to the same riches as the Great Clans and thus have not enjoyed the same success. In many ways the Minor Clans remain trapped in the past, struggling to survive by relying on the old ways while the Great Clans adapt to the newer.

In some cases this has actually proven fatal. The Dragonfly are unable to adequately defend themselves against the superior forces of the Lion, due in part to the role of firearms in the conflict. By the time Imperials intervened, the surviving Dragonfly number only a handful; there is little choice but to let the Dragon absorb the Tonbo as a vassal family. The Hare Clan, in conflict with the Crane over railroads in their lands, is likewise nearly wiped out.

The Sparrow Clan has its own difficulties. Unable to utilize the advanced farming techniques demonstrated by the Phoenix, the Sparrow remain as poor as ever. Then the railroads come; already stressed by having so little land to cultivate, the Sparrow see the railroads winding through their valley as a possible death stroke. Their protests fall on deaf ears, however, and ultimately they have no political sway to change the minds of the Imperial cartographers. Attempts to lobby with the Empress are blocked by Great Clan courtiers, who are unwilling to risk a lost investment or a diversion into productive lands of their own. The Sparrow are powerless to stop the railway. Perhaps they, too, will follow the same path as the Hare.

However, some Minor Clans have flourished in this new climate. The Tortoise enjoy much influence as the liaisons for the Merenae, and although their contact with gaijin makes them "unclean" in the eyes of many in the Empire, those opinions matter less and less as the Empress embraces more changes. The Kasuga are staunch supporters of the Imperial family and enjoy Imperial sanction for their activities. They are the face of Rokugan in the Merenae lands and have become experts on their homeland's culture and practices, the most influential of all families while abroad or at sea.

Perhaps the greatest success story is that of the Mantis Clan. The Gusai family has thrived over the past few centuries, rivaling even the Great Clans in its wealth and influence. The ambition of the Mantis Clan knows no bounds, and as the primary overseers of foreign trade in the Empire they have no end to the allies and favors they can call upon. Their navy is rivaled in size only by the Crane, and in power it is rivaled by no one. Incorporating aspects of gaijin designs into their ships (including cannons, advanced sails, and hull design), the Mantis have an unspoken mastery over the seas surrounding Rokugan. For now they are content to obey their Imperial charter, but they dream of Great Clan status and may soon grow bolder in their actions. While they remain apart from the politics of the land-bound Empire, and mostly unaffected by the Empress' infamous decree, the Mantis watch the affairs of Rokugan very carefully, knowing the outcome will affect their own future. The lord of the Gusai is especially interested in the possible success of the Empress' Iron Dragon. After all, if an iron vehicle can be self-propelled by this "steam engine"... why not a sea vessel?

Where are the Unicorn?

The Unicorn Clan does not return to Rokugan until the year 815. Ironically, in this timeline they have probably adhered more closely to their ancestral ways than the majority of Rokugani, who have adopted the technological advances of gaijin nations beyond their borders. When the Unicorn arrive they take the same route through the Shadowlands, approaching the Carpenter Wall just as they would have in the canonical timeline... but things are different this time around. The Carpenter wall is been outfitted with cannons and other such defenses, and the unsuspecting Unicorn Clan no longer has the overwhelming advantage of cavalry when they must face cannon and musketry. Depending on the GM's whims, this could mean a very sudden and inauspicious end to the story of the Scions of the Ki-Rin. If they are wiped out, the entire incident would go largely unnoticed outside of the Crab Clan, who would report it as yet another attempted incursion by Shadowlands forces. The story of the Lost Clan would continue for centuries. None would know the Ki-Rin met their end at the hands of their own cousins after nearly 800 years, and none would ever hear their warnings about the Lying Darkness...



Major Figures in Iron Rokugan

There are of course a great many samurai of significance in any era of Rokugan's history. This section focuses on the three most important figures in the Iron Rokugan setting: the Empress, her brother, and the Emerald Champion.

Empress Hantei Meisho

Daughter of Heaven

Born as Okiko, the second child and eldest daughter of Emperor Hantei XXII, Hantei Meisho was a quiet and curious child. She spent much of her early childhood with her older brother Ieyasu in the halls of Kyuden Doji. She looked up to him from an early age, then cared for him as he grew older and his health began to fail. The two were inseparable.

In the winter of 789, Ieyasu's health took a drastic turn, and he was close to death for many days. Meisho never left his side, and when he finally recovered, the daimyo of the Seppun claimed her spirit had kept him tied to the mortal realm. When the lone Merenae ambassador offered his personal residence in for Ieyasu, the Emperor – worried for his son, and hoping a change in climate would improve his health – agreed. He allowed the boy, his mother, and his sister to live abroad in the Merenae kingdom for five years to see if it would improve his health.

During her five years spent abroad, Meisho saw many wonders. She was fascinated by this strange land, and although the Imperial family was kept within the ambassador's residence for their own safety, the locals brought many marvels to show them. Meisho's personality grew bolder during her time in the Merenae lands, and on a few occasions she snuck out of the residence to witness the ways of their people firsthand. As a Hantei she could never be reprimanded, but the people of the township knew nothing of her noble birth and treated her as they did all others. During one of these outings, she witnessed the operation of a steam engine and saw blueprints and fanciful renditions of a locomotive. This image, the very concept of such a vehicle, captivated her mind for decades to come. By the time she returned to Rokugan, Meisho had become confident and outspoken, as well as almost obsessed with the things she had seen beyond the shores of her homeland.

In the year 797 Hantei XXII suffered a riding accident that robbed him of his life. Many expected Ieyasu, the eldest child, to ascend the throne... but Ieyasu abdicated, shocking the Imperial court. His announcement made waves through the courts of all of the Great Clans, who had not foreseen his decision. Citing his poor health and his wish to understand the world before his death, Ieyasu joined the Brotherhood and named his sister as his heir. None could defy his word as a Hantei, and thus at the age of 17 Okiko became Hantei Meisho, Daughter of Heaven.

In her first few years as Empress, Meisho proved to be rather unconventional, and it did not take long for others to realize how the subject of the Merenae fascinated her. With her newfound power she began asking for artifacts from beyond Rokugan's shores, and the Mantis and Tortoise found they had considerable influence over the new Empress.



Meisho believed herself a very progressive ruler. She had seen firsthand the wealth of the Merenae people, and as she studied the troubles of the Empire she decided the wonders of the gaijin would bring prosperity to her own land. Recalling the locomotive she had seen depicted in her youth, she conceived of a great railroad that would unite her lands, stretching across the provinces of the Empire and allowing for faster travel and transport than ever before. Accordingly, in the year 801 she announced the construction of the Golden Road, a railroad to wind through every province, with Otosan Uchi as its hub. She commanded the creation of a locomotive to power it, which she named "The Iron Dragon."

At the time, none of her advisors knew what she was talking about. Such a concept was utterly alien to the Empire. Turning to the Mantis and opening the Imperial Treasury, Meisho purchased from the Merenae a single steam engine, along with blueprints for a locomotive and as many artistic depictions as could be provided. The Merenae king had actually abandoned the idea of a locomotive in his lands (the crude steam engine they had developed did not generate the power required to move such a heavy vehicle), but he gladly accepted the gold of a distant Empire in return for plans and samples. Since the Rokugani did not know anything of such devices, they wound up acquiring a collection of blueprints that had never seen use and the oldest model of a steam engine that still worked. Nonetheless, that winter the Empress unveiled her plans to the Imperial court, demonstrating the workings of the steam engine and displaying the image of her planned Iron Dragon.

Her captivation with the device reflected itself in the glittering eyes of many courtiers throughout the court. Other, more traditional-minded samurai remained silent, not daring to speak against the Daughter of Heaven. Indeed, the implications and scope of her plan eluded all but the wisest of her court. Yet as they gazed upon the drawing of the Iron Dragon, the courtiers of the Great Clans saw an opportunity. Thus began an effort which would eventually threaten to tear the Empire asunder.

Empress Meisho is normally a calm, compassionate, and patient ruler. She is merely an adequate warrior, capable of defending herself but little more, but her mind is keen and she is well-versed in the Tao. Well-learned and sharply intelligent, she relies less on her advisors than many Emperors of times past, trusting instead her own judgment and learning. She speaks the Merenaean language and requires all within her court to study it. In matters of law and justice, she is known to be a fair arbiter. Unlike many rulers before her, Meisho makes no attempt to sequester herself from her people; she tours the Empire frequently and in fact many heimin recognize her at sight. She is beloved by many of her people... except those who see her ideas of progress as the greatest threat Rokugan has ever known.

In contrast to her virtues, Meisho suffers from a stubbornness that is difficult to breach. As one of the few Rokugani to ever travel beyond the borders of the Empire, Meisho believes she knows what is best for her people, often casting aside all arguments to the contrary. She believes in the putative "progress" she is laying the foundations for, and in many ways her idealism blinds her to the consequences of what she is doing. When her Emerald Champion (and lover) Seppun Tadaka speaks in favor of abandoning the project, she takes personal offense and considers it a deep betrayal. This decision, made in the heat of emotion, damages her reputation in the eyes of her people, and at that point her support begins to slowly but steadily decline. She comes to regret her hasty decision, but her stubbornness makes it impossible for her to go back or admit her mistake, especially since doing so means she would lose face with her already-eroding core of supporters. Despite this, her faith in her vision of a more advanced Empire holds steady... a faith that may usher in a new age of prosperity for her people, or doom them.

Empress Hantei Meisho

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

Awareness: 5 Perception: 4

Honor: 6.5 *Status: 10.0* *Glory: 5.0*

(after Seppun Tadaka is banished: 5.8)

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 3 / Imperial Scion 3

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 7, Etiquette 5, Investigation 3, Lore: Merenae Culture 3, Languages: Merenae, Intimidation (Control) 5, Sincerity 5, Meditation 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Defense 3, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu 4, Warfan 3

Advantages: Allies (uncountable), Fame, Sacrosanct, Social Position (Empress)

Disadvantages: Driven (Complete the Iron Dragon), Fascination (Merenae Culture), Idealistic

Seppun Tadaka

Emerald Champion, Leader of the Restorationists

Seppun Tadaka is the grandson of the younger brother of Hantei XXI, and his veneration of his forefathers makes him a very traditional samurai. Quick of blade and good-natured, Tadaka's honorable nature wins him allies in every court throughout the Empire, and shortly after his gempukku his skills also win him the title of Emerald Champion.

Tadaka is everything expected of an Emerald Champion: a master of the iaijutsu duel, an expert archer, a brilliant general, and an expert in law and Bushido. Upon his ascension to the office he receives an exquisite *bajozutsu* as a symbol of his station, and for many years practices its use with the same dedication he gives to archery and swordsmanship. He claims to perceive many parallels between the gun and the bow, often speaking of the art of *Teppoudo* with an almost esoteric air.

In an Empire where the ways of commerce and politics are steadily overtaking the ways of the samurai warrior, the traditionalist Tadaka has a clear charm to those of similar mind. He is inspiring to the most conservative among the nobility, who praise his many accomplishments. It is this charm, this influence, and his admirable adherence to Bushido that wins the attentions of the ladies at court... in particular the Empress herself.

While Empress Meisho is not one to sequester herself away from her subjects, Tadaka is one of the few permitted regular private audiences with the Daughter of Heaven. The two become close friends, having common tastes in theatre, art, and other such subjects, and while they sometimes disagree on philosophic issues, such is never an obstacle to their friendship. Some occasionally whisper the two have become closer than mere friends, but due to the strength of their reputations none make any open accusations. In truth, the two are indeed lovers, although they are careful to never dishonor themselves through their passions. Their compatibility is plain to many, however, and some Imperial Nakado consider trying to officially match the two.

However, there is one aspect in which the two are completely incompatible: their visions for the Empire's future. As the impact of sweeping technological change becomes more and more obvious, Tadaka began to feel the Empire is falling out of balance, its very identity compromised in favor of "progress." His suspicions are confirmed as he learns more and more about the mass disenchantment and bitterness in the warrior class. When the Empress declares an end to the traditional practice of feudal succession, the ensuing rebellion in Scorpion lands becomes the final straw for Tadaka (and countless others). Standing before the Empress and the entire Imperial court, Tadaka lends his voice to the concerns and fears of disenfranchised samurai throughout the Empire, giving a passionate defense of the old ways and pleading with the Empress to reconsider her policies and her decree. He fails to convince her; heartbroken, he requests seppuku in apology.

Yet as this chapter has already revealed, that was not the end of Seppun Tadaka's story. His followers persuade him to forsake seppuku and instead flee into the northern Empire, where he eventually meets with the Champion of the Dragon Clan himself. Although he refuses to ever reveal what passed between them in their long hours of private conversation, Tadaka emerges with a new resolution, determined to protect Rokugan's traditions regardless of the cost. He tells his followers the path the Empire has taken is not one condoned by Heaven, and if they continued as they have the Heavens will withdraw all their blessings from the land. They must try to preserve the ways of the samurai, the ways of their ancestors, even if they can only do so outside the bounds of Rokugan itself. Although he offers to release any follower who does not agree with his path, not one of them turns away. Thus is born the City of the Twin Rivers.

Tadaka and his followers are content with their new home, where they continue to practice the ways of their ancestors, eschewing all gaijin influences and preserving the sacred way of the samurai. Tadaka is determined to die before he allows anything, even his once-beloved Empress, to destroy the bastion of honor he has created.

Seppun Tadaka, Emerald Champion, Leader of the Restorationists

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

Honor: 8.1 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 7.0*
(Infamy: 4.0)

(As a ronin, Tadaka becomes Status 0, but is treated as Status 9 within the City of Two Rivers.)

School/Rank: Seppun Guardsman 5 (Emerald Champion Path replaces Rank 5)

Skills: Etiquette 5, Investigation 3, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Law 5, Meditation 3, Sincerity 3, Battle 5, Defense 5, Horsemanship 3, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 3, Spears 3, Teppoudo 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Hero of the People, Leadership, Social Position (Emerald Champion), Tactician

Disadvantages: True Love: Hantei Meisho (this becomes Lost Love after his exile).

Note: After his exile, Tadaka loses Social Position and gains Sworn Enemy (Hantei Meisho).

Hantei Kano

Imperial Advisor

Hantei Kano is the youngest child of Hantei XXII and was born under especially auspicious signs. He quickly showed much promise in the ways of the court, with a sharp mind and a talent for rhetoric. Where his older brother Ieyasu was physically weak, Kano was strong and hardy... and while his sister Meisho was compassionate, he had a heart of stone. He took after his father in this way, and it was widely suspected that Hantei XXII would eventually name Kano as his heir. He was certainly the most capable in the Emperor's eyes.

Unfortunately, the Emperor died in a riding accident before he could issue a proclamation about his heir. In the absence of such an Imperial order, tradition dictated the elder brother would become Emperor. Kano knew his brother Ieyasu was too weak to hold the throne, and indeed Ieyasu knew this as well; Kano had long since convinced Ieyasu the responsible thing was to relinquish his claim to the throne in favor of a younger sibling so the line could be continued by a strong samurai. But he had not considered Ieyasu might choose with his heart instead of his reason: when Ieyasu abdicated his position, he named his sister Meisho as his heir.



This came as a shock to all within the court, but none were as dismayed as Kano. He believed his superiority to his sister was beyond question, and all knew their father had favored him for the position. Ieyasu never spoke of why he had chosen to abdicate to his sister, sparing his brother's face in the eyes of the court. In truth, Ieyasu saw his younger brother as more capable than his sister, but also saw the pride and ambition in Kano's eyes. Kano had none of the compassion required to rule, and his pride would make him easy to manipulate.

Both to honor Kano and to appease those who believed him the superior choice, Meisho promoted her brother to the position of Imperial Advisor, and even permitted him to retain the Hantei name. Many praised her for this, and Kano humbly accepted the appointment with the respect his sister was due. But in his heart, Kano never bowed to his sister, and never forgave his brother for his decision.

Meisho's progressive and experimental nature only fueled Kano's certainty that his elder brother had made a mistake. He was disgusted by his sister's interest in gaijin technology and believed her concept of an "Iron Dragon" was an impractical fantasy at best. He was careful to keep these feelings to himself, but as he saw the growing uncertainty and disillusionment of the samurai class, he realized there was an opportunity for him to grasp what had always been his birthright. He could use the divide between tradition and progress to his own advantage. On the day of Ieyasu's death, Kano began to enact his plan.

For nearly a decade, Kano has secretly encouraged the conflict between traditionalist and progressive factions throughout the Empire, playing both sides against each other. It was he who planted the seeds of rebellion in the Scorpion provinces, he who suggested the end of the practice of feudal succession to his sister. After Seppun Tadaka refused to commit seppuku and fled to the north, Kano sent one of his followers, Shosuro Takawe, to infiltrate the loyalists who sided with the disgraced Emerald Champion. It was by his order that a forged declaration of sovereignty was sent from the Restorationist city to the Imperial Court, creating an open conflict between the two. Each of these events, and many others besides, was manipulated by Kano to bring him closer to his goal: the Emerald Throne of Rokugan.

Convinced of his own rightness, Hantei Kano has taken great care to cover his own tracks and to protect his own reputation. To all outward appearances, Kano is one of his sister's strongest supporters. None outside his small circle of loyalists suspect his role in the events leading the Empire into conflict. If his hand in these events ever becomes known, it would surely horrify any honorable samurai... and lead to Kano's seppuku in short order.

Kano is as charming as he is ruthless, as calculating as he is heartless. He has spent years crafting his plan and now that it is close to fruition he will let nothing stand in his way. Yet for all his ruthlessness and intelligence, he cannot see his own shortcomings, cannot recognize them as proof that he would ultimately be a weak and ineffective Emperor. Kano's overconfidence in himself could doom an Empire under his guidance, but he is heedless to this reality, consumed by his own obsessions

Hantei Kano, Imperial Advisor

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 5

Awareness: 5 Willpower: 3 Intelligence: 5 Perception: 4

Honor: 3.8 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 4.0*

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 4 / Imperial Scion 1

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation) 7, Calligraphy 4, Defense 3, Warfan 4, Etiquette 6, Intimidation (Control) 5, Investigation 5, Sincerity 5, Games: Sadane 5, Temptation 5, Slight of Hand (Conceal) 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many), Dark Paragon: Control, Sacrosanct, Social Position (Imperial Advisor)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Manipulating the Empire toward war), Overconfident

Portrait of an Iron Empire

While much of the Empire in this timeline changes due to the embrace of pre-industry and technological inventions, there is also much that remains the same. Indeed, it is simpler to point out what has explicitly changed than to paint an entirely new picture of the Iron Empire. This section explores the specific differences between this Empire and the canonical Rokugan. While GMs are free to adopt or reject anything presented here in their own depictions of an Iron Rokugan, they should always carefully consider how one advancement leads to the next and how a traditionalist culture would try (or fail) to incorporate each such advancement.

Social Impacts of Technological Progress

Two major changes assail the social dynamics of Rokugan during this era: the slight lessening of the gap between the lower and upper classes, and the lessening of the samurai caste's relevance.

Before the introduction of technological advancements, the rankings of each class and profession were distinct and unchanging: eta and entertainers at the bottom, then merchants, then craftsmen, and finally the farmers who stood at the top of the heimin caste. Nobility was ranked above the commoners, and were the only people who were uniformly literate, had free time to pursue their own interests, and could bear arms and fight to defend themselves. When new technologies are introduced, they are initially contained mostly to the hands of the nobility, so much of the social structure remains the same. However, due to necessity, altruism, or sometimes simply by accident, many of these advancements also benefit the lower classes, and

ultimately the "social floor" begins to rise. This leads to a more educated populace. Heimin gain access to better agricultural techniques and better sanitation techniques. For the first time, commoners begin to have some free time to pursue interests of their own, and literacy spreads as well. A sense of empowerment begins to appear in the ranks of the lower classes. Even so, they still fear their samurai masters... at least, they do until the Scorpion uprising, when it becomes clear to all observers that the firearm has equalized the ashigaru and the samurai.

Most of the nobility did not realize that when they embraced new weapons and conveniences they were also embracing the slow erosion of their own class. With the new technology came less and less need for highly trained warriors. The most important role of the samurai became leading *kakiyari*-armed ashigaru. Politics became more than ever the focus for power, and with the appearance of paper currency and a rising demand for new inventions, money became a far greater avenue to power than it ever was before. This led to fewer and fewer trained bushi, and more and more samurai who lived out their lives without ever touching a sword. By the time the nobility realized what had happened, the warrior's blood of the samurai caste had grown dangerously thin.

It is worth keeping in mind that these technological advancements and changes are not spread evenly across the Empire. Peasants and even samurai living in far corners of the Empire can still go their entire lives without witnessing any of these new devices. In general, the new civil technologies are found mostly in the cities, and only the rich can afford luxuries and more modern weapons. A *saigo* ("city-samurai") would have regular access to modern conveniences and knowledge of modern ways, while a *goshi* ("rural-samurai") would still be mostly living with traditional technology and sensibilities. In most cases, this would serve only to further alienate the two from each other, but there are also many instances of goshi learning about modern ways to improve their villages. Such men are held in high esteem by the common folk, but earn the suspicion of their fellow *goshi*, who see them as becoming "outsiders."

Finally, the changes of this era bring about a shift in the attitude toward improving one's own life. According to tradition a Rokugani (regardless of social class) should simply shoulder the burdens of existence with stoic and honorable acceptance. Under the influence of new ideas, however, seeking to break one's own life-bonds becomes more acceptable... and so does plain ambition.

The Iron Dragon and the Golden Road

The Empress' plan to build railroads linking the Empire together is met with confusion by most samurai. For an Empire that is slowly easing into technological change, it is an extremely ambitious project, and many traditional-minded samurai simply do not see the point of the railway. Many simply go along with her plans because they trust in the wisdom of Heaven, but the benefits of the railroad are obvious to those who can grasp its potential. First, the distribution of goods will become faster and more efficient, solving many existing economic and distribution problems in the vast Empire. Famine may become a thing of the past, as food can be easily moved from prosperous regions to those suffering dearth. More generally, travel and commerce will become far easier, and the complications of distance will become almost trivial. The Empress herself believes this project can be a moral rallying point for the Empire's future, accomplishing something her people had never before thought possible, something not even the gaijin can do.

But as the project drags on, many complications arise. The existing laws are inadequate to regulate the construction and use of a railroad. Long before the project can be completed, lords argue and feud over who owns the rail lines. The railway is financially backed by many clans, yet they are ordered and run by Imperials and built in lands not always owned by their backers. The conflicts lead to wounded pride, offended honor, and stained blades.

There are other issues. Samurai are forced to give up ancestral lands to make way for railways. Minor Clans and other groups with no political clout – including the Brotherhood of Shinsei – feel threatened under the shadow of the Iron Dragon. The most esoteric claim the railways disrupted the natural flow of chi within their surroundings, ruining the balance and staining the beauty of the lands, offending the kami. In many cases shugenja are required to accompany the cartographers and railway workers, trying to appease any spirits the rails offend. Diversions around shrines and sacred places cost money, and not all of those in charge are willing to make such sacrifices.

In the end, the Iron Dragon comes to represent two very different things. To the progressive-minded it is a symbol of the future, but to the Restorationists and other traditionalists, it is an oppressive symbol of the erosion of the Empire's very identity.

Woodblock Printing and the Spread of Literacy

In the sixth century, the Miya daimyo invents movable-type woodblock printing and fundamentally changes the distribution of information and literature throughout the Empire. For the first time in Rokugan's history, books and other documents can be mass-produced. The Miya embrace the new technique, and it eventually results in the spread of literacy throughout the higher levels of the bonge class.

Of course, from the Empire's earliest days merchants and artisans among the heimin had learned to read and write in order to support their commercial activities, but now literacy was spreading far beyond such limited groups and threatening the image of the samurai as the "educated class" of Rokugan. Being able to study reading in the first place had always meant one had time for leisure, a rarity in a land sustained by ancient agricultural techniques. Now, in an attempt to keep the social castes appropriately stratified, the Otomo family and the Crane Clan spent considerable effort devising separate groups of kanji for the upper and lower classes. The script of the nobility had

Incorporation, not Westernization

It is important to note that while the Empire depicted in this setting has incorporated new technology from beyond its borders, it has not "Westernized." Rokugan still rejects much of what the outside world has embraced. It has imported technology, but not ideals or traditions. The Rokugani identity is still very important to the people of the Empire, and the centuries spent catching up with foreign nations have not changed that. GMs should give this some consideration in depicting this setting. Even with the incorporation of guns, steam engines, and other such advances, the world should still "feel" like Rokugan and should still portray samurai drama (albeit a drama that is slightly more modern in tone). The GM should still portray all of the normal social conventions of the Empire, even if they directly clash with an advancement that the Rokugani have explicitly accepted.

In fact, the clashing of technology and social convention often result in complex moral quandaries, which can be the basis for many adventure hooks and stories. GMs looking for inspiration may wish to consider the Meiji Restoration era in Japanese history. How the PCs reconcile the conflicts between tradition and progress can fuel many gaming sessions, and the GM should encourage the PCs to take a stance on these issues.

always been extensive and colorful, appropriate for poetry and philosophy, and they sought to confine the kanji of the lower classes to more limited and practical uses. Imperial law decreed the bonge should only be taught from this specific selection of kanji; they would merely be able to read simple orders and write equally simple reports. In this way, the degree of literacy one possessed replaced literacy itself as a sign of social status. The more kanji one could read and reproduce, the greater one's social standing and esteem. While this policy allowed considerable control over the bonge, nonetheless even a limited degree of literacy was extremely empowering to the peasant masses. For the first time in centuries, average Rokugani were able to express themselves in writing, thus rising a little closer to the samurai nobles who ruled them. The lives and stories of farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and weavers could now be preserved in writing and passed on through the centuries. Even if there are still limits imposed by the ruling class, such things had never been possible in the Empire of the past.

Eventually, monks of the Brotherhood attempt to spread literacy even further throughout the Empire, teaching peasants to read the Tao. This required they learn many kanji supposedly restricted to the nobility. However, the Imperials did little to stop this effort; they had learned in the age of the Gozoku that none could raise a hand against the esteemed Brotherhood of Shinsei without provoking the masses. While it is certain the continued spread of literacy helped birth the Restorationist movement, the full effects of a literate lower class has yet to be seen...

The Restorationists

By the year 810, there is mass disenchantment and bitterness among the warrior class of Rokugan. Their traditional ways have been largely supplanted by newer technologies, and many believe the way of the bushi is no longer relevant. Courtiers are the most common of the Empress' servants, and with the latest advances in firearms the defense of land can be achieved with mere ashigaru and a few samurai officers. The changing faces of warfare and society are too much for traditional samurai to bear. The world is moving past them, reducing both their own importance and the ways of their ancestors to mere grains of sand on the beaches of time. The Imperial Railroad and the Iron Dragon itself become symbols to them of an Empire that has cast aside its heritage.

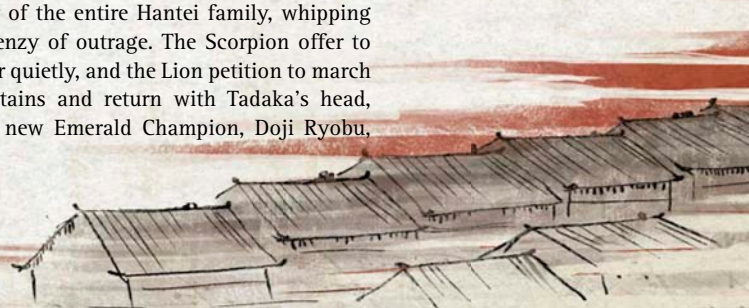
When Emerald Champion Seppun Tadaka is banished from the court for giving voice to these concerns, it is the final straw for these embittered samurai. The implications are obvious to the Empress' servants: discontent is treason. As he prepares for his seppuku, Tadaka is visited by a group of traditionalist samurai and monks who convince him to stay his hand. Instead he flees, heading north with his loyal followers. This is a grave insult to the Empress herself; Tadaka is declared a ronin and condemned to death. Yet as he moves north he finds that none actively seek to stop him; in the eyes of true samurai, he is beyond reproach. On the contrary, many offer aid to him and his followers, while refusing to ask his name and thus denying they ever aided him specifically. They are merely following the tenets of Courtesy and Compassion by giving food and shelter to wandering ronin.

Tadaka's followers grow in numbers as he moves north. Many younger samurai are inspired by his stoic adherence to his principles and his noble sacrifice of his family name. Many older retainers join him as well, seeking meaning for lives which seem to have none. Even some retired samurai emerge from the monasteries to pick up their swords and follow Tadaka's path. It is this growing and increasingly diverse group of samurai who eventually join with Tadaka in creating the City of Two Rivers in the territories of Yobanjin tribes, beyond the border and the eyes of the Empire.

The Restorationists' new home is nestled in a bowl-shaped valley beyond the Great Wall of the North. A treaty with the nearby Yobanjin tribes ensures peace between them, at least for the time being. The city itself is populated by samurai from virtually every clan, including traditionalist shugenja and courtiers, as well as monks and many heimin servants. With numbers roughly equivalent to a Minor Clan, the Restorationists' goal is to maintain the samurai way of life apart from the Empire. At the orders of the Dragon Champion, the Dragon Clan maintains surveillance on the city from a distance.

For two years, nothing is heard from Tadaka in Rokugan itself, until the arrival of his apparent message at the Imperial Winter Court of 813. Seemingly in his own hand, the letter proclaims sovereignty for himself and all of his followers. Invoking his years of loyal service and his former ties to the Hantei line, Tadaka pleads with the Empress to allow his new nation to continue the traditions of the samurai unimpeded by the changing Empire. In exchange, he promises never to return to the Empire of his birth, and pledges his line and the lines of his followers will never interfere with the internal affairs of Rokugan. It will be as if they do not even exist.

Such a thing is deemed impossible by the Imperial Court. Hantei Kano, the Imperial Advisor, names the letter as a slight to the honor of the entire Hantei family, whipping the court into a frenzy of outrage. The Scorpion offer to deal with the matter quietly, and the Lion petition to march through the mountains and return with Tadaka's head, but ultimately the new Emerald Champion, Doji Ryobu,



is given the honor of dealing with the "Restorationist Traitors." Against the advice of her retainers, the Empress herself declares she will accompany the army into the mountains and kill Tadaka herself.

When the Imperial Legions mobilize, the Dragon warn the City of Two Rivers but have no intention of participating in the battle. The Restorationists must stand on their own. The way of the samurai must prove it's worth against the fates and the march of time. And unknown by either side, while the message contains the truth behind Tadaka's fate, it is not written by his hand. It is a forgery created at the order of Kano, in order to bring about the final phase of his plan to take the throne.

Samurai Firearms

When the Empress Hantei Retsuhime decided to legalize the use of firearms, she knew the implications of her decision. But she trusted the role of samurai would never be obsolete, because she believed – as her mother believed – that honor and Bushido would always ensure samurai superiority. Even so, the more powerful and versatile types firearms were eventually restricted to the samurai class by Imperial decree. This encouraged the samurai to venerate their firearms in much the same way as the daisho and other such weapons: lovingly cared for and passed down from generation to generation.

Although the Imperial Treasury did purchase an initial cache of muskets and pistols from the Merenae, having the Empire dependent for arms upon any foreign nation was unthinkable. Retsuhime issued a decree: any Great Clan which developed unique non-gaijin firearms would have the endorsement of Heaven. The Agasha of the Dragon Clan soon perfected a unique type of black powder which allegedly did not carry the disturbing spiritual implications of the foreigners' *polvara*. This allowed the rest of the Empire to easily meet the Empress' decree. The Crab developed the Hand Cannon, while the Phoenix created the Fire Lance. The Mantis preferred to stick closely to gaijin designs, altering their muskets just enough to be considered Rokugani. Thus, it was not long before each of the Great Clans had their own distinct firearms.

Tanegashima

The Rokugani word for samurai firearms is "*tanegashima*." Unlike the simple, direct-ignition discharge of more common firearms, *tanegashima* employ complex matchlock mechanisms and fire smaller and more precise projectiles. Common firearms have no inherent firing mechanism, instead requiring the gunner to lower a lit match to a touchhole in order to ignite the powder and unleash the blast. This draws the user's attention away from the target and impairs the accuracy of the weapon. In contrast, the snap matchlock design of the *tanegashima* ignites the weapon automatically at the pull of a triggering lever, allowing the user to focus all attention on the target without distraction. This makes samurai firearms more precise and effective, if also more complex.

The word "*tanegashima*" comes from the samurai credited with the invention of the firing mechanism. After the Battle of White Stag, a small number of Merenae were allowed to conduct diplomacy and trade with the Empire. The leader of the Tsi ronin family emptied his family's meager fortune to purchase two matchlock pistols from the Merenae diplomats. This man, Tsi Tanegashima, called upon his blacksmith family to reproduce the firing mechanism. The result was the first truly Rokugani pistol, which Tanegashima demonstrated to the Imperial Court that winter. It became the basis and standard for samurai firearms, and any weapon utilizing his family's matchlock mechanism is called "*tanegashima*" in honor of him.

Like the katana and wakizashi, tanegashima are legally samurai weapons, meaning possession of one by non-samurai is strictly forbidden. Unlike the sword, however, the nature of the *tanegashima* is such that it requires less training to be effective, making it even more dangerous. Socially astute samurai do their best to ensure the common *Bonge* never get their hands on *tanegashima*.

Types of Firearms

Kakiyari (Fire Lance)

The most common Rokugani firearm, the *kakiyari* ("fire lance"), was invented by the Phoenix Clan for use in its armies. The inventor, Asako Hisau, was inspired by watching his yojimbo perform the Heaven's Wing Kata; he wanted to create a versatile firearm that could be used with existing spear techniques within his clan. His design is valued for its simplicity and was later adopted by other clans. But while every clan has access to these weapons by the hundreds, the *kakiyari* is most impressive when it is made by a Phoenix artisan.

The Fire Lance is essentially a long bamboo spear with a hollow bronze "head" incorporated into the weapon. This "head" is muzzle-loaded and capable of firing a blast when the priming charge is lit by a hand-lowered match. When the weapon is fired, the pole handle is propped against the ground to absorb kickback, while the user grips behind the head for aim. The weapon fires either a load of metallic pellets and debris, or for closer range a single blast of ignited flame. The Fire Lance is capable of only a single discharge; after the initial shot, the bronze head is ruined and is discarded, turning the weapon into a simple yari for use in close combat. Because of its ease of use, cheap manufacture, and one-time charge, the Fire Lance is the preferred weapon for equipping ashigaru soldiers.

It may be noted that some artisan gunsmiths, both in the Phoenix and elsewhere, have designed kakiyari with cast-iron heads, capable of multiple discharges and weighted for use as a melee polearm. These are cared for with the same attentiveness as any other firearm, and are often admired for their craftsmanship and beauty.

Bo-Hiya (Fire Arrows)

A natural extension from the traditional flaming arrows that use oil or fireworks, the Fire Arrow is essentially a normal arrow containing a paper rocket, a fuse, and a gunpowder pouch attached to the arrowhead. The fuse

is lit before firing, timing the release so that the rocket ignites in mid-air, propelling the arrow with great force. Eventually, the fuse reaches the arrowhead, igniting the pouch and resulting in an explosion.

Due to its design, the Fire Arrow requires precision and timing for maximum effect. As such they are rarely utilized by untrained archers, but can be used en masse by trained ashigaru or singularly by skilled samurai. The range of these arrows is only around 100 yards, even when assisted by the paper rocket. In spite of these shortcomings, the arrows have been proven effective in sieges, and many Daidoji carry the means to create such arrows as circumstances demand.

Fire Arrows can be fired from bows like a normal arrow, and are used at sea to set ships ablaze or during sieges to ignite selected targets. In mass battles, they are fired in volleys, sometimes by siege weapons, in order to maximize effectiveness.

Hand-Cannon

The Hand-Cannon can be compared in many ways to the Fire Lance. It is essentially a small metallic barrel containing a flash pan with a top-loading touchhole. This barrel is attached to the end of a thick wooden or metallic handle, resembling a tetsubo. Because there is no built-in firing mechanism, it can be very cheaply produced and utilized by relatively untrained soldiers. The Hand-Cannon can only be fired once, but afterward it can be used as a tetsubo.

In the years since it was originally developed the Kaiu have continued to improve their design, incorporating hinged bronze lids to protect the touchhole from rain or premature ignition, and adding mechanisms for holding a charge inside without spilling, allowing the wielder to use the weapon as a cudgel without affecting the contained charge. There is no specific ammunition for the Hand-Cannon; it is capable of firing rocks, pebbles, metal balls, or virtually anything else that can fit in the barrel.

The Hand-Cannon is not as graceful as the Fire Lance and is generally considered to be a poor ranged weapon. It lacks the accuracy and distance of other firearms. However, when fired in tandem by ashigaru or utilized at short range, it delivers a very powerful payload, capable of piercing even the thick hide of an oni. Psychologically, the sound of the weapon firing can have a profound effect, especially on horses, often inciting panic in the animals.

Bajozutsu and Teppo

Samurai do not use the muskets and pistols of the gaijin. Instead, they use strike matchlock weapons called *tanegashima*, which, while inspired by and derived from gaijin pistols and muskets, have a distinct classification as a samurai weapon.

Bajozutsu are samurai pistols. They are designed to be drawn from the obi as one would draw a sword, and have a lightly-curved handle and a wooden sheath similar to the saya of a wakizashi. They fire a single musket-ball shot with an accurate range of about twenty feet, and are hardy enough to be reloaded, albeit slowly. They are often decorated, the muzzles sculpted to look like dragons, exquisite laminated wood and painting on the handles, and so forth. *Bajozutsu* are often venerated in the same light as the blades of a daisho.

Teppo are samurai muskets, made from iron barrels, wooden stocks, and bronze matchlock mechanisms. Barrel-loaded in the same manner as a pistol, the weapon is fired by bracing it against the shoulder and pulling the trigger. The missile fired by teppo is the same metallic ball used by *bajozutsu*, allowing ammunition to be shared freely between samurai when it becomes scarce in battle. The *teppo* is preferred for long distance fighting, although it cannot match the yumi in range. It is said dedicated samurai can coax the weapon into firing accurately at greater distances.

The Rocket Festival

Celebrated on the 14th Day of the Rooster, "*Matsuri no Hanabi*" or the "Rocket Festival" is a colorful occasion celebrating the art and spirit of the firework display. It is a day-long festival held throughout the Empire, primarily celebrated within cities, coastal towns, and villages with a large merchant presence. The format of the festival differs at each location, but most are modeled after the primary festival in Otosan Uchi. The morning begins with a greeting to Ametarasu, followed by an entire day of celebrations. Among the typical festivities are dragon dancers, lantern dances, feasts, competitions, and a popular game called *Kingyo-sukui* in which contestants attempt to scoop and catch live goldfish using a fragile paper net. The most common food served is usually squid, since it is an animal shaped closely to a firework rocket.

The day is peppered with amateur fireworks displays, aspiring artists who hope to rise to predominance one day. Often such aspiring firework artists (*hanabika*) will go to great lengths to attract the attentions of potential patrons. Even so, these beginners never launch their displays at night, a time which is reserved only for honored masters of the craft.

What truly sets the festival apart is the fireworks competition, which takes place at sunset. Participants launch homemade rockets and fireworks into the sky. Winners are judged by a panel of honored experts (often Imperials) who make their choices based on color, pattern, height, and the overall novelty of the display. Anyone is allowed to participate, and the winner is usually bestowed some great honor. Previous winners are not allowed to participate in future competitions, but often are invited to attend as judges.

When the sky is completely dark, the festival is concluded with a magnificent fireworks display. Usually this is created by past champions of the fireworks competition, but inviting experts and *hanabika* to fabricate the display is not unheard of. In Otosan Uchi, the *hanabika* overseeing this display is hand-picked by the Emperor himself, the highest honor one devoted to the craft can possibly attain.



New Mechanics

The following mechanics are suggested for use in any campaign taking place in the alternate history presented in this chapter. GMs can also incorporate these skills into any campaign where the use of blackpowder weaponry has been accepted by the Empire.

New Bugei Skill: Teppoudo (Intelligence)

- Sub-type: Weapon Skill
- Emphases: Fire-Lance, Hand-Cannon, Bajozutsu, Teppo

Teppoudo is the skill of maintaining and firing a Rokugani (non-gaijin) firearm. Taught alongside the traditional arts of Kenjutsu and Kyujutsu, the art of Teppoudo places a great emphasis on mindfulness, calm deliberate intentions, and careful breathing. It is just as much a practice of zen-like focus as it is a test of rote and memory. The samurai does not merely pull the trigger... *he pushes the bullet.*

Mastery Abilities:

- **Rank 3** – Gain +1k0 to all damage rolls when firing a Rokugani firearm
- **Rank 5** – Loading a Rokugani firearm requires one less Complex Action
- **Rank 7** – Gain +0k1 to all damage rolls when firing a Rokugani firearm

Rokugani Firearms

Rokugani firearms can be incorporated into many different campaigns, whether or not the GM wants to take things as far as they are presented in Iron Rokugan. In feudal Japan, simple firearms were imported from the Chinese as early as the 1200s, and matchlock guns were common during the Sengoku period of 1467 to 1604. Even Miyamoto Musashi mentions firearms in his text on Japanese warfare and philosophy, "The Book of Five Rings," saying that the gun was unrivaled on the battlefield until swords were drawn. Even though they were relatively common and helped decide many battles, Japanese firearms did not hold a predominant role in warfare, and were often considered a secondary weapon to the Yumi due to their limited range, slow reload time, and poor accuracy. Skilled archers and swordsmen were far more common than skilled gunners; techniques had to be developed to get the most out of firearms, and they were usually placed in the hands of lower class troops. On the other hand, at the battle of Nagashino the Japanese warlord Oda Nobunaga all but annihilated the cavalry forces of the Takeda Clan with a strategy that relied on volley fire with muskets.

GMs who wish to incorporate firearms into a non-Iron Rokugan setting can do so via an Imperial Edict calling upon the Great Clans to reproduce the firearms of foreign powers while still maintaining the ban on trade and communication with gaijin nations. To better re-create the climate of early Japanese firearms, it is suggested that only the Kakiyari, Teppo, and Bajozutsu be incorporated, and that only the Bajozutsu should have the Samurai keyword.

Rokugani firearms require three Complex Actions to load (or reload). When fired, they ignore the effects of armor on Armor TN and Reduction.

New Weapon: Kakiyari (Fire Lance)

- **Keywords:** Large, Firearm
- **Range:** 50 feet
- **DR:** 3k2
- Price: 8 Koku
- **Special:** The Fire Lance can be wielded in melee as a Yari. If so, its DR is 1k1 and it cannot be thrown accurately. A normal Fire Lance such as this can only be fired once.

New Weapon: Bo-Hiya (Fire Arrows)

- **Range:** 100 feet (regardless of bow used)
- **DR:** 3k3
- Price: 1 Koku
- **Special:** Fire Arrows explode when they land. Their damage ignores all forms of Reduction.

New Weapon: Hand-Cannon

- **Keywords:** Large, Firearm, Heavy Weapon
- **Range:** 20 feet
- **DR:** 4k3
- Price: 25 Koku
- **Special:** The Hand-Cannon ignores Reduction from natural toughness. It can only be fired once. The Hand-Cannon can be wielded in melee as a Tetsubo.

New Weapon: Bajozutsu

- **Keywords: Small, Samurai, Firearm**
- **Range:** 20 feet
- **DR:** 3k2
- Price: Due to the sacred nature of the Bajozutsu and the complexity of the weapon's manufacture, they are not normally available for sale.
- **Special:** The Bajozutsu can be drawn from its sheath with the Iaijutsu skill.

New Weapon: Teppo

- **Keywords:** Large, Samurai, Firearm
- **Range:** 150 feet
- **DR:** 3k3
- Price: 30 Koku
- **Special:** At half range or less, the Teppo ignores Reduction from natural toughness.

Unique Firearms of the Great Clans

These weapons are considered clan secrets and are not generally available to anyone from outside their clan.

New Siege Weapon: Kaiu Thunderer

The Kaiu were greatly intrigued by gaijin cannon and quickly set out to create their own models of the weapon to utilize against oni and other Shadowlands beasts assailing the Crab lands. The Kaiu Thunderers are impressive sights on any battlefield, their iron muzzles shaped to resemble grimacing faces and bestial maws, and the arrival of such weapons at a siege quickly puts fear into the defenders. However, only a handful of portable Thunderers exist at any one time. Most of these weapons are stationary, permanently installed in castles and other defensive fortifications along the border with the Shadowlands.

- **Keywords:** Siege, Cannon
- **Skill:** Siege Weapons
- **Crew:** 4
- **Range:** 1,200 feet
- **DR:** 10k10
- Area: Thunderers fire explosive shells which detonate on impact, inflicting 5k5 to anything within twenty feet of the target.
- **Special:** Fear 3. The Thunderer ignores all Reduction, including structural Reduction (when using the optional rules for siege engines). If at least one crew member on a Thunderer has Ranks in the Engineering skill, the Thunderer gains +1k0 to its attack roll.

New Weapon: The Dragon Teppoto

Created by the Agasha, the Dragon *Teppoto* is the preferred sidearm of the Mirumoto samurai; its extremely careful and unique design means it requires many years to complete a single one. Essentially, it is a *bajozutsu* incorporated into a short sword. As a pistol, the *Teppoto* has poor range and a long loading time, and like other Rokugani firearms it only holds one bullet. However, the unique hand-guard protects the firing mechanism, while the sword-like handle permits the weapon to be wielded as a sword. Thus it can be used in place of the wakizashi when employing the *Niten* style. While such a device would have less usefulness to a typical samurai than a normal *bajozutsu*, for students of the Mirumoto School the *Teppoto* is ideal, and many Mirumoto carry a *Teppoto* in addition to (or even sometimes in place of) their wakizashi. The most common tactic is to fire on a charging aggressor and then use the gun-barrel to deflect and parry attacks.

Different Gunpowder?

The official view of Rokugan's authorities is that the black powder created by the Agasha is not the same substance as gaijin polvara and thus does not pose the same spiritual or philosophical problems as the foreign substance. However, it is debatable as to whether this is really true. Is the Agasha black powder genuinely different, or has the Empire merely used that as an excuse to soothe its unease with the new technology? It is up to the GM whether or not there is actually a genuine difference between Agasha gunpowder and gaijin gunpowder.

- **Keywords: Medium, Samurai, Firearm**
- **Range:** 20 feet
- **DR:** 2k2
- Price: Due to the sacred nature of the Teppoto and the complexity of the weapon's manufacture, they are not normally available for sale.
- **Special:** The Teppoto can be wielded in melee as a wakizashi, using the Kenjutsu skill. It is also considered a wakizashi for purposes of the Mirumoto School techniques.

New Weapon: Heaven's Wing Kakiyari

An improved version of the standard Fire Lance, the Heaven's Wing Kakiyari is a unique and elegant firearm used by the Shiba family of the Phoenix. Unlike the regular Fire Lance, which is largely a disposable weapon, the Heaven's Wing Kakiyari is painstakingly crafted by Shiba artisans, made as much for beauty and reliability as lethality. Great care and expertise is required in the crafting of these weapons, since they must be carefully weighted and balanced to permit the Heaven's Wing techniques to be accomplished with them. Likewise, the iron barrel must be expertly cast in order to sustain multiple firings.

- **Keywords:** Large, Firearm
- **Range:** 80 feet
- **DR:** 3k2
- Price: 15 Koku
- **Special:** The Heaven's Wing Kakiyari can be wielded in melee as a Yari. If so, it's damage value is 2k2 and it cannot be thrown accurately. This kakiyari can be reloaded.



Chapter Four

The Heresy of the Five Rings

The garden of the Crane Embassy of Nikesake was heavily crowded that morning. Monks, samurai from every clan, and even peasants were all waiting for the famous monk Gorinno to offer his new interpretation of the Tao. Gorinno sat in meditation beneath a plum tree, and as the hours trickled past the crowd grew steadily more restive. But at last the monk stirred, opened his eyes, and addressed his audience.

"It is common knowledge the world is divided into five Elements, the Five Rings of existence," he said, his voice soft but perfectly clear. "Shinsei revealed to the Empire the secrets of the Rings, whose interaction brings harmony to our world. My meditations brought me to ask myself how the Five Rings truly manifest themselves in our world. Of course there are the obvious manifestations: light, wind, rain, or rocks." He gestured at the garden around him, the raked gravel beneath his feet, the sky overhead. "But they also manifest in more... subtle ways. I have come to realize that even our Empire's Great Clans are manifestations of the Five Rings."

The audience began whispering, surprised by this shift in topic, but Gorinno ignored their interruption. Silence fell once more as he continued, serene:

"The Crab, its people strong and stubborn, holding their ground no matter how desperate or dangerous their situation. They are the rock on which stands the Empire. These qualities make them a Clan of Earth.

"The Crane are gracious, confident, easygoing. They move through the courts like leaves in the wind. Most assuredly they are a Clan of Air.

"The Dragon explore the paths to Enlightenment. Each one of them is like a light in the night, their inner fire blazing. In that they are a Clan of Fire.

"The Lion Clan is like the ocean. Their armies are endless, their fury like a raging storm, their understanding of Bushido deep as the sea. Indeed they are a Clan of Water.

"The Phoenix are masters of all four Elements, but at the same time they stand between them all, binding them all. That is the wisdom of a Clan of Void.

"The Scorpion stands in the shadows, catching any whisper, any secret that lips let escape. They strike like the wind: invisible, yet you can feel its action. They are a Clan of Air."

He sighed softly, and as he looked around at the audience, his expression seemed almost sad. "Now, can you see the imbalance that plagues the Empire?"

The crowd was silent, for no one dared to speak the unspeakable. Finally the Crane ambassador stood. "There are two Clans of Air where there should be only one."

Gorinno smiled and nodded. For a moment, no one spoke. Then someone shouted: "Heresy!"

The garden erupted in clamor as everyone tried to speak at once, a few even lifting their hands and trying to bring order back to the assembly. Finally Gorinno stood, and at his motion silence at last fell once more.

"There is a way to bring back harmony in the Empire," Gorinno said calmly. "Remember the Ki-Rin. They also were a Clan of Water, but understanding the imbalance their presence caused, they preferred to leave the Empire."

The Crane ambassador smiled coolly, but his voice had an acidic edge. "Sensei-sama, are you truly suggesting that the Crane or the Scorpion must leave the Empire to restore balance?" It was clear from his tone that the Crane would certainly not be volunteering.

"Most assuredly not," Gorinno replied. "Why, I am not even suggesting one of these clans has to be destroyed." He said it as though it was a serious idea, and a chorus of gasps ran through the garden. "No, my solution is simpler. The Crane and the Scorpion are like two faces of the same koku; they are both needed to properly function. Balance must be maintained. The solution is the union of the Crane and the Scorpion into a single clan.

"Five Rings, five clans. Otherwise, balance will never be attained, and our misfortunes will only grow worse."

The Heresy of the Five Rings is an event which spans the years 519 to 535 of Imperial history. It is a side-effect of the First Rise of Iuchiban, which ended in the year 510 after the horror of the Battle of Stolen Graves. The shock of fighting their own undead ancestors was still fresh in the minds of many samurai, and the Emperor's insistence on a new custom of burning the dead was controversial, widely seen – especially among the heimin – as somehow cutting the connection with their ancestors. Many of a more religious nature began to suggest the Empire was suffering some manner of spiritual imbalance.

The monk Gorinno was a man gifted with both incredible charisma and a deep understanding of the Tao of Shinsei. He became quite prominent in the years following the Battle of Stolen Graves, traveling around the Empire helping the people of Rokugan to accept the new customs; it is said he even counseled the new Emperor when he was mourning his father. However, Gorinno also claimed to have attained deep spiritual insight into the nature of the Five Rings and the alleged spiritual malaise of the Empire. He then proposed a cure for the imbalance he perceived: Five Rings, Five Clans. If each Great Clan was directly connected to one of the Elements, the Empire would be in balance and all would prosper. But because there was one clan too many, the Empire was unbalanced, and evils like Iuchiban had become possible. Gorinno proposed the merging of the Crane and the Scorpion into a single Clan of Air. His idea was widely dismissed as heretical nonsense, but in the uncertain environment of the times it also attracted many adherents, especially in the Brotherhood and among the heimin. A series of peasant revolts followed, and soon the Brotherhood itself was plagued by acts of violence between its various sects. When Gorinno won the trust of the new Emperor, he came close to imposing his vision on the Empire as a whole, an event which would have profoundly altered the future history of Rokugan. Ultimately, only by a narrow margin was the Empire able to avert a plunge into full-fledged civil war.



Timeline of the Heresy

This section details the major events of the Heresy of the Five Rings as they unfolded over the course of sixteen years. It is divided into three sections: the Prelude (notable events that immediately predate the Heresy), the Heresy Begins (as Gorinno announces his teachings and throws Rokugan into chaos), and the Heresy Triumphant (as Gorinno becomes Imperial Advisor and attempts to impose his creed on Rokugan).

Prelude to the Heresy

Year 510

- Emperor Hantei XI orders the burning of all corpses to prevent any future undead attack. The decision produces major upheavals throughout the Empire, especially since it means many recently interred bodies must be unearthed and then cremated. Initially, there is no consistent ritual of cremation, and each shugenja and monk develops his or her own approach. This quickly leads to favoritism as samurai develop preferences for one or another type of ritual.

Year 512

- The Ikoma family daimyo, Ikoma Karaku, presents the controversial document called "Ikoma's Comprehensive History of the Empire" to the Imperial Court.

Year 514

- A *tsunami* hits the seashore provinces of the Crane. The local daimyo asks his cousin, an Asahina shugenja, to conduct the victims' funerals, but the shugenja is in the Dragon lands and takes weeks to return. While the local authorities were waiting for him, Bloodspeaker cultists steal several of the corpses.
- Hantei XI dies. He is succeeded by his son Hantei Hikawa, who becomes Hantei XII. He decrees the late Emperor's funeral will establish the standard funeral rites for all of the Empire. He tasks the Jade Champion, Seppun Matashi, with deciding on the most honorable and pious ritual. Matashi summons prominent shugenja and monks from across the Empire to join him in this duty.
- The Phoenix Elemental Masters, working as always to undermine the Jade Champion's authority, refuse all the rituals he proposes for the Emperor's funeral. The situation remains in a stalemate until a Four Temples monk, Gorinno, convinces everyone to accept his ideas. The funeral is a success and Hantei XII publicly thanks Gorinno and praises his enlightened wisdom.

Year 516

- The Crab lands come under attack from a large group of oni who work together. These attacks continue sporadically for more than a decade.

Year 518

- The Scorpion Clan captures Shiro no Meiyo, the Castle of Honor, on the Lion side of Beiden Pass. Scorpion Champion Bayushi Tsuya renames the castle The Lion's Shadow. The Lion Clan spends many years trying to retake the stronghold.

The Heresy Begins

Year 519

- While in the Phoenix lands, the monk Gorinno – who now has many followers and admirers throughout Rokugan – first proposes his radical doctrine of Five Rings, Five Clans. The idea causes great commotion, with some immediately condemning it as heretical or simply foolish. However, some – notably the prominent Phoenix shugenja Isawa Amaku and Kuni Watabe, daimyo of the Kuni – treat it as a valid idea.
- Emerald Magistrates arrest Gorinno for heresy, but the Emperor himself intervenes. He declares the person responsible for the funeral rites held throughout the Empire cannot be guilty of heresy, and rules that so long as Gorinno only teaches and does not actually urge anyone to take action, he is not to be touched.

Year 520

- Several small but troubling peasant revolts erupt in Crane and Scorpion lands as the *heimin* demand the Empire recognize Gorinno's wisdom and restore the Celestial balance.

Year 521

- The Lion Clan Champion, Akodo Kento, makes note of the recent peasant unrest and realizes Gorinno's Five Rings creed can be a political or even a military weapon against both the Crane and the Scorpion. He asks the Kitsu daimyo, Kitsu Eiji, to contact Gorinno and arrange a meeting with the monk. Gorinno and Kento soon become friends.

The Heresy in History and in Game

The era of the Heresy of the Five Rings is a relatively minor crisis in the official history of Rokugan, far less destructive to the Empire than many of the other crises depicted in this book and in the previous L5R 4th Edition supplement, Imperial Histories. Although the Heresy, like many unpleasant events, is subsequently erased from Rokugan's official histories, this was relatively easy given that the incident produced only moderate problems within the Empire and was contained to only a few years.

However, there is no requirement for each GM's game to depict the Heresy in the same manner. As this chapter notes more than once, it was entirely possible for the Heresy to escalate to the point of inciting actual civil war within the Empire, elevating it to an existential crisis comparable to the Great Famine, the second Rise of Iuchiban, or even the Clan Wars. It all depends on how aggressive the GM wants to be in re-making Rokugan's history to match his own ideas and his own campaign plans.

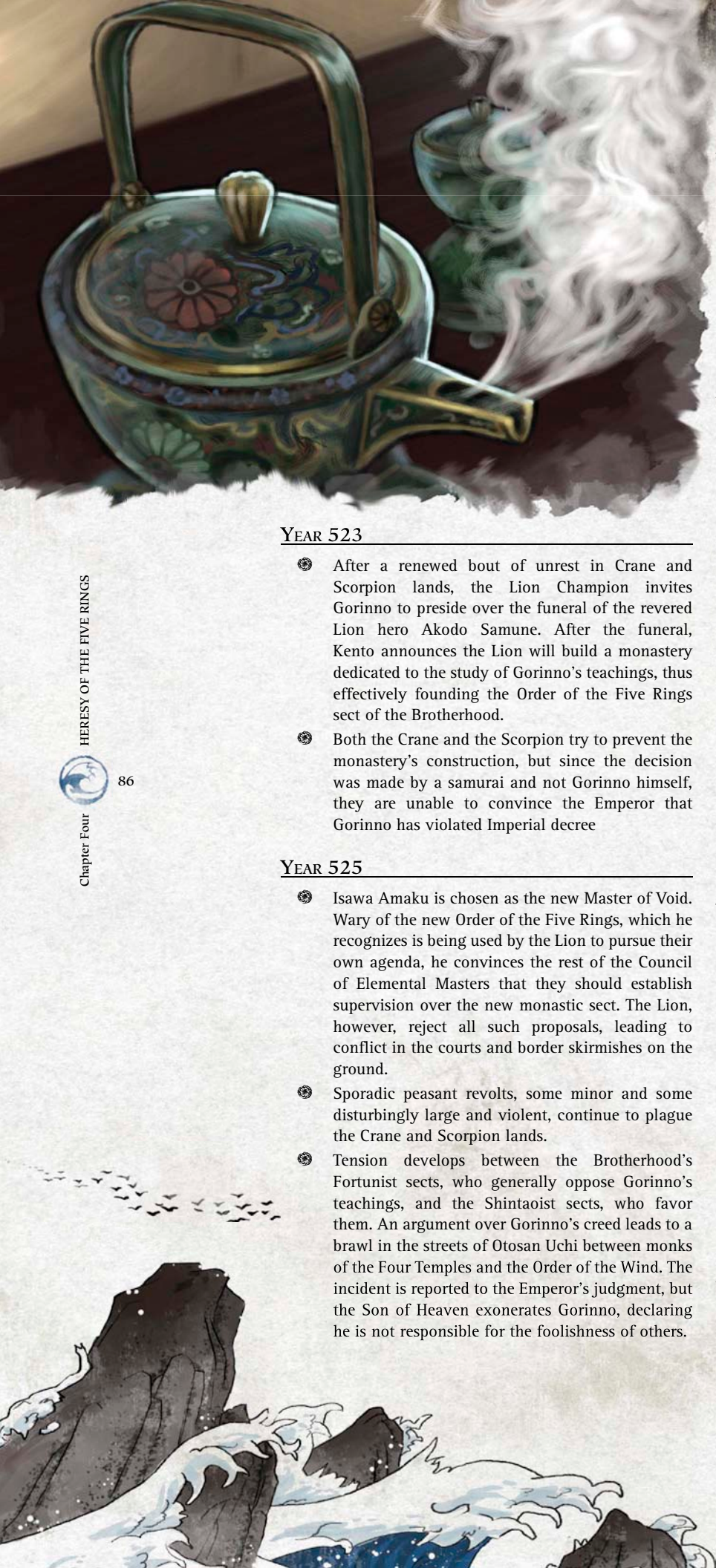
Even if the GM chooses to stick to the canonical history of the Heresy, this era is still a good example of how new stories can be woven into the pre-existing narrative of Rokugan's history, shedding new light on previously established facts.

Year 523

- After a renewed bout of unrest in Crane and Scorpion lands, the Lion Champion invites Gorinno to preside over the funeral of the revered Lion hero Akodo Samune. After the funeral, Kento announces the Lion will build a monastery dedicated to the study of Gorinno's teachings, thus effectively founding the Order of the Five Rings sect of the Brotherhood.
- Both the Crane and the Scorpion try to prevent the monastery's construction, but since the decision was made by a samurai and not Gorinno himself, they are unable to convince the Emperor that Gorinno has violated Imperial decree

Year 525

- Isawa Amaku is chosen as the new Master of Void. Wary of the new Order of the Five Rings, which he recognizes is being used by the Lion to pursue their own agenda, he convinces the rest of the Council of Elemental Masters that they should establish supervision over the new monastic sect. The Lion, however, reject all such proposals, leading to conflict in the courts and border skirmishes on the ground.
- Sporadic peasant revolts, some minor and some disturbingly large and violent, continue to plague the Crane and Scorpion lands.
- Tension develops between the Brotherhood's Fortunist sects, who generally oppose Gorinno's teachings, and the Shintaoist sects, who favor them. An argument over Gorinno's creed leads to a brawl in the streets of Otosan Uchi between monks of the Four Temples and the Order of the Wind. The incident is reported to the Emperor's judgment, but the Son of Heaven exonerates Gorinno, declaring he is not responsible for the foolishness of others.



Year 526

- Forces of oni and lesser Shadowlands beasts mount their largest assault yet on the Crab lands. Shiro Kuni is besieged for several months. Daimyo Kuni Watabe pleads with Gorinno to help his clan; the monk agrees and leads a large number of monks and peasant followers to the Crab lands. The rag-tag army helps break the siege of Shiro Kuni and drives back the Shadowlands beasts, albeit at heavy cost.

Year 527

- Dogen, an abbot of the Temple of Osano-Wo who is close to the Crab Champion, counsels him to expel Gorinno and his followers as soon as possible to prevent the wrath of the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. Although Champion Hida Oshu is reluctant to disrespect someone who helped the Crab Clan, he nonetheless accepts Dogen's advice and orders Gorinno to leave the Crab lands.
- Order of the Five Rings monks, angry at the Crab for expelling Gorinno, condemn the Fortunist monasteries in the Crab lands as misguided and selfish. The Fortunist sects defended their reputation and soon both factions resort to open violence. The conflict inside the Brotherhood spread through the Empire.
- The Dragon Clan Champion, Togashi Hiwata (the name used by the Kami in this era) dispatches samurai to many of the more prominent temples in the Empire to act as peacekeepers between the rival factions in the Brotherhood. They are able to control the violence, at least for a time.

Year 528

- Kakita Wayozu is named sensei of the Kakita Artisan Academy. She promotes artistic works that defend the Empire's traditional structure of six Great Clans. Soon after, the Scorpion began to use a similar tactic, using acting troupes from the Shosuro Butei Academy to perform plays supporting traditional social structures.
- After several inexplicable delays (actually caused by Scorpion sabotage), the Monastery of the Five Rings is finally completed. It is located in the foothills of the Spine of the World Mountains, close to the old Seikitsu Pass in Lion lands. Pilgrims and monks soon flock to the temple to study Gorinno's teachings.

The Heresy Triumphant

Year 531

- While traveling through the Crab lands, Kuni Watabe is challenged to a wrestling match by Ugoie, a monk of the Order of Osano-Wo, for his support of the Five Rings sect. Watabe accepts, but during the combat he slips and his neck is broken.

Gorinno's followers accuse Ugoie of murder and riots break out. Ugoie is murdered by the mob and the local Fortunist temple is burned. Rioting soon spreads to the rest of the Empire.

- Isawa Amaku decides the time has come to take control of the Order of the Five Rings once and for all. Realizing the Lion will only respect brute force, he personally leads an army to conquer the Monastery of the Five Rings, confronting a Lion army on the border between the two clans. Amaku intends to use his power over the Void against the Lion army, but during the battle he tries too much, loses control of his abilities, and gazes into the Void. The Phoenix are routed and Amaku is separated from the rest of the army, his fate unknown.
- After weeks of wandering the lands in a half-mad state, Isawa Amaku finds refuge in an isolated temple dedicated to the Fortune of Wisdom. He regains his sanity and recognizes his own mistakes; he returns to Kyuden Isawa, resigns his position as the Elemental Master of Void, and joins the Order of the Thousand Fortunes as a monk.

Year 532

- Hantei XII dies and is succeeded by his son, Hantei Satoru, who becomes Hantei XIII. The young Hantei has grown up as an admirer of Gorinno and his teachings, and one of his first acts is to name Gorinno as Imperial Advisor, giving him the power to directly enact his creed. Gorinno immediately begins actively pursuing his goal of merging the Crane and the Scorpion, using the continuing unrest and occasional riots to justify his actions. By the end of the year, major members of both clans are forced to marry, paving the way for an intended full merging.

Year 533

- Five Rings monks openly harass and attack Fortunist monks across the Empire, and there are an increasing number of incidents involving samurai as well. Gorinno uses his power as Imperial Advisor and confidant of the Emperor to silence any complaints.
- The Scorpion Clan Champion, Bayushi Tsuya, attempts to undermine Gorinno's massive political influence by crushing the Lion Clan, the monk's main supporters. He launches an ambitious military assault aimed at the capture of Kyuden Ikoma, but the Lion Clan's military skills prove the greater and his army is defeated after a short siege. Tsuya retreats to the castle he calls The Lion's Shadow, waiting for the Lion Clan's counter-attack.
- Akodo Kento leads the entire Matsu Second Army to battle at The Lion's Shadow. The Scorpion, led by garrison commander Bayushi Takida, hold their positions until a Dragon army unexpectedly arrives to help the Lion. The Scorpion are defeated and every man, woman, and child in The Lion's Shadow are killed by the Lion. A single Scorpion samurai named Shosuro Butei survives by hiding in the tunnels bellow the city. The Lion rename the city Kenson Gakka ("Humility's Lesson").
- After this disaster, Bayushi Tsuya commits seppuku and is succeeded by his daughter Bayushi Megumi. Since the Crane Clan Champion, Doji Iwata, is widowed, Gorinno decides it is now possible to merge both clans completely by wedding their Clan Champions. Bayushi Megumi, playing for time, asks the Emperor to wait three years before the wedding – three years being the traditional mourning period for one's parent.

Year 534

- At the end of Winter Court, Gorinno formally announces the betrothal of Megumi and Iwata. At his urging, the Emperor proclaims the merged Crane/Scorpion "Clan of Air" will be known as the Hawk Clan. With this announcement many monks of Order of the Five Rings felt confident enough to openly attack opposing samurai as well as monks from other sects; violence escalates throughout the Empire, often accompanied by peasant uprisings and riots, to the point where some regions almost seem to be in civil war.
- Bayushi Megumi undertakes a major covert campaign to push back against the Five Rings movement and undermine its support, especially among the common people. She secretly enlists both the Phoenix and (in an alliance of supreme pragmatic convenience) the Crane in the effort.
- As the Five Rings monks continue to escalate their activities, the Dragon Clan peacekeepers begin to switch policies and actively oppose the heretics. Tattooed men are sighted in many parts of the Empire, breaking up riots, humbling over-aggressive Five Rings monks, and otherwise working to restore order and harmony.



- A drought afflicts the northern Empire, seriously reducing the rice and grain harvests and threatening the possibility of hunger or even famine the following year. Gorinno and the Fives Rings monks proclaim this is a further sign of imbalance which must be corrected through the merging of the Crane and Scorpion. Many others in the Brotherhood, however, suggest it is instead evidence of Celestial displeasure with the Five Rings heresy.
- The waves of oni attacks on the Crab lands finally taper off, and Crab Champion Hida Yamate begins looking for opportunities to restore his clan's fortunes after years of heavy fighting.
- At the Imperial Winter Court, Scorpion, Phoenix, and Crane courtiers all stage a series of relentless political attacks on Gorinno, trying to undermine his position or somehow shame him. Gorinno and his samurai allies successfully rebuff all of their attacks, further enhancing his reputation in the eyes of the young Emperor. Many Scorpion and Crane begin to quietly surrender to despair, convinced that their ancient clans will soon be destroyed, and at the end of winter a wave of kanshi (protesting seppuku) sweeps through the ranks of both clans.
- During this same winter, the senior members of the Brotherhood of Shinsei hold a major conclave to discuss the ongoing problems created by both the Order of the Five Rings and Gorinno's teachings. The meetings are contentious, frequently disrupted by the small number of Five Rings monks in attendance, and the conclave is still in seclusion when spring arrives.

Year 535

- Hida Yamate sends an army into the southern Crane lands, hoping the impending forcible union of the Crane and Scorpion will make them too distracted to respond effectively. The Crane lack the military strength to stop the invaders, but the Crab meet an unexpected defeat when Master Sensei Kakita Wayozu unleashes her inner gift, causing the disappearance of herself, her fellow artisans, and the entire Crab army.
- As the weeks count down toward the impending wedding, the coordinated political attacks on Gorinno and the Order of the Five Rings escalate. The Phoenix in particular manage to make some headway by pointing to the social disruptions in the Empire and the threat of famine as proof that the



Five Rings heresy is weakening Celestial balance rather than strengthening it. Gorinno, increasingly frustrated by the relentless barrage of political attacks, finds it difficult to respond effectively to this charge, but this failing is not enough by itself to convince the Emperor to withdraw his support.

- Increasingly desperate, Bayushi Megumi begins plotting an assassination of Gorinno. However, she fears such an act will make him a martyr and merely increase the Emperor's determination to carry out the monk's plan.
- With only a week left before the fated wedding, a large delegation from the Brotherhood of Shinsei arrives in Otosan Uchi. Confronting Gorinno in open court, they announce the Order of the Five Rings has been formally named a False Path, and call on the monk to immediately undertake a pilgrimage of contrition. Gorinno, unable to handle being thwarted to close to his goal, erupts in screaming fury, threatening his followers will "burn down your temples and sow the ground with salt!" The court is shocked and Gorinno's followers, including the Son of Heaven, recoil from him. Too late, he realizes his mistake and appeals to the Emperor to expel these rival monks from the Imperial Palace... but the Emperor turns his back. The monks escort Gorinno from Otosan Uchi, never to return.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Order of the Five Rings unleashes a wave of violent rebellion against the rest of the Brotherhood, as well as against the Emperor for rejecting Gorinno. This further violence is skillfully exploited by Bayushi Megumi and Doji Iwata to harden the Emperor's heart against his former advisor. The Emperor issues an Imperial decree formally labeling the Order as heretical, and commanding it be permanently disbanded.
- At Winter Court, Akodo Kento and Kitsu Eiji commit *seppuku* to atone for their involvement in the Order of the Five Rings.

Side-Stories in the Heresy Era: The Crimson Kingdom

The timeline presented in this chapter depicts the main course of the Heresy of the Five Rings and other major events closely related to it. However, there are always plenty of other events happening during an era like the Heresy, events that may or may not escalate to the point of drawing attention from the Empire at large. The GM can add almost any sort of side-story to a campaign set within the Heresy (or any other era, for that matter). The following is an example of such a storyline:

Year 528

- With many Dragon samurai out in the Empire on peacekeeping missions, a group of Bloodspeakers led by a peasant woman named Chikako take control of one of the outlying Dragon Clan provinces. They rename it the Crimson Kingdom, with Chikako as their queen.
- Many Bloodspeakers and other *maho-tsukai* migrate to the Crimson Kingdom, seeing it as a refuge from Imperial authorities.

Year 529

- The Crimson Kingdom reveals itself by mounting a series of attacks against neighboring provinces. The Dragon Clan recalls its samurai to do battle with the maho-tsukai, and Hantei XII dispatches Emerald and Jade Magistrates to support the Dragon. The Phoenix Clan also sends groups of Inquisitors to assist.
- In early autumn the Crimson Kingdom is finally defeated in a bloody campaign by an entire Dragon Clan army, assisted by Phoenix and Imperial forces. Chikako is killed along with most of her followers; the survivors flee, and Imperial agents spend the next few years rooting them out.

The Clans and Factions During the Heresy Era

The Heresy era starts in the wake of the First Rise of Iuchiban, as the Empire comes to terms with the recent horrors and adjusts to the need for cremation rituals. Each clan and faction responds differently to the stresses and adjustments of this era, and it is these differences which open the way for the Heresy to be so influential.

The Crab Clan

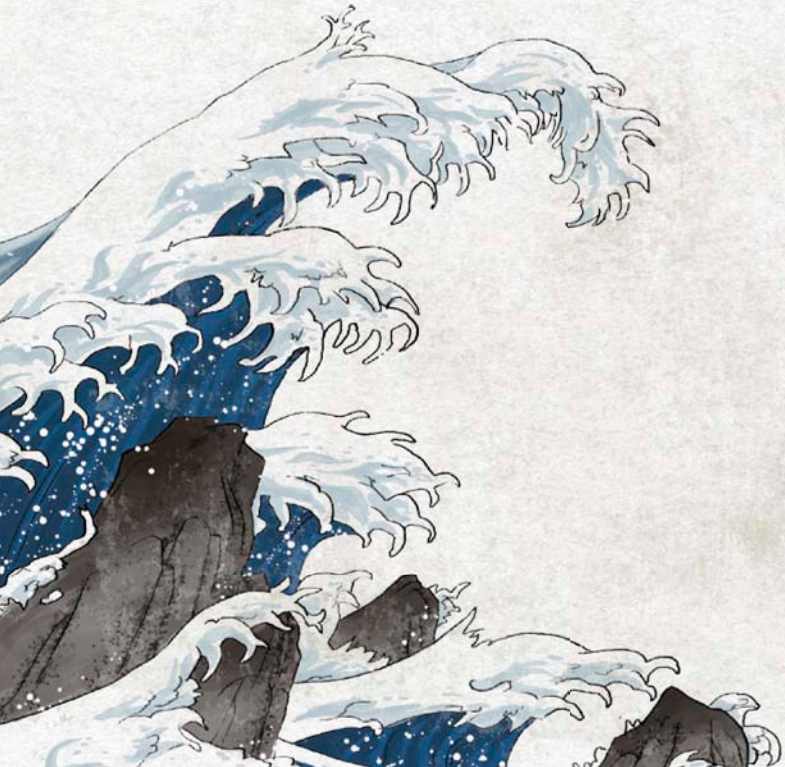
The Crab Clan initially hoped the Battle of Stolen Graves would lead to better understanding from the other clans of the horrors which they had to face on a daily basis. Sadly, this was not the case. As soon as the doors of the Tomb of Iuchiban were sealed, the rest of the Empire wanted to forget about that terrible time. The Crab Clan had no chance to remind them, for the Shadowlands stirred once more in the south; large packs of oni began to attack in organized groups. The pre-Wall defensive system of the Crab was continually tested by these powerful attacks, culminating in a siege of Shiro Kuni itself. Even after the siege was broken, the Crab still spent several more years fighting these oni before the threat finally receded.

When the Heresy began, the Crab were ambivalent about Gorinno's strange creed. On the one hand, merging the Crane and the Scorpion would leave only one clan of pampered fools instead of two. On the other hand, the merged lands of the Crane and the Scorpion would surround the Crab on two sides, and would be economically strong enough to choke the Crab Clan into submission whenever it wanted.

Moreover, the followers of the Heresy helped lift the siege of Shiro Kuni, which created a sense of obligation among many Crab.

Hida Oshu, the Clan Champion, sought the counsels of Dogen, an abbot of the Order of Osano-Wo, for guidance in dealing with the Heresy. However, Dogen was a fierce opponent of the Heresy; he counseled Oshu to denounce the Heresy to avert Osano-Wo's wrath. This drew opposition from those Crab who supported the Heresy, such as the Kuni family daimyo, Kuni Watabe. Trying to prevent any dissension in his clan, Hida Oshu did expel Gorinno from his lands but did not actually denounce the Heresy, nor did he punish anyone in his clan who followed Gorinno's creed.

Although Oshu's efforts prevented disunity within the Crab Clan itself, they could not avert violence between rival monastic groups within their lands. The Crab could do little to deal with such problems, since the Shadowlands demanded all their attention; even after these monastic disputes escalated into open fights, the Crab hesitated to intervene. They were wary of the possibility of peasant revolts (such as those plaguing the Crane and Scorpion lands) and also did not want to show weakness before the other clans. For a time this approach worked, but after the tragic incident involving Kuni Watabe and the monk Ugoie, the clan experienced much larger-scale violence, verging on outright rebellion. Thankfully, by then the attacks from the oni were in decline. The new Clan Champion, Hida Yamate, re-allocated many troops from the border to restore control within the clan's lands. When the impending wedding of the Crane and Scorpion Champions was announced, the Crab had regained enough control to be able to take action against the Crane, hoping to avert the economic encirclement they feared might result from the creation of the merged "Hawk Clan." This action was not without its own problems – notably the unexpected disappearance of a Crab army confronting a group of Kakita artisans – but the new resources proved beneficial on the long term. It would be over a generation before Crane political pressure forced the Crab to give back their conquests.



The Crane Clan

In the aftermath of the Battle of Stolen Graves, the Crane were not in a strong political position. Iuchiban's chief lieutenant was a Crane, Asahina Yajinden, and this did considerable political damage to the clan. True to form, though, the Crane did not succumb to despair but simply went back to work rebuilding and expanding their networks of favors and alliances. When Gorinno first proposed to merge them with the Scorpion, the Crane did not even bother to scoff at the notion – they simply ignored it, as something far beneath their notice.

What the Crane misjudged was the reaction of the heimin to Gorinno's doctrine. The common folk were deeply superstitious, and the Empire's recent bad fortunes – not only the rise of Iuchiban, but also the tsunami which hit seashore provinces in the year 514 – seemed to prove Rokugan had earned the wrath of the Heavens. If merging the Crane and the Scorpion could prevent future disaster, clearly this was the right thing to do, and when the samurai rejected Gorinno's wisdom it seemed as though revolt was the only option left. At first, the Crane easily crushed these petty revolts, but the problem escalated when the Lion Clan and the Phoenix Clan both gave their support to Gorinno's creed. Belatedly recognizing that they were facing a mass movement, the Crane adopted a campaign of actively opposing the Heresy with both politics and art. The leadership of the Kakita Artisan Academy played a key role in opposing the Heresy throughout the Empire, and this era thus became an exceptional one for Crane art.

This approach had some success, and the Crane were able to better control the unrest of the common people in the later years of the Heresy. Unfortunately, they were unable to prevent Hantei Satoru from appointing Gorinno as Imperial Advisor after he ascended to the throne. The Crane were unprepared to face the prospect of the Emperor outright commanding the merging of their clan with the Scorpion, and no amount of political favor seemed to be able to convince the Emperor to reject Gorinno's counsel. Although Hantei XIII had a Crane wife (like all Hantei Emperors), she too found herself unable to avert his decision. The Crane tried everything to delay the forced union of their Champion with the Scorpion ruler, obstructing the Imperial bureaucracy with endless demands, trading favors with the Imperial families to delay the preparations, and waging a continual political campaign against Gorinno in the courts. When lesser-ranking Crane and Scorpion were forced into marriages, the Crane made sure these unions were childless – and then argued this showed divine displeasure toward the idea of a merged clan.

When the Crab attacked the Crane lands, Kakita Wayosu and her artisans sacrificed themselves to save their lands – the first instance of a Crane discovering the Academy's ultimate artisan technique. Later generations would study Wayosu's accomplishment and learn how to duplicate it. At the time, however, the Crane hoped to make use of her magnificent achievement to convince the Emperor to abandon Gorinno's plans. After Wayosu and the Crab army

vanished, they left behind a book written in a unknown language, illustrated with images of those consumed by Wayosu's fictional world. The Crane presented the book to Hantei XIII, and he was so moved by it that he almost cancelled the wedding. Sadly, "almost" was not enough – Gorinno convinced the Emperor to stand firm and continue the project.

Ultimately, it took the intervention of the rest of the Brotherhood to bring an end to the Heresy and save the Crane from being merged together with their hated Scorpion rivals. Naturally, the Crane found this embarrassing, and did their best to erase every mention of the Heresy and of the forced weddings it had occasioned. They had help in this, of course, from Imperial historians who had no wish to remind anyone that the Emperor had listened to Gorinno's heretical advice. Ultimately, in later centuries the only legacy of the Heresy was the magnificent art which future generations enjoyed without any knowledge of its historical context.

The Dragon Clan

During the Heresy era, the Dragon Clan initially followed its traditional policy of not intervening in the affairs of the Empire. The large number of monks and shugenja in the clan made it easy for them to transition to the new tradition of cremation, and Togashi himself (going by the name Togashi Hiwata in this era) did not seem overly interested in the topic. When Gorinno decided the official rites at the funeral of Hantei XI, the Dragon Clan readily adopted the new standardized rites.

Togashi did not approve of Gorinno's creed of Five Rings, Five Clan, and the Kami forbade any member of his clan from supporting it. However, he did not take any overt measure against the monk or the Order of Five Rings. It was only when the Brotherhood itself fell into internal conflict that the Dragon Clan began to show concern about the Heresy. The Clan Champion dispatched Dragon samurai throughout the Empire to try to arbitrate disputes between monks and preserve the peace.

This large presence of Dragon Clan samurai outside the clan boundaries was quite rare, almost unprecedented, and drew considerable attention. At first, many Brotherhood monks expected the Dragon samurai to help them get rid of the Order of the Five Rings, but they stayed scrupulously neutral and even the Order of Five Rings quickly came to respect them. Only a few members of the Order operated within Dragon lands, and they were careful not to provoke the Dragon Clan, hoping they could convert the clan's neutrality into acceptance and approval. The monastic violence which plagued so many other parts of Rokugan never spread to the Dragon lands.

Unfortunately, this effort to maintain peace within the Brotherhood was not without cost; the departure of so many samurai left Dragon territory with minimal protection, and a remnant group of the Bloodspeaker Cult seized the opportunity to carve out its own small kingdom on the fringes of Dragon territory. The so-called Crimson Kingdom became a thorn in the side of the Dragon Clan and ultimately required a large-scale military campaign, supported by Imperial Magistrates and the Phoenix Inquisitors, to snuff out.

This era also saw a rare instance of Dragon intervention in inter-clan struggles when a Dragon army appeared at Kenson Gakka, helping the Lion retake their castle from the Scorpion. As was so often the case, Togashi did not explain his actions, and both the Lion and the Scorpion were equally mystified by this intervention.

Ultimately, the Dragon withdrawal back into their lands may have served a larger purpose. With Dragon samurai no longer present to maintain the peace, the Brotherhood finally was driven to take decisive action against the Heresy. Perhaps that was Togashi's intention all along, or perhaps it was simply a fortunate coincidence – history will never know.

The Lion Clan

The Lion Clan was at a peak of fame and honor after the Battle of Stolen Graves. The magistrate Akodo Minobe had helped reveal Iuchiban's plot and his actions had ensured victory in the subsequent battle against the Bloodspeaker's undead army. The attention of the Imperial court was monopolized by the presentation of Ikoma's "Comprehensive History of the Empire," which inspired many young Ikoma to push the boundaries of their family's traditions.



Then the Scorpion attacked. The sudden loss of Shiro no Meiyo took the Lion greatly by surprise and humiliated their leadership. The Clan Champion, Akodo Ieyatsu, immediately set out to retake the castle and died in the unsuccessful attack. His son Akodo Kento became the new Clan Champion, and chose to take a more patient approach to the Scorpion challenge. Rather than directly assault the Scorpion Clan's prepared defenses, he instead chose to support Gorinno's unconventional creed. The Scorpion and Crane lands were already plagued with peasant riots brought on by the Five Rings Heresy, and Kento believed if the Lion Clan supported Gorinno's creed it would lead to even more such uprisings, weakening both of the rival clans. Kento assigned Kitsu Eiji to contact Gorinno and establish a relationship.

The Lion Clan's sponsorship of the Order of Five Rings, a new sect within the Brotherhood, came as a surprise to all in the Empire; after all, the Lion had never expressed any kind of interest in Shintaoism, and their own religious practices were focused overwhelmingly on ancestral worship. To Kento, this was the genius of his plan: to strike where no one expected, as Akodo taught. Of course, the clan's own religious observations did not change – Kento never embraced the Five Rings Heresy for himself, nor did he encourage other Lion to do so.

Some of the more traditionalist Lion in the clan's senior ranks did not approve of his strategy, particularly his choice to hold the Lion armies on the defensive. They also pointed to the sporadic peasant uprisings and Brotherhood violence within the Lion provinces as proof that his policies were misguided. However, Kento refused to listen to them and persisted in his plans. The Lion Clan's defeat of the Phoenix in 531, and its victories against the Scorpion in 532 and 533 – culminating in the triumphant recapture of Shiro no Meiyo, which Kento renamed "Humility's Lesson" – seemed to prove his policies correct.

Unfortunately, the Battle of Kenson Gakka would prove to be the last success of Kento's reign. The year before, Gorinno had been appointed Imperial Advisor, and his effort to finally force the unification of the Crane and Scorpion triggered fierce resistance and, ultimately, his demise when the rest of the Brotherhood declared the Order of Five Rings to be a False Path. The close association of Akodo Kento and Kitsu Eiji with the rise and spread of the Five Rings Order brought great shame upon the Lion Clan, and both leaders committed seppuku to atone for their failures. Kento was succeeded by his cousin Akodo Renzu, a strongly traditionalist Lion. In later years, Kento's unconventional and ultimately destructive behavior was blamed by some on the influence of Ikoma's "Comprehensive History," and the book would be largely suppressed by the Ikoma historians.

The Phoenix Clan

In the wake of the Battle of Stolen Graves, the Phoenix – perhaps unsurprisingly – attacked the authority of the Jade Champion. The Council of Elemental Masters felt the Jade Magistrates were imposing upon the sacred duties passed on from the first Emperor to the Phoenix. They argued their own Inquisitors were better suited to the task, since they could call on the Phoenix Clan's deep knowledge of all forms of magic. Inquisitors and Jade Magistrates clashed over jurisdiction and authority many times during this era, and such distractions may have contributed both to the rise of the Heresy and to ugly tangential problems such as the Crimson Kingdom in Dragon lands.

The Phoenix had been devoted followers of Shintaoism since the dawn of the Empire, not least because Shinsei's wisdom had opened to door to a far deeper understanding of magic and the Elements. Thus, many of them eagerly embraced Gorinno's notion of five Great Clans to match the Five Rings, seeing it as the perfection of Shinsei's teachings. Gorinno's creed also appealed to the Asako henshin order, since the transformation he proposed to the Empire seemed to fit well with their own doctrine of the transformation of the soul on the Path of Man. In fact, the Heresy era proved to be one of the few times in the Empire's history when the Isawa and Asako families worked in harmony together.

Another impact Gorinno's creed had on the Phoenix Clan was the glorification of the *ishiken*. The shugenja of Void had always been respected within the clan, but when Gorinno specifically identified the Phoenix Clan with the Void, they gained much additional respect and influence. The foremost *ishiken* of the era, Isawa Amaku, was especially enamored of Gorinno's teachings and chose to use only Void magic, deepening his insight into the Element. Thus, he was the obvious choice when the position of Elemental Master of Void became vacant. Amaku soon convinced the Council to actively support the Order of the Five Rings and promoted the idea that the Phoenix should take direct control of the Order themselves. Unfortunately, this led to conflict with the Lion Clan, and border skirmishes between the two clans became frequent.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the clan's support for the Heresy, Five Rings monks caused significant problems within the Phoenix provinces, clashing with traditionalist monks of the Brotherhood. The Shiba sought to contain this infighting, and at first both henshin and shugenja involved themselves in these efforts as well, but as the violence continued to escalate many Phoenix became disenchanted and concluded their clan's pacifistic ideals required them to stay out of the conflict.



When Isawa Amaku finally sought to take control of the Order of Five Rings by force, the defeat of the Phoenix army by the Lion struck a further blow against those who had supported the Heresy. Indeed, when Amaku himself gazed into the Void, lost his sanity, and later emerged from madness to confess the error of his ways, many thought the Heresy had been struck a decisive blow. From that moment forward, the Phoenix Clan concluded that Gorinno was following a False Path; the Council of Elemental Masters retired to meditate, as did many individual samurai. They hoped that by espousing true pacifism and non-intervention they would show Gorinno and his monks their errors and bring an end to the violence. During the last years of the Heresy, Phoenix outside their lands became rarer even than Dragon, with only Inquisitors and a few diplomats venturing beyond their borders.

When the Heresy ended, the Phoenix returned to their normal lives, convinced that their example had contributed vitally to the Brotherhood's final decision to declare the Order of Five Rings a False Path.

The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion were in a strong position in the years immediately prior to the Heresy. It was the Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Rikoji who had suspected Iuchiban's plot and dispatched the magistrate who teamed up with Akodo Minobe to expose the Bloodspeaker's plot. Rokiji's successor, Bayushi Tsuya, then planned and executed an ambitious assault on the Lion city of Shiro no Meiyo, seized it, and renamed it The Lion's Shadow. In the courts, the Scorpion maintained a lower profile but enjoyed good standing with the Emperor due to their assistance in hiding Iuchiban's true identity.

The Scorpion had never felt much interest in the affairs of the Brotherhood. Of course, some Shosuro spies pretended to be monks, just as they sometimes pretended to be peasants or ronin, but such missions were matters of practicality; the clan felt no need to spy on monks when spying on samurai was so much more important. Thus the Heresy came to a considerable surprise to the Clan of Secrets. The first peasant revolts in Scorpion lands were motivated by superstition, much like those in the Crane lands, but they grew in strength as many peasants began wondering if a merged clan would treat them with greater compassion. For a time the Scorpion simply endured the troubles, maintaining order as best they could and waiting for this strange notion to die away.

The creation of the Order of the Five Rings by the Lion, however, was a provocation the Scorpion could not ignore. Turning Gorinno's heresy into a religious order threatened to not only maintain the peasant unrest but make it far worse. The Scorpion resisted the Lion effort in the courts and launched raids across the border to disrupt the construction of the new monastic order's headquarters. When conflict within the Brotherhood spilled over into the Scorpion lands, Scorpion magistrates hounded monks regardless of their affiliation, causing even more heimin unrest. The Scorpion used both military strength and more covert methods to suppress these troubles, but found themselves constantly in danger of overstretching their resources. Much of their effort in the courts went into maintaining a façade of aloofness, as if nothing was bothering them, thereby preventing the other clans from sensing their weakness.

The Crane used art to oppose the Order of the Five Rings among the common folk, with some success, and the Scorpion eventually decided on a similar strategy. The Shosuro Butei Academy produced a large number of plays designed to show the peasants the mistakes of Gorinno's creed. Numerous acting troupes were sent across the Empire to perform these plays and to collect information about the heresy.

Nonetheless, the Scorpion position was not a good one. Once Gorinno became the Imperial Advisor, Bayushi Tsuya began to feel desperate. He convinced himself that the only way to stop Gorinno would be to crush his main supporters, the Lion; a military defeat would weaken the Lion and rob Gorinno of his greatest political support. Tsuya devised an ambitious plan to invade the Lion lands and cut them in two, but his military skills proved unequal to defeating the famed Akodo tacticians; his army was

Alternate Paths: The Hawk Clan

"Gracious, yet hooded" – Hawk Clan motto

What if Gorinno had his way? A GM who wants to really delve into the possibilities of alternate timelines can go ahead and let him succeed, merging the Crane and Scorpion together into the new Hawk Clan. Although this would give rise to considerable initial resentment from the samurai of both clans, over time most of them would probably come to reluctantly accept their new position and role in the Empire.

The Hawk Clan would ideally take the best aspects of both of its predecessor clans. It would be a powerhouse in the courts, mixing the alliance-networking of the Crane with the manipulation and blackmail of the Scorpion, and most likely no other clan would be able to withstand it in political conflicts. The Hawk would still be the masters of iaijutsu and the home to the great artists who set the cultural trends in Rokugan. In war, the Hawk Clan's army would be mostly defensive, but would be considerably stronger due to combining the archery and swordsmanship of the Crane with the Scorpion Clan's network of spies, saboteurs, and assassins. (For that matter, the Daidoji Harriers would probably find a union with the Shosuro to be rather congenial.)

A GM wanting to use the Hawk Clan in a later era should be prepared to rework a lot of the history of Rokugan. For example, when the Unicorn returned, they waged war on the Scorpion (and their victory marked them as a potent new force in the Empire), but it was the Crane who helped Rokugan to accept them. What happens if there is only the Hawk Clan? Does the clan welcome the Unicorn or treat them as enemies? The Scorpion Clan Coup provides another and even more dramatic example. Would the Hawk Clan do the same thing, or would just a part of the clan attempt the Coup, leading to a civil war?

Mechanically speaking, unless the GM wants to spend many hours developing new Basic Schools, it is best to keep things simple. The primary (Kami-founded) families should remain separate and distinct; other families can also remain separate, or can be merged based on having the same Trait bonus or the same role. Similarly, the GM can opt to simply keep all the Basic Schools (since each has distinctive teachings), or keep only those representing the dominant traditions of the new Hawk Clan, with the other Schools surviving only as Alternate Paths.



defeated, and the following year the Lion recaptured Shiro no Meiyo at the Battle of Kenson Gakka. Bayushi Tsuya died there, and his defeat – combined with Gorinno's seemingly unstoppable political influence – appeared to be the end for the Scorpion.

However, appearances can deceive. Tsuya's daughter Megumi waged a relentless political war against Gorinno, fighting to weaken and delay his campaign to force the union of the Crane and the Scorpion. Ultimately, her efforts bought enough time and inflicted enough frustration on Gorinno that he could finally be brought down by the Brotherhood's condemnation. With Gorinno defeated and the Heresy purged, the Scorpion quickly restored stability in their lands and eagerly assisted in erasing the Heresy from the Imperial records.

The Minor Clans

The decade before the Battle of Stolen Graves proved how vulnerable the Minor Clans could be. The Boar Clan was sacrificed in the year 501 by a Bloodspeaker called Agasha Ryuden, who used their deaths to create the sinister artifact known as the Anvil of Despair. The whole Gusai family was forced to commit seppuku after they kidnapped of the Emperor's son in the year 510. These recent disasters prompted the Minor Clans to mostly keep to themselves during the Heresy era; they generally took a neutral position and avoided the worst of the violence. Only the Fox and the Centipede Clans were involved in the major events surrounding the Heresy.

Gorinno had claimed the Ki-Rin Clan left the Empire because they understood the imbalance they created, being a Clan of Water like the Lion. The Ki-Rin who had stayed in the Empire had become the Fox Clan, and they now found themselves asked repeatedly to confirm or deny Gorinno's claim. Kitsune Hashibi, the Clan Champion, carefully refused to answer such questions lest the Fox Clan be dragged into the midst of the Empire's larger problems and conflicts. This proved a difficult balancing act, since the clan faced constant pressure from both sides of the Heresy debate, but Hashibi proved adept at saying whatever his current audience wanted to hear without actually committing himself irrevocably.

The Centipede also drew some unusual attention. As followers of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, they were often visited by Fortunist monks seeking guidance and protection. This in turn marked them as a target to the Order of the Five Rings, and the Centipede were forced to physically defend their small valley on several occasions from groups of angry Five Rings monks.

Another event that affected the Minor Clans during the Heresy era was the tsunami of 514. The Mantis Isles suffered the brunt of this storm, causing major disruption to their trading operations. The Centipede, Sparrow, and Tortoise lands also suffered from storms, flooding, and other related problems. In the Sparrow lands, ironically, the heavy storms after the tsunami washed large amounts

of sediment into their lands from higher elevations, leading to a few years of good harvests afterward. The Centipede and the Tortoise lands both suffered more significant damage, but managed to recover fairly quickly. The Mantis, however, had a more difficult time and many of their ship captains resorted to piracy, either to help the rebuilding effort or simply to survive. Yohihotsu, the lord of the Mantis, did not want to jeopardize the future of the clan and forbade further piratical activity, but many captains disobeyed, and ultimately Yohihotsu felt compelled to wage war against these rebellious captains.

The Imperial Families

After the Battle of Stolen Graves many among the Imperial families felt a distinct sense of failure. The Otomo had not even realized Otomo Jama was descending into madness, and the Seppun had not even been able to fulfill their duty to protect the Emperor, since it was a Lion magistrate who turned the tide of the battle. Thus, by erasing the true identity of Iuchiban the Imperial families hoped to erase their own shame. When Seppun Matashi won the Jade Championship, many interpreted it as a sign the fortunes of the Imperial families would turn around. Unfortunately, when Hantei XI died soon after and his son Hantei Hikawa ascended to the throne, Matashi's confusion with the funeral rites of his father led to the ascendancy of Gorinno.

The Imperial families were horrified when Hantei XII refused to take any action against Gorinno and strictly forbade anyone to hurt the monk, even to the point of commanding a few Seppun samurai to protect him. To the Otomo, the creation of the Order of Five Rings was a symbol of the Emperor's indecision and a challenge to his authority; the Otomo worked hard to try to obscure the Emperor's role in the spread of the Heresy, fearful that ambitious samurai might abuse the situation. They also worked with the Seppun shugenja to try to cause more friction within the Brotherhood. Some of the more ruthlessly pragmatic Otomo actually saw the Order of Five Rings as a useful way to promote division between the clans, preventing them from turning against the Throne.

When Hantei Satoru succeeded his father, the Imperial families hoped he would finally put a stop to the Heresy, but the opposite happened: he appointed Gorinno as Imperial Advisor. Like his father, Hantei Satoru was a young man when he ascended to the throne, but where his father had been undecided Satoru wanted to make Gorinno's creed a reality. The Imperial families tried many time to convince Hantei XIII to change his plan, but Gorinno was always able to persuade him back. The Otomo in particular aligned themselves with the Crane-Scorpion alliance that was trying to undermine Gorinno's power; ultimately, however, it was the Brotherhood which resolved the problem. The Otomo were more than a little embarrassed that Gorinno was brought down by his fellow monks rather than by their actions, and were thus more than happy to help purge memories of the Heresy from Imperial records.

The Brotherhood

The Heresy era proved to be one of the worst crises the Brotherhood of Shinsei faced in the long history of Rokugan. Gorinno's creed was deeply divisive, pitting Shintaoists against Fortunists. The core theological problem the Heresy posed to the Brotherhood derived from the tradition that each monk had freedom to pursue Enlightenment in his own way; thus, it was impossible to instantly proclaim the Five Rings creed unacceptable. Since the Emperor chose to remain silent on the matter, the Brotherhood was left to debate – and ultimately, to fight – on its own. Fortunists emphasized respect toward the founding Kami; the Great Clans were their work and must be respected. The Shintaoists were more flexible; the Five Rings creed, they argued, was simply another potential path to Enlightenment, and should be freely explored.

The eruptions of violence within the Brotherhood were made worse by the conditions of the time. The Rise of Iuchiban had inspired more monks to train as sohei, warrior monks, and thus there were more warriors and fewer pacifists in the Brotherhood ranks when the Heresy emerged. The influence of the Lion Clan also encouraged the Order of the Five Rings, specifically, to follow a martial path and fill its ranks with large numbers of sohei. All of this facilitated the spread of violence through the Empire.

The Heresy also magnified the individual moral failings of monks. The dispute between Fortunists and Shintaoists turned into bitter hatred for far too many monks. For example, Dogen advised the Crab Champion to expel Gorinno and his followers from the Crab lands – not because he wanted to prevent Osano-Wo's wrath, but because he secretly hoped Gorinno would resist, giving the Crab an opportunity to strike him down.

When Gorinno became Imperial Advisor, he manipulated the Imperial Court to turn a blind eye on the worst excesses of the Five Rings monks.

Ultimately, the leaders of the Brotherhood decided that any creed which promoted so much violence and division could not be a true path to Enlightenment. Their declaration that the Five Rings, Five Clans belief was a False Path was the pivotal moment that flung Gorinno from power; thus the Heresy ended, as it began, within the ranks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.



Important Personages of the Heresy Era

This section presents two of the movers and shakers of the Heresy era. These NPCs represent two different outlooks on Rokugani spirituality, and thus can potentially be used in other time periods by a GM wanting to showcase these outlooks.

Gorinno

Heretical Monk and Imperial Advisor

A young boy was left behind by his own parents as they fled an approaching army. Alone in a village, cold, hungry, the boy thought he was going to die. But then a wandering monk came and took him under his care. The army never came, and the boy never saw his family again. He grew up in a monastery, and his intellectual abilities and insight blossomed, and he took the name of Gorinno.

As he gained fame and notoriety, Gorinno could not forget how alone he was. He craved human contact, to have people always at his side. When he devised his own unique conception of the relationship between the Five Rings and the Great Clans, he always remembered Shinsei's words: "Fortune favors the mortal man." Gorinno saw that fortune favored him after he revealed his new creed, and he gained powerful allies such as Kitsu Eiji, Kuni Watabe, and Isawa Amaku. With them at his side, Gorinno believed he could change the Empire forever, bringing about his ideals.

The death of Kuni Watabe was a heavy blow to Gorinno, but it was when Isawa Amaku, now Amaku the monk, told him he was wrong that Gorinno truly felt betrayed and abandoned. His former equanimity gave way to an increasingly frantic and fanatical determination to see his dream to fruition. Now serving as Imperial Advisor, he remorselessly manipulated the young Hantei XIII to do everything he wanted, pushing ahead against increasingly bitter and determined resistance. When the Brotherhood itself turned against him, it was the final blow to his self-control, and his loss of face in open court ended his dreams.



Gorinno, Monk and Imperial Advisor

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

Awareness: 5 Willpower: 4 Intelligence: 5

Honor: 3.8 *Status: 9.1* *Glory: 7.8* *Infamy: 6.7*

School/Rank: Four Temples Monk 5

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Craft: Farming 1, Defense 2, Divination 2, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation) 5, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Jiujutsu 2, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 8, Meditation 5, Sincerity 4

Kiho: Buoyed by the Kami, Channel the Fire Dragon, Chi Protection, Cleansing Spirit, Eight Direction Awareness, Flee the Darkness, Grasp the Earth Dragon, Harmony of the Mind, Touch the Void Dragon, Unbalance the Mind.

Advantages: Allies (Various), Hero of the People, Sacrosanct, Sage, Social Position (Imperial Advisor)

Disadvantages: Ascetic, Cast Out (Fortunist sects), Driven (prove his creed is right), Infamous

Isawa Amaku

Master of Void

The young Isawa Amaku came from a long line of ishiken, so it was no surprise that he also proved to have the gift of Void magic. He trained intensively throughout his youth to be worthy of his gift and his ancestors, but soon arrogance followed talent and he came to look down on those who could not speak to the Void, even within his own family. Perhaps this lack of enlightened humility was why his sensei sent him to Nikesake to listen to the famous monk Gorinno. However, hearing Gorinno declare the Phoenix to be the Clan of Void only reinforced Amaku's conviction that *ishiken* were superior. The young shugenja embraced Gorinno's philosophies to the fullest and vowed to never use a non-Void spell again.

Perhaps in part from sheer enthusiasm, Amaku's prowess as a Void shugenja soon became almost legendary. Despite his youth, he was selected to become the Elemental Master of Void when the previous Master retired. Amaku used his new position to push more strongly for the Phoenix Clan to support Gorinno's philosophies; he was furious when the Lion made use of the Order of the Five Rings to cause problems for the Crane and Scorpion. His hostility to the Lion behavior led to border skirmishes and eventually to war, a violation of the Phoenix Clan's tradition of pacifism. Other Phoenix increasingly withdrew their support from Amaku's policies, but his arrogance made him blind to his clanmates' arguments; only when he himself was forced to pay the price for his mistakes by losing control and gazing into the Void did he begin to understand how foolish he



had been. Fleeing his army's defeat against the Lion, he finally found refuge in a small shrine to Fukurokujin, the Fortune of Wisdom, and there Amaku achieved true enlightenment. He saw the oneness in all things, that everything was part of the unity of the Five Rings, and balance was a matter not of superficial social change but of true understanding of the pattern formed by the Celestial Wheel. He resigned from his position and joined the Temple of the Thousand Fortunes.

Amaku's enlightenment allowed him to see the hole in Gorinno's soul, and he tried to help his old teacher. Gorinno, however, refused to see the truth. After the monk's final disgrace, Amaku continued his own teachings, and in his old age he became one of the most respected sensei in the Brotherhood.

Isawa Amaku, Master of Void

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 7
Willpower: 4 Intelligence: 5

Honor: 6.7 *Status: 7.8* *Glory: 6.8*

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Void) 5 (Isawa Tensai, Void)

Skills: Battle 2, Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Courtier 3, Defense 1, Divination 2, Etiquette 1, Games: Go 2, Investigation 4, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Spirit Realms 3, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 5, Meditation 6, Spellcraft 9

Spells: Although Amaku, as an Elemental Master, has access to almost any spell, he refuses to use anything but Void spells

Advantages: Ally (Gorinno), Ishiken-do, Social Position (Master of Void)

Disadvantages: Driven (to control the Order of Five Rings), Touch of the Void

Faith and Politics: L5R Campaigns During the Heresy Era

The Heresy of the Five Rings was a shock for the citizens of the Empire. For the first and only time, Rokugan came close to experiencing a war of religion, something which caught almost everyone by surprise. To confront the Heresy is to question one's personal beliefs and spirituality, and any campaign set during the Heresy era should raise these questions for the players.

Ultimately, the Heresy is about the relationship between spirituality and politics. The Lion use the Heresy to further their own goals. The Phoenix retire from politics to prove their point. Hantei XIII's naïve idealism almost destroys the Crane and the Scorpion. In fact, the Heresy itself was possible only because of the failure of the previous Emperor, Hantei XII; by refusing to condemn Gorinno, he opened the way to a spiritual crisis.

In Rokugan, the Emperor functions as both a political and a religious leader, the ruler of the Great Clans and the supreme authority over the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Thus, it is ultimately the Emperor who can declare a teaching or a creed to be heretical. Of course, Emerald Magistrates can accuse someone of heresy, and the Brotherhood can designate a creed as a False Path, but it is the Emperor who serves as the final arbiter of such matters should they rise to the attention of the Imperial Court. (As an example, consider the case of Shiba Tsuna, depicted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire, page 168.) When Hantei XII refused to condemn Gorinno's creed of "Five Rings, Five Clans," yet also refused to embrace it, he created an unprecedented gray area in Rokugan's religious life; neither accepted nor condemned, the creed was left to spread through personal initiative.

The Heresy directly affected how every samurai viewed the Empire. By trying to link each Great Clan to an Element, Gorinno in effect was re-inventing how each clan was perceived, proposed a new way to see each of them, a way that lay outside of both clan tradition and the prism of Bushido. The Code of Bushido focused on the Virtues a samurai most uphold, clan traditions focused on the duty of each clan to the Emperor, but the Heresy said that instead the most important thing was the correspondence between the clans and the five Elemental Rings. Although the Heresy did not directly oppose Bushido, it created a new and very different way of understanding one's place in the world. Surprisingly, even in the two clans targeted by Gorinno's creed (the Crane and the Scorpion) some samurai joined the Heresy, seeing it as a superior vision of the world that could reconcile the Empire's recent troubles. In an L5R campaign, a group of heretic samurai from clans opposing the Heresy can provide an interesting dynamic, since these samurai cannot count on their clans for support and must build up their own network of allied heretics, samurai from more supportive clans, and Brotherhood monks.



The Heresy put shugenja in a particularly difficult position. Although the kami they spoke to did not have any opinion on the Heresy, the shugenja could hardly deny the importance of harmony and balance in the Elements, something the Heresy claimed was vital to the success of the Empire. Gorinno's views on the Great Clans and their relationship to the Elemental Rings corresponded surprisingly closely to the natural inclinations of the clan Shugenja schools of that era. On the other hand, some shugenja had access to the Spirit Realms and could speak to their clan's ancestors, perhaps even to the founding Kami themselves, all of whom rejected Gorinno's views. Thus many shugenja found themselves torn in their loyalties and struggling to find a way to reconcile Gorinno's apparent wisdom with older traditions.

It may be noted that shugenja also had much more contact with both the Brotherhood and the peasants than other samurai. Most shugenja trained in temples staffed with Brotherhood monks. In some clans, such as the Crane, Phoenix, and Crab, the shugenja shared responsibilities with the local monks for conducting the rituals of life (such as the celebration of a birth or the rites of a funeral) for their heimin. Thus they experienced first-hand the impact of the Heresy, both good and bad, on the monastic orders and the common people. In an L5R campaign, the GM can use this contact to show the various sides of the Heresy to the players.

The Heresy era also saw more emphasis on the relationship between samurai and the Brotherhood. Normally, monks and samurai do not interact a great deal, since monks stand aside from the social order and spend the bulk of their time ministering to the common folk. Likewise, samurai who retired to the Brotherhood usually did not maintain significant contact with their clans. Typically, most samurai only encountered monks when they collected taxes from monasteries or updated their records on the local heimin and hinin population. Occasionally, of course, a monk would rise to prominence as a teacher to samurai, or as a source of trouble which samurai had to suppress, but these were very much the exceptions rather than the rule.

During the Heresy, however, monks became much more prominent in the Empire's affairs and frequently came into conflict, even violent conflict, with samurai. Monks can be formidable combatants when they choose, but the true menace they create for samurai is their influence over the peasants. The common folk of Rokugan have always had a great deal of respect for the Brotherhood and can easily be inspired to take up arms on their behalf. This became a major problem during the Heresy era. Even when samurai were trying to stop monks from fighting each other, as the Dragon did on several occasions, this could frequently lead to resentment from the local population, planting the seeds of future revolt.

Dealing with monks in court also became a more frequent event during the Heresy, and a challenging one at that. GMs who wish to emphasize the more subtle frustrations of dealing with the Heresy may wish to explore this aspect of the era. Monks are taught to be humble, so

the typical court tactics of embarrassment and humiliation are not the most viable strategies to deal with them – and may even increase sympathy for the monk. Gift-giving and blackmail are of no use with most monks, since they eschew material possessions and usually have no secrets to hide. A theological debate can be more effective, but monks study the Tao as intensively as shugenja if not more so, and thus make formidable opponents in such arguments. It is also worth noting that monks who follow the Order of Five Rings may be "villains," but are not Tainted monsters or other such conventional villains – they are simply men and women who have a differing belief system.

The Heresy also sheds some interesting light on the way peasants experience religion. *Heimin* and *hinin* do not have access to their ancestors as samurai do. In fact, many peasants resent the Imperial edict to cremate dead bodies because it destroys the physical connection with their ancestors, the only connection they enjoyed. Of course, tombs and funeral urns were used before the edict and are still used after, but the corpse had been a specific physical presence. Peasants also have a great many superstitions, quirky beliefs which are tolerated by samurai and monks alike, since they help the peasants to make sense of the world around them. Most of these superstitions are dedicated to sensing and averting bad omens, and the Heresy nourished itself on these bad omens, offering a convenient explanation and a promise of future protection. Peasants, in fact, formed the backbone of the Heresy as a mass movement; the creed "Five Rings, Five Clans" was easy to remember and spread quickly throughout the commoner population. The monks of the Order of Five Rings went freely among the peasants, promising a bright future if the Empire embraced their teachings and warning of disaster if they were ignored. (It should be noted that most peasants were not genuine heretics, merely simple and uneducated people who were manipulated by the teachings of the Five Rings monks.)

For a GM running a campaign set in the Heresy, it is important to remember that spirituality is not just about Ranks in the Lore: Theology skill. It is a fundamental aspect of any Rokugani character, a vital part of their personality and story. The Heresy offers many challenges to conventional Rokugani beliefs, and these challenges are an excellent way to explore characters' morality, beliefs, and principles. How do the PCs deal with the clash between Fortunist and Shintaoists in the Brotherhood? How do they confront the Five Rings creed and its subversion of the traditional roles of the clans?

The All-Monk Campaign

The sidebar on monk characters in the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook (page 231) observes that running a monk is liable to "earn the undying hatred of your GM!" Although the comment is humorous, it gets at a serious point: Brotherhood monks do not always fit well into a conventional L5R campaign. L5R is designed first and foremost to explore "samurai drama," the challenges of trying to live as an honorable samurai in a world which seldom lives up to the Code of Bushido. Even the members of the Togashi Tattooed Order are still part of a clan, still bound by the same demands as other samurai. Brotherhood monks, however, are outside the social order of samurai Rokugan, with very different duties and responsibilities and a different moral code. The challenges which motivate samurai have little meaning to them.

However, the L5R RPG is designed to embrace flexibility. One way to explore this, and to solve the "problem" of monk characters, is to turn the normal game on its head and have all the players run monk characters – an idea that can work especially well in the Heresy era, where monks lie at the center of much of the action. Of course, an all-monk game poses its own unique challenges for both the GM and the players. The various sects inside the Brotherhood usually coexist, so having monks from various different Orders causes much less inter-party friction (and drama) than having characters from multiple clans. Of course, in the Heresy era there is some friction, and the GM can always add some of his own. Perhaps the abbots of two neighboring temples do not like each other, or perhaps a prominent monk switches from Shintaoist to Fortunist philosophy, prompting tension between the Orders. After all, just because the Brotherhood espouses peace and Enlightenment does not mean its members are always free from personality conflicts.

Monks are more flexible in their in-game "roles" than samurai are, which can be both liberating and daunting. A samurai character's basic role is usually defined by his school, with the player developing personal variations on that role. Monks, however, are defined more by their philosophical disciplines and their choices of Kiho than by their Schools. The various monk disciplines (described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, pages 193-194) are effectively philosophical "overlays" that define role and character without any mechanical element, and the players can further adjust their approach by which Kiho they choose to learn. *Sohei* monks are those who become warriors, defenders of the common people. They work tirelessly to strengthen their bodies,



Monk Characters and Kiho Limitations

In an all-monk campaign, some players may feel frustrated with the limited number of Kiho in the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook. In particular, they may feel it is annoying to have essentially the same powers as another character who is from a different school, or they may want to distinguish their character in a more special way.

The Elemental series of supplements for the L5R RPG is gradually introducing new Kiho into the game, but if those books are not available, or the player wants something they do not have, the GM may wish to consider the optional rules for Basic Spell/Kiho Creation in the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire, page 284. This approach will allow players to customize their monk characters to match their specific vision, though of course the GM should be wary of any new Kiho that seriously disrupts game balance.

and any character who chooses to focus on Martial Kiho can function as a Sohei – a good role for players who prefer to run characters of a more physical nature. The *Questioners* are ascetics who always thrive to shatter other's perception of reality; this makes them a good choice for a social-oriented character. The *Lotus* discipline monks are mystics, obsessively following religious texts, making them suitable for both scholarly characters and for players who wish to focus more on Mystical Kiho. The remaining two monk disciplines, *Shintao* and the *Yamabushi*, tend to be loners and thus may not be suitable for player characters (although the players can always develop unusual backgrounds to explain why their hermit-like monk has left his remote mountain fastness.) Much as with a party of samurai from multiple clans, the best approach is for the GM and players to talk about the kind of game they want and what sort of characters can be acceptable.

It should be noted the samurai "monk schools," like the Togashi Tattooed Order, the Asako Henshin, and the Kuni Witch-Hunter have the same problems in an all-monk campaign as monks have in a "normal" samurai-centric campaign, since the obligations a samurai faces are different from those of Brotherhood monks. The Order of the Spider monk school, while technically an off-shoot of the Brotherhood, poses its own challenges. In a game set before the Spider Clan gained Great Clan status (such as the Heresy era), the Order of the Spider can potentially be allowed into the game – although there will always be tensions between players of regular characters and those running a "villain" (much like the problems that can arise from allowing Spider Clan characters in a "normal" samurai game).

Almost all the types of adventures described in the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook's Book of Void can be used without any difficulty in an all-monk campaign – though of course the specific conflicts and dilemmas will be different. Monks do not have to choose between obedience to one's lord versus personal honor, but a monk might find himself in a dilemma choosing between the needs of a particular situation and the search for Enlightenment. A clever GM can also develop conflicts based on whether a monk follows the worldly approach or prefers to be more ascetic (see the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire, page 189). Perhaps a monk belonging to one philosophy finds himself facing problems the other philosophy can resolve more easily. For example, a worldly monk in a region where the peasants are revolting might be tempted to simply join in alongside them, but a more ascetic approach focused on Taoist study might inspire the peasants to realize their mistakes and peacefully end their revolt. The involvement of samurai can also be used to focus on the worldly/ascetic clash. As another example, consider an ascetic monk who must find the money to pay annual taxes before the clan magistrates arrive to collect. Praying to the Fortunes for divine intervention might be his preferred approach, but it might be more effective to go out and look for the money, or find something else the magistrate might want.

Although the Heresy is obviously an ideal setting for an all-monk campaign, in point of fact such a campaign can be set in almost any of the eras depicted in this book or in its predecessor, the first Imperial Histories. The all-monk campaign lets GMs and players look at well-known events from a completely new angle. Monks had an important role in the Gozoku era, for example, but how does the Brotherhood react during the Clan War or even during the Thousand Years of Darkness? The monks can be depicted as quietly moving "behind the scene," or the GM can turn things around and give the monks the spotlight. For example, what if the Seven Thunders at the end of the Clan War were all monks who could trace their bloodlines back to the original Thunders?

An all-monk campaign is a good opportunity to explore the life the heimin and hinin castes in a different light. Samurai pay little attention to these folk (especially the hinin), expecting them to simply bow and do as they are told. Monks, by contrast, interact with these people daily, join them in their labors, and consequently are often admired by them. Admittedly, role-playing a monk plowing the fields may not appeal to most players, but showing the life of the peasants can change the pace of a game in a beneficial way and help players focus on different kinds of role-play. Peasants usually more open to monks, giving the players the opportunity to discover a less well-known side of Rokugan. And of course these sorts of games also cast a different light on the samurai. A samurai can be an antagonist who oppresses the commoners and abuses the monks, but he can also be an enlightened samurai who demonstrates the proper ways of the Celestial Order, or simply a dutiful man carrying out an unpleasant task. If a samurai is investigating an accidental death at the monastery, suspecting the monks

of murder, is he an antagonist or merely a good man fulfilling his duties?

The eternal monastic quest for Enlightenment offers many opportunities for role-play. Aspects of this quest include emotional detachment, trying to lose one's focus on the self, and accepting things without judging them. Such things are not easy to do, especially when faced with an angry samurai or a heartbroken peasant, and the GM can build many effective role-playing encounters out of these conflicts. A GM who wishes to add a mechanical reinforcement to the quest of Enlightenment may wish to experiment with adding an "Enlightened" Rank that functions in the same manner as a samurai's Honor rank, going up or down as the monk becomes more or less Enlightened.

Finally, it should be remembered that not all monks are kindly or selfless. Asian literature and folktales are replete with drunken and mischievous monks who get into all manner of difficulties with the common people. GMs and players who wish to have more fun with an all-monk campaign should feel free to introduce one or more characters of this type, racing from one bout of trouble to the next, barely ahead of outraged husbands and furious peasants.

A Darker Heresy: Gorinno the Villain

In the basic timeline of the Heresy, the monk Gorinno is a misguided idealist whose determination to bring his vision into reality nearly plunges the Empire into chaos. However, some GMs may prefer to take a different approach and depict Gorinno as a more straightforward villain, a purely negative figure who brings much greater danger to Rokugan.

One version of this approach is to depict Gorinno's ambitions as extending beyond merely the merging of the Crane and Scorpion. For example, suppose Gorinno learns about a pre-human ritual of the Five Ancient Races, a ritual which banished the Taint from the mortal world (at least for a time). Slowly putting the pieces of this ritual together over the years, he decides to carry it out at the same time as the Crane and Scorpion Clans merge, thereby "proving" the correctness of his creed by eliminating the Taint at the same moment the Empire's supposed disharmony is repaired. He uses the Order of Five Rings to seek out and capture members of the four remaining ancient races: a kenku, a ningyo, a troll, and a zokujin.



Alternate Paths: The Heresy in Other Eras

Although the official timeline places the Heresy in the early sixth century, GMs can easily adapt the concept for other eras of play. The Heresy could potentially take place in any time period when there are only six Great Clans. For example, the Heresy could be added to the Gozoku era or even to the Great Famine era from the first Imperial Histories supplement, adding depth to those eras or simply escalating them by creating an additional crisis.

After the return of the Unicorn, the Heresy of the Five Rings is harder to incorporate into the timeline in its "normal" form, since merging four Great Clans would generate far more opposition than with merely two. However, the GM could still adapt the basic concept of the Heresy by changing Gorinno's specific demands – perhaps he argues for a change in the Empire's social structure rather than focusing specifically on the number of Great Clans.

In eras after the Mantis Clan and the Spider Clan gain Great Clan status, the Heresy could be approached in a different way. There are now nine clans, so perhaps Gorinno believes there should be two clans for each Element, and demands the creation of a tenth clan to restore Elemental balance. For example, the Elements could be Air for the Crane and Scorpion, Earth for the Crab and Spider, Fire for the Dragon and Mantis, Water for the Lion and Unicorn, and leaving only one Void clan, the Phoenix. This alternate Heresy might demand a second Clan of Void to keep the balance, or propose to disband the Phoenix and merge them into the Brotherhood of Shinsei, thus sparkling religious violence. Perhaps it might also propose to create a new force of special "Elemental Magistrates" to oversee the pairs of clans, alienating the clans from traditional Imperial rule. The possibilities are only limited by the GM's imagination.

For the Kitsu he relies on a full-blooded Kitsu shugenja, preferably his friend Kitsu Eiji.

From there, the GM can easily spin out an epic tale. Perhaps Eiji refuses and is imprisoned or even murdered by Five Rings fanatics lest he betray their leader. This would create a mystery for the PCs to investigate, slowly unraveling the secrets of the Five Rings Order and its leader. The GM can escalate this storyline as much as he wants – perhaps Gorinno has to secure the power of the Oracles to carry out the ritual, and sends members of the Order to seek out the Covenant of each Oracle, to force them into obedience when the moment is right. Perhaps Gorinno decides he needs to focus the power of the ritual through the Emperor himself (or one of his blood), committing the ultimate act of treason in the name of his dream. Do the PCs discover the truth in time? And if they do, how do they prove it to a naïve young Emperor?

A GM who wants to escalate Gorinno's villainy in a different way can instead choose to present a timeline in which the Heresy escalates into a full-scale civil war, either within the Brotherhood or between the Brotherhood and the Empire. The Empire has seen many inter-clan wars both large and small, but there has never been a full-scale conflict between samurai and the Brotherhood; a GM who wants to thrust the PCs into an epic conflict that is unusual and challenging can find this approach very effective. It is also a conflict that can be morally troubling for characters on both sides, since neither the Brotherhood nor the samurai are "bad guys" – they both are doing what they think is right. Such a war can escalate as far as the GM is willing to take it, since the monks of the Brotherhood are numerous and can potentially call upon vast numbers of devout peasants to support them.

New Mechanics

The Order of the Five Rings

The Order of the Five Rings was a relatively short-lived sect within the greater Brotherhood of Shinsei that, sadly, gained incredibly notoriety and considerable influence during the Empire's sixth century. The order's meteoric rise was largely attributable to its leader, the charismatic monk Gorinno, who had gained the Empire's attention when he was consulted by the Emperor himself to assist in determining formal cremation rites for the entire nation. Although he was already known as a wise teacher and gifted orator, this act catapulted Gorinno to an unprecedented position of influence in the Empire. It was from this prominent position that he created both his heretical philosophy and the order of monks who would follow it.

Even in the beginning, the members of the Order of the Five Rings were extremely devoted to their founder, and as the years of the heresy unfolded they became increasingly fervent in their beliefs, almost to the point of acting as a cult. Moderate members of their order were weeded out early on, leaving only zealots and borderline lunatics where there had once been scholars and orators. Once the heresy was concluded, the Empire quickly dissolved the Order of the Five Rings, and it is mentioned only in a few texts within the monastic libraries of the Brotherhood.

Members of the Order of the Five Rings are notorious for their strange abilities, which permit them to find strength in even the slightest imbalance of the Elements. Normal theological and philosophical doctrines accept that some

small degree of imbalance is inevitable (and indeed is a hallmark of humanity's inherent imperfection as a race born from both the blood of Lord Moon and the tears of Lady Sun). However, the monks of the Order of the Five Rings are able to exploit these minor weaknesses in a manner the rest of the Brotherhood cannot replicate – or has chosen not to in the years since the Order's demise.

New Basic School: Order of the Five Rings [Monk]

- **Devotion:** Shintao
- **Benefit:** +1 Awareness
- **Starting Honor:** 4.0
- **Skills:** Courtier, Defense, Etiquette, Jiujutsu, Lore: Elements, Lore: Theology (Shintao), Meditation

Technique: Cracks Within the Elements

Monks of the Order of the Five Rings excel at seeking out the imbalances within others and exploiting them to their own advantage. Whenever you are making an attack roll or a Social Skill Roll against a mortal opponent, you gain a bonus to the roll equal to twice the difference between your opponent's highest and lowest Rings.

New Ronin Path: The Hawk Purists

During the years of the Heresy the Empire has, as always, many ronin desperate for acceptance and belonging. Since the Hawk Clan did not yet formally exist, there was technically no penalty for impersonating a member, and some ronin took this opportunity to represent themselves as members of the Hawk Clan, hoping not only to mitigate the circumstances of their day-to-day existence but also perhaps to gain acceptance into the ranks of the Hawk Clan if the Heresy succeeded. As the Heresy escalated, these ronin became numerous enough to band together and develop a simple Technique to enhance their efforts, but once Gorinno was cast down it became dangerous to continue claiming allegiance to the Hawk, and the former "Purists" scattered and abandoned their Technique.

GM may also use the Hawk Purist Technique to represent any ronin band that aspires to become a Minor Clan and thus lays claim to a larger name and identity.

New Ronin Path: Hawk Purist [Courtier]

- **Technique Rank:** 1
- **Benefit:** +1 Reflexes
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Hunting, Jiujutsu, Kenjutsu, Kyujutsu, any one Skill.
- **Starting Honor:** 3.5
- **Outfit:** As per True Ronin or Clan Ronin, as appropriate (L5R 4th Edition core rulebook, page 234)

Technique: Grace from the Shadows

The ronin who fancy themselves members of the Hawk Clan rely on a mix of popular opinion, bluff, and intimidation to make themselves part of a greater movement and gain favor with others. Any time you are speaking with another person, you may assert your membership in the "Hawk Clan" and try to convince him to treat you with corresponding respect. This is a Contested Awareness roll (and is a Complex Action if Actions are relevant). If you succeed in the roll, your opponent will treat you as if your Status is one Rank greater than it is. (Thus a normal Status 0 ronin will instead be treated as though he is Status 1.)





Chapter Five

The Reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum

Hida Tsuneo, Crab Clan Champion and advisor to the Emperor, stared down at his hands for a moment before nodding for the servant to continue pouring. As the water ran over his hands and into the ornate basin below, it pooled deep red, then pink. Finally the water dripping from his hands fell clear. He nodded for the servant. "Return to the cellar with the others."

The servant bowed deeply, his eyes fixed on the tatami at his feet, and backed out of the room. Tsuneo could hear him becoming ill once he was out of sight. The Stone Crab shook his head and then turned to survey the room and the results of his Lord's orders.

Three children lay dead in the room. The smallest, Otomo Hiroku, 15th in line to the throne, was three years old. Hiroku had not even had the chance to sit up before Tsuneo killed him. The next oldest, Otomo Kori, 14th in line to the throne, had been five years old... before the Clan Champion of the Crab had cut him nearly in half. The eldest, Otomo Furiki, 13th in line for the throne, had been eight years old. Furiki had somehow managed to find a tanto and tried to stab Tsuneo before the Crab General stepped on the boy's arm, crushing his bones, and then reached down and broke his neck.

Tsuneo bent down and dried his hands on one of the children's blankets, one that was not entirely soaked with blood. "Traitors," he said quietly, then strode out of the room. On his way out of the house, he stopped in the kitchen and lifted up the heavy table used to prepare food. Cookware spilled across the wooden floor, clattering loudly. With only a soft grunt, Tsuneo swung the massive table around and placed it in front of the cellar door.

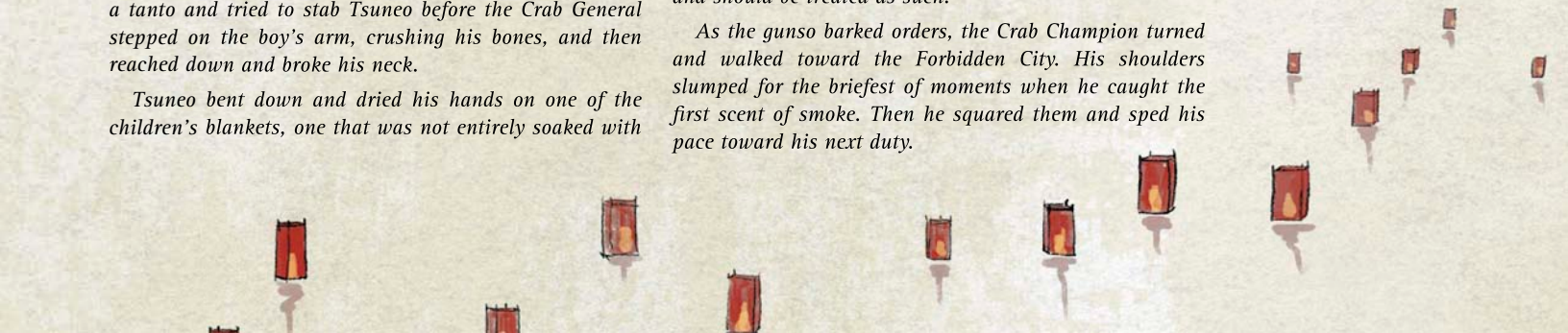
The servants' voices came from the cellar, faint and fearful. "Crab-sama? When can we come out, Crab-sama?"

The Stone Crab called through the door, "You will all be free soon." He turned and strode out of the house.

Freedom, *Tsuneo thought. That would be nice. What is that old expression? Death is lighter than a feather, duty heavier than a stone. No use contemplating that which cannot be. He had a job to finish.*

Outside the house, Hida Tsuneo approached the group of soldiers waiting nearby. A grizzled-looking gunso bowed to him. Tsuneo grunted in response, then said, "Burn the house to the foundation. Anyone who escapes is a traitor and should be treated as such."

As the gunso barked orders, the Crab Champion turned and walked toward the Forbidden City. His shoulders slumped for the briefest of moments when he caught the first scent of smoke. Then he squared them and sped his pace toward his next duty.



Rokugan Under Tyranny

"Let the people hate, as long as they also fear."
- Hantei XVI, The Steel Chrysanthemum

The era known as the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum was one of the darkest in the history of Rokugan. What differentiates it from other dismal periods is that it was not due to some Shadowlands incursion, Bloodspeaker uprising, or gaijin invasion, but was instead the direct result of the madness, paranoia, and unbounded ambition of a single man, Hantei Okucheo, who became Emperor Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum. The terror and destruction of his reign was entirely his creation, making it an era of terror born solely from man, not the supernatural.

The reign of Hantei XVI began with a short period of prosperity and happiness in the Empire, but things slowly changed as his madness and cruelty manifested more and more. Ultimately, the horror of Okucheo's reign was so terrible that the most loyal samurai in the Empire, the Seppun *miharu* bodyguards, turned on the man they had sworn to protect.

A campaign set in this era can become one of both amazing highs and the darkest of lows. Such a campaign will center on the desperate struggle to understand and predict a man who was both a political genius and a paranoid psychopath, and on how the paranoia of an Emperor can spread to infect an entire Empire.



Hantei Okucheo, the Early Years

Hantei XV was not an inspired or memorable Emperor, and he knew it. He took the throne in his mid-twenties and spent much of his reign simply maintaining the status quo his father had implemented. His wife, Otomo (formerly Doji) Kaoichihime, became his trusted advisor, and it was largely due to her influence that Hantei XV was more than merely a figurehead during the early years of his reign. Kaoichihime bore the Emperor six children, four sons and two daughters. As the children grew, the eldest, Toruo, began to show signs he would be much like his father when he reached adulthood. However, their second son Okucheo showed amazing intelligence even at an early age. The Emperor and Empress were almost relieved when Toruo died in a tragic accident at the age of seven. He fell into one of the ornamental fountains in the palace gardens and drowned. When the Seppun arrived, following the frightened shouts of a child, they found Okucheo leaning over his brother, pounding on his chest, trying to revive the boy. His efforts were unsuccessful, but Okucheo was lauded for his ingenuity and compassion.

Okucheo seemed to live a charmed life. He was not only highly intelligent but also a political prodigy. When he was six, his mother brought him to court with her and by merely listening to the conversations around the room he was able to tell his mother about three separate plots underway at that very moment, all of them designed to gain power for clan daimyo and to take it from others more closely allied with the Imperial houses. His mother was skeptical that a six-year-old could have seen political machinations she had missed, but she investigated his claims and soon discovered each of the plots young Okucheo had seen was real. Because she was forewarned, she was able to forestall each of them. From that point forward Okucheo became a staple of the Imperial court, soon learning how to curry favor with the courtiers and how to subtly change the tenor of political discussions in his family's favor. It was because of young Okucheo's political acumen that his father was able to take a firmer hold on the Empire and begin to implement changes and political strategies more sophisticated than any he could have devised on his own.

A side effect of this was that other influential courtiers and daimyo started to bring their own children to court as well. As Okucheo grew older, his intelligence and political acumen were enhanced by charisma; he made friends easily and found it easy to convince others to follow his lead. As a result, young Okucheo gathered around him a group of impressionable children who would go on to become the most influential people in the Empire when he took the Throne. Many of them would also later be considered some of the most sadistic and opportunistic courtiers and warriors the Empire had ever seen.

When Okucheo reached the age of gempukku, he left the capital to tour the Empire. During this trip Okucheo visited all of his court friends in their homes and crafted many new relationships as well. It was also during this trip

that Okucheo met the young Hida Tsuneo. The two men could not have more different physically; Tsuneo was tall and broad, with a face that was in no way attractive. He moved carefully and seemed to ignore the social demands of his station. Okucheo, on the other hand, was slim and narrow, with features considered highly attractive, and his immaculate kimono were always the height of fashion. Despite their physical differences, however, the two young men recognized intelligence in one another and became fast friends. Hida Tadaka, the Champion of the Crab, gave his son permission to travel with the young Okucheo, and the youthful Crab learned much about the Empire as well as coming to trust and revere Okucheo.

While in the lands of the Lion, Okucheo and Tsuneo decided to take a trip into the countryside alone to see what the peasants really thought about their rulers. They saw much of the common people's lives, but during the trip the two men came under attack by bandits. In the ensuing battle Okucheo saved Tsuneo's life, and the young Crab swore he would serve Okucheo unswervingly until the Hantei no longer needed him. This oath became the foundation of Tsuneo's unyielding devotion to Hantei XVI, a devotion which ultimately transcended death itself.

When Okucheo turned twenty, his father decided it was time to retire and hand the Empire over to a man who was clearly much more suited to being Emperor than he. Hantei XV shaved his head and departed for a monastery, and Hantei Okucheo became Hantei XVI.

The first five or so years of Okucheo's reign were a time of nearly unparalleled prosperity in the Empire, earning him the nickname of the Golden Chrysanthemum. His connections with all of the clans made it easy for him to institute his policies, and his understanding of the peasants allowed him to get the most out of all of his people, a rarity for an Emperor. But after two bad growing seasons, when one of his childhood confidants implemented policies that went directly against Okucheo's suggestions, things began to change in the Empire. And Okucheo himself began to change, becoming suspicious, vindictive, and increasingly cruel. Within only a few years, the gifted young Golden Chrysanthemum would bring the Empire to its knees, and christen himself the Steel Chrysanthemum instead.

The Dark Times: The Madness of Hantei Okucheo

Hantei Okucheo could have been one of the most influential and revered Emperors Rokugan ever had. He was highly intelligent, charismatic, and had amazing political savvy. But he was also insane.

From his early childhood on, Okucheo began to fear other samurai were out to steal the position of Emperor from him. Accordingly, he took steps to surround himself with people he believed were completely loyal... to him, not the Empire. This early paranoia resulted in Okucheo arranging the death of his older brother, Toruo, rationalizing to himself that the boy was weak and would endanger the power and security of the Throne. His success in this deed, however, also convinced him that his own cleverness and ruthlessness could protect him from almost anything.

As Okucheo grew older, both his paranoia and his arrogance intensified. He began to see enemies around every corner, but for much of his early reign he was careful never to let anyone see the depths of his madness. After all, to let his enemies know that he knew about their plots would give them power over him. It was not until late in his tenure on the Throne that his madness began to overwhelm his logical mind. Nonetheless, everything Okucheo did throughout his reign, from beginning to end, was a direct result of his paranoia.

Hantei XVI and the Peasants

Although few historians pay note of it, in truth the life of the average peasant remains unchanged even in some of the darkest times in Rokugan. Only a few of the Empire's great crises have impacted the common folk. It is sometimes said, with considerable truth, that the history of Rokugan is the history of its samurai, not of the heimin.

While Hantei XVI was extremely brutal and sadistic to the samurai under his rule, he generally did not abuse the peasants in the same manner, and some accounts suggest he treated the heimin with a surprising amount of respect until the final and most insane days of his rule. Why this should be true is something of a mystery. Some historians theorize Hantei XVI did not believe the peasants were a threat to him, so they were saved from most of his paranoid delusions. Others believe that during his youthful trip through the Empire he came to regard the peasants as more honest and genuine folk than the samurai of his own caste, and this odd respect circumvented the worst of his later madness. Of course, in the last degeneration of his rule he abused the peasants as badly as anyone else, so it is possible they merely avoided his attention in the earlier years.

It is up to the GM to decide the true reasons for Hantei Okucheo's treatment of the common folk. And of course a GM who wishes to make the Steel Chrysanthemum an even more malignant leader can extend his cruelties to the lower castes throughout his reign, rather than merely in the final years. (It is worth noting that when he returned to Rokugan through Oblivion's Gate in the twelfth century, Hantei Okucheo showed no concern at all for the welfare of the common people – but whether this was a symptom of his centuries-long sojourn in Toshigoku or merely a result of his underlying nature is left to GMs to decide.)



While Okucheo's madness affected Imperial policy in the Empire, it did not become an actual danger to the Empire until about five years into his reign when one of his trusted advisors, Daidoji Tojo, staged a power-play within Crane lands that derailed plans Okucheo had been orchestrating for years. That perceived betrayal broke Okucheo's self-control and his paranoia blossomed into true insanity, perceiving enemies in every shadow and behind every fan. This, in turn, fed his underlying cruelty – which, like his paranoia, he had kept out of sight in earlier years – until it festered into unconscionable horror.

By the end of Hantei XVI's reign, Rokugan had become a land where samurai feared every day that their Emperor might have them tortured and killed for literally no reason at all. The change from an idyllic and peaceful Empire into a house of horror was gradual enough that by the time most samurai realized something was wrong, it was too late to stop it.

The Life of Hantei XVI

Year 569: Birth of Hantei Okucheo

- Historical accounts differ as to the omens in the year of Hantei Okucheo's birth. The Ikoma records claim the Empire was afflicted with dire portents, some of the worst ever seen, but that these were largely ignored. The official public histories of the Empire, however, claim no bad omens were seen. (Of course, the official histories also confine Okucheo's reign to a mere eight years, 589-597, perhaps so as to minimize his true impact on Rokugan.)

Year 589, Spring

- Hantei XV retires to a monastery in Lion Lands. Hantei Okucheo takes the Throne as Emperor Hantei XVI, the Golden Chrysanthemum. There is a week long celebration across the Empire.

Year 589, Summer

- At Hantei XVI's behest, six of his closest childhood friends move to the Imperial capital. They are the only six people in the Empire he believes he can fully trust: Akodo Tsurikan, the son of a prominent Lion daimyo and general; Daidoji Tojo, duelist and heir to a prominent seat on the Daidoji Trading Council; Shosuro Tsia, actor, courtier, and daughter of the sensei of the Shosuro Actor school; Hida Tsuneo, son of the Crab Clan Champion and chui in the Crab army; Miya Karuo, the Miya family daimyo; and Suzume Kirako, daughter of the Sparrow Clan Champion (and the only truly innocent person in the group).
- Okucheo begins his reforms by commissioning the Miya and Kaiu to oversee an overhaul of the roads in the Empire. Ostensibly, this will allow for better trade throughout the Empire, as well as permitting pilgrims to travel more easily between shrines. However, Okucheo also wishes to make certain he can move troops anywhere in the Empire swiftly and easily, should it be necessary.

Year 590, Autumn

- **The Golden Harvest:** Rokugan enjoys one of the best harvests it has seen in decades. With the help of his advisors and their contacts, Okucheo is able to ensure everyone in the Empire is well fed and all of the clans end the year with a surplus of food, an almost unique occurance.

Year 590, Winter

- **The Death of the Old Guard:** many of the older and more traditional samurai in the Empire either die or retire over the course of the winter. Okucheo's brother Tanaka later comes to believe that Okucheo orchestrated these departures, assassinating some and using blackmail and threats to force the rest into retirement. This winter marks the beginning of Hantei XVI's push to be the sole political power in the Empire.

Year 591

- **Formation of the Golden Legion**: Doji Rin, the Crane Clan Champion and Emerald Champion, proposes the creation of a new Imperial Legion whose job will be to patrol the roads of the Empire, with his brother as the commander. Rin secretly hopes to use this legion to support Crane mercantile interests and trade routes throughout the Empire. Hantei XVI sees a sinister plot to create an army outside of his control, but senses an opportunity and decides to approve the formation of the new legion – and place his friend Miya Karuo in charge of it. He names the new force the Golden Legion.
- Unwilling to forgive Doji Rin's perceived betrayal, Okucheo sets out to discredit and ruin this honorable man. He carries out a whispering campaign against the man with the assistance of Shosuro Tsia, and also seduces Rin's only child and beloved daughter, Doji Hime, taking her as his concubine. By the end of the Winter Court of 591, Doji Rin is a broken man; he shaves his head and retires.

Year 592

- Doji Hime becomes pregnant in the autumn. Okucheo is pleased to finally have an heir on the way, and officially marries Hime that winter in order to ensure the child is recognized as legitimate.

Year 593

- In the early spring, Otomo Hime slips on a patch of ice in the palace gardens and miscarries. Okucheo personally executes the gardeners and servants in charge of that part of the Imperial Palace. It takes three hours.
- Daidoji Tojo's father dies in the autumn. Tojo returns to Crane lands to take up his father's position as daimyo and senior member of the Daidoji Trading Council. This allows Okucheo to advance his own plans for consolidating power in the region.

Year 594

- Daidoji Tojo uses information about Okucheo's political maneuvers to attack and discredit a childhood rival within the Trading Council. In doing so, he destroys years of Okucheo's meticulous planning and betrays the Emperor's trust. In retaliation Okucheo orders his other advisers, especially Akodo Tsurikan, Shosuro Tsia, and Miya Karuo, to ruin Tojo.
- Daidoji Tojo is discovered to be guilty of crimes against the Empire (the evidence is supplied by Tsuriken and Tsia) and is hanged. His entire family commits seppuku to erase the shame on their name.
- After this event, Hantei Okucheo becomes noticeably colder and more remote in public. He shows less trust for his advisors (except for Hida Tsuneo, who he still relies on absolutely) and begins to refer to himself publicly as the Steel Chrysanthemum.
- During the Winter Court of 594, Hantei Okucheo and his advisors force other senior members of the Crane Clan into situations wherein they will disgrace themselves. No fewer than twelve prominent Crane commit seppuku over the course of the winter, and the new Crane Clan Champion, Doji Rin's brother Hekiro, is executed in punishment for the actions of his subordinates.

Year 595

- Hida Tadaka, the Crab Clan Champion, dies during a routine patrol. Following the funeral, Okucheo unexpectedly declares the Crab Clan is now the Right Hand of the Emperor, with Hida Tsuneo at its head. This outrages many traditionalist Lion samurai, but Akodo Tsuriken manages to suppress the worst of their unrest by reminding them of their clan's absolute commitment to the Emperor and the Imperial Throne.
- In the autumn, Tsuneo moves one of the five Crab armies to Otosan Uchi so the new Right Hand can be near the Emperor. Groups of Crab bushi begin to patrol the streets of the capital, where crime rapidly becomes almost nonexistent.
- A Crane province which suffered a flood early in the year is unable to produce enough food to pay its Imperial taxes. The provincial daimyo travels to the Imperial Capital to petition the Golden Chrysanthemum for more time or an abatement of taxes for the year. Okucheo accused the man of treason, tortures him, and hangs him.
- Hantei Okucheo dispatches the Golden Legion to the Crane province to "purge the region of traitors." When they are done, no samurai are left alive in the entire province.



Winter 595: The Dragon Withdrawal

In the winter of the year 595, Dragon Clan Champion Togashi Orikan (the alias used by the Kami Togashi in this era) calls many of his prominent and influential daimyo to the High House of Light for a Winter Court – a most unusual action on his part. He assigns them new duties deep within the mountains of the Dragon Clan, well away from the reach of Hantei XVI. Over the next five years, nearly all of the Dragon Clan samurai who are in the greater Empire are recalled to the Dragon lands, leaving only a token group of Mirumoto residing in the Chokai Province south of the Dragon mountains (the lands which will later become home to the Dragonfly Clan).

Togashi recognizes Hantei XVI's madness is not something which he can prevent without even worse consequences, and opts to protect his clan until such time as the Empire becomes safe once again.

Year 596

- Otomo Hime miscarries again, possibly by deliberate action.
- **The Steel Magistrates are Formed**: Hantei XVI orders Shosuro Tsia to create a group of magistrates whose job will be to root out treason among the samurai of the Empire. He places Tsia at the head of the organization, unofficially referring to her as the Steel Champion.
- In the autumn, Scorpion agents across the Empire begin dying mysteriously. Shosuro Tsia, using her knowledge of the Scorpion information network, is sending the Steel Magistrates against Scorpion agents. A secret war begins between the Steel Magistrates and the covert agents of the Scorpion Clan. Tsia evades at least three assassination attempts that winter.

Year 597

- Trade caravans of those known to disagree with Hantei Okucheo's policies begin to disappear on roads patrolled by the Golden Legion. Bandits are blamed and the Legion displays hanged bodies of these "bandits" – some of whom are recognized as the members of the missing caravans.
- Several children of the Otomo family, all with close blood ties to the Imperial line, die in their sleep or in accidents. Some adult Otomo with close blood ties also die, to bandit attacks or in illegal duels, over the course of the year. In this same year, the former Hantei XV dies of an "unknown fever" in the monastery where he retired. In reality, the Emperor arranges all of these deaths in order to eliminate perceived threats to his rule.
- Small groups begin to meet around the Empire, especially in Crane and Phoenix lands, to discuss whether anything can be done to stop the abuses by the Emperor. Some of these groups are later discovered by the Steel Magistrates and executed for treason.

Year 600

- Birth of the Imperial Heir: In the wake of two additional miscarriages, the Emperor places Otomo Hime under confinement and constant watch to ensure she brings a child to term. When his son is finally born, the Hantei immediately takes him from Hime's arms, declaring she will not be allowed to be a bad influence on their son. Hime remains confined to her chambers thereafter.

Year 602

- Otomo Hime dies, it is said of a broken heart. The Emperor orders an official state funeral, but shows no signs of grief.

Year 603

- **The Phoenix Clan begins sending covert missions of humanitarian aid throughout the Empire in an attempt to mitigate the abuses of Hantei XVI without directly opposing him.**

Year 604

- Rebellious samurai from several clans begin to gather in the lightly-settled western Lion lands, forming an improvised army under the leadership of several senior lords who have been disgraced or exiled by Hantei XVI. They appeal to the Lion Clan for support, but the Lion refuse and condemn the rebels as traitors. The Phoenix also refuse to support the rebellion, citing their pacifist ideals.



Year 605: Suppression of Rebellion

After learning about the rebel army from the Lion during Winter Court, Hantei Okucheo orders Hida Tsuneo to march on the rebels and destroy them. A series of pitched battles ensue between the rebels and Tsuneo's mixed force of Crab soldiers and Imperial Legions. Hida Tsuneo employs brilliant tactics and is completely victorious, crushing the rebel forces and hunting down their survivors with absolute ruthlessness.

Although many aspects of Hantei XVI's reign are suppressed in the later historical record, Hida Tsuneo's battles are remembered and studied throughout the later centuries. As a result, Tsuneo is revered in the modern Empire as one of the greatest tacticians ever born.

Year 607: The Fortune of Torture

When a drunken nobleman makes disparaging comments about Hantei Okucheo where he can be overheard, the Steel Chrysanthemum has him tortured and killed before the Imperial Court. Okucheo's advisor Suzume Kirako protests this use of torture against a noble samurai, and the Emperor names her a traitor and has her tortured to death as well.

The following day, Hantei XVI proclaims that since his old friend Suzume Kirako was so concerned with regulating torture in her life, she will be allowed to do so in death. He proclaims her to be Kirako, the Fortune of Torture. He also proclaims that since his old friend Daidoji Tojo was such a loyal friend and ally in life, he will be granted power in the afterlife as well; in recognition of his amazing accomplishments, he will be allowed to preside over that which he was worth. Tojo becomes the Fortune of Dung.

By this time, no one in the court is willing to speak against Hantei Okucheo's words. The only one to object to his actions is his mother, Otomo Kaoichihime, and in response the Emperor has her publicly whipped and confined to her chambers.

That autumn, the Empire suffers a drought and bad harvest, leading to unrest in many regions. Peasants and monks both speak of the wrath of Heaven, suggesting Hantei XVI has angered the Celestial Order by naming such impious Fortunes.

Year 608

- Okucheo's paranoia deepens; he begins to suspect his remaining siblings are plotting against him, and loses trust in most of his advisors. He no longer holds open courts, instead requiring all petitioners to wait outside the court until summoned.
- Otomo Michiko, the Emperor's younger sister, is "killed by bandits" in the Crane lands. The Steel Chrysanthemum uses her death as an excuse to impose further sanctions on the Crane.
- Hantei XVI names several additional Fortunes of strange and in some cases blasphemous nature, such as a Fortune of Beetles. When some among the Brotherhood protest these actions, he has them executed en masse.
- Otomo Tsurichi, one of Hantei XVI's younger brothers (and known as a staunch supporter of the Emperor) is killed in an illegal duel with Akodo Tsuriken.
- The Empire suffers a second bad harvest. In response, the Phoenix expand their covert efforts to help the rest of the Empire.
- During the Imperial Winter Court, Hantei XVI abruptly accuses Miya Karuo and Akodo Tsuriken of treason and orders his once-trusted advisors tortured and executed. The Golden Legion is disbanded and all of its senior officers are likewise tortured and executed for complicity in Karuo's putative treason. Hida Tsuneo carries out many of the arrests and executions personally.

Year 609

- **The harvest fails for the third year in a row, leading to famine in many provinces and several peasant uprisings. The Emperor, declaring the clans cannot be trusted to police their own lands, dispatches Hida Tsuneo to crush all such rebellions.**
- **Otomo Yurikan, Okucheo's youngest brother, dies when the library in which he is studying burns to the ground.**



- Shortly before winter begins, a small group of Phoenix samurai are captured by the Steel Magistrates in the Chokai Province of the Dragon Clan, which is one of the worst famine-stricken provinces. Torture and interrogation reveals the Phoenix are part of a larger effort to send relief all over the Empire, based out of the city of Nikesake. The Emperor orders a punitive expedition against Nikesake; he also declares the Chokai Province is guilty of treason for accepting the aid of the Phoenix. He commands the Seppun to carry out punitive expeditions against both regions the following year; his paranoia deepening, he is unwilling to dispatch his protector Hida Tsuneo.
- At the start of Winter Court, the Emperor suddenly orders Shosuro Tsia arrested and tortured in open court. She is forced to "confess" that the Steel Magistrates are plotting against the Throne. Hantei XVI orders her hanged along with the entirety of the Steel Magistrates.
- The Emperor's surviving brother, Otomo Nazeru, begins actively conspiring with the dowager Empress, Otomo Kaoichihime, to try to overthrow the Steel Chrysanthemum. Recognizing that a military rebellion is unlikely to succeed, they instead try to subvert the Imperial Guard, hoping to pull off a palace coup.

Year 610

- The Seppun raze the city of Nikesake and invade the Chokai Province with orders to slay every samurai there. However, two Mirumoto manage to escape the slaughter: a boy just out of his gempukku and his forty year old sensei. They flee to Lion lands and begin to spread tales of what happened to their province.
- Furious that the Seppun did not fulfill his command to kill everyone in Chokai Province, Hantei XVI orders ten times ten of them hung alive from stakes lining the Imperial Road in the capital. Many of them take over a week to die, and the Emperor orders their rotting corpses be left on the stakes for all to look upon. In the face of this final atrocity, Otomo Nazeru finally begins to make headway in his efforts to subvert the Imperial Guard's loyalty.

Year 610: The Fall of the Steel Chrysanthemum

The Steel Chrysanthemum's tyrannical reign ends when he learns of Otomo Kaoichihime's plots against him. He calls the Dowager Empress to his throne room and has her brutally tortured before the entire court. She finally confesses and then curses him before the entire court: "I curse you, Hantei Okucheo, that you will suffer for each





death you have caused and the Empire will never again bear your weight." Angry but trying not to show it, the Emperor orders Hida Tsuneo to kill her. But when the Crab Champion draws his sword, Hantei XVI shakes his head. "No, Tsuneo-san. With your hands. She deserves no better than the goblins you fight."

As Hida Tsuneo crushes the Dowager Empress' head between his hands, she whispers to him: "My curse on you, Tsuneo, is that you will follow him to death . . . and beyond."

The brutal murder of the Dowager Empress is finally too much for even the Imperial Guard to take. They join with Otomo Nazeru in cutting down the Steel Chrysanthemum and all of his remaining loyalists and sycophants. Tsuneo, still staring at Kaoichihime's blood on his hands, does not resist.

Legends claim Otomo Nazeru does not allow his older brother to be killed instantly. He instead has the wounded Emperor hung from a stake, the same cruel punishment he had inflicted on the Seppun. It takes Hantei XVI ten days to die, and the tales say it is his ten-year-old son who finally ends his life by stabbing the dying madman in the throat with a knife.

Clans and Factions in the Steel Chrysanthemum's Reign

The reign of Hantei XVI was a time of great confusion for the Empire, since the clans had never before faced a madman on the Throne. Each clan reacted differently, some to their credit, others to their shame.

The Crab Clan

I am a Crab. I do not question.

– Hida Tsuneo

The Crab began the era of the Steel Chrysanthemum in the same as in most eras: the under-appreciated guardians of the border with the Shadowlands. Jigoku's realm was fairly quiet during this time period, and there were few instances of maho within the Empire, so the Crab were tolerated but generally ignored. If the Steel Chrysanthemum had not taken the Throne, one of the greatest tacticians ever born in Rokugan – Hida Tsuneo, the Stone Crab – would likely have lived and died as just another unremarkable Crab Champion. Instead, Tsuneo became simultaneously one of the greatest villains and most admired soldiers in all of Rokugan history.

Because of Hantei XVI's friendship with Hida Tsuneo, the early years of his reign were good ones for the Crab Clan. Unlike many Emperors, Hantei Okucheo seemed to understand the responsibilities and needs of the Crab Clan. Rather than disdaining them for their lack of etiquette and decorum, he found their lack of guile refreshing. He knew he could count on the Crab to speak their minds honestly, and he knew they would never turn on him without first telling him they were going to do so.

Thus in Okucheo's reign the Crab Clan got all the food and other supplies it needed, at times even rerouting supplies and shipments from regions which had displeased him to the Crab lands. Crab representatives were invited to all of the important courts and made political inroads with many of the other clans. The Kaiu were instrumental in the upgrading of the Empire's roads and many of the Hiruma joined the Golden Legion.

The Crab were one of the few groups in the Empire whose conditions actually improved when Hantei XVI began his slide into madness. When Okucheo declared

The Imperial Succession

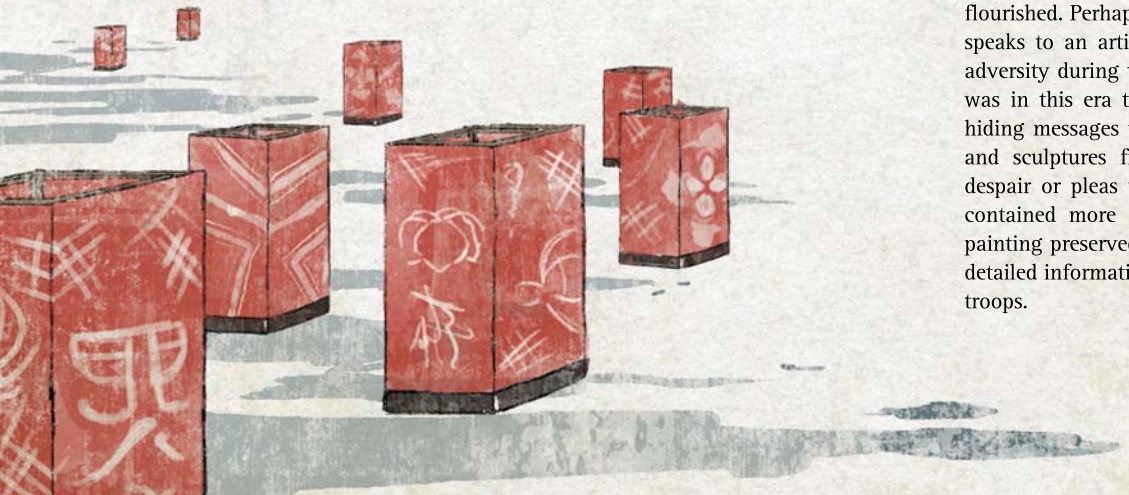
Although Otomo Nazeru served as a regent after the Steel Chrysanthemum's death, he did not claim the Throne for himself, believing his actions in conspiring against Okucheo made this inappropriate. It was Okucheo's son, ten years old at the time of Hantei XVI's fall, who became Emperor Hantei XVII when he came of age in the year 616. Nazeru managed the Empire skillfully in the intervening half-decade, working to repair the damage his maddened sibling had done and encouraging Seppun Hanako to write the *Articles of Heaven*, a series of reforms which Hantei XVII embraced once he ascended to the Throne



the Crab Clan to be his right hand, the clan took its new mandate seriously. A large force of Crab was stationed within the Imperial capital, and smaller groups roamed the Empire making certain their Emperor's realm was in order. Of course, Hida Tsuneo made certain he never pulled more Crab from the border than he believed it could spare. The newly renovated Imperial roads made it fairly easy for his forces to return to the Crab lands should they need to do so quickly.

Sending Crab out into the Empire had its downsides, of course. While the rest of Rokugan looks down on the Crab for their brutish and uncouth ways, the Crab tend to look down on the rest of the Empire for its frivolity, self-indulgence, and lack of focus on things that really matter. This culture clash led to the Crab becoming hated across the Empire as bullies and brutes, the Emperor's enforcers. For a long time the Crab claimed this title with pride, though others meant it as a curse.

After the year 598, Hida Tsuneo secretly ordered the Crab Clan to begin stockpiling supplies. Tsuneo knew Hantei XVI would eventually die and when that happened the Empire would likely look at the Crab with great disfavor, making their political position even worse than it had been before the Emperor came to power. This proved an accurate prediction, but thanks to Tsuneo's foresight the Crab Clan made it through the years following the Steel Chrysanthemum's death far better than might have been expected.



The Crane Clan

My life is a garden of pain and fear, but I cannot let the flowers see my despair.

– A Crane pillow-book of the era, author unknown.

The Crane Clan suffered greatly at the hands of Hantei XVI. When the new Emperor came to power, Crane Clan Champion and Emerald Champion Doji Rin had spent much of his life as the top political figure in the Empire, and believed himself the finest courtier and leader in the Imperial Court. Of course, this was in part due to the relative weakness of most of his would-be rivals at the time; in truth, he was a decent courtier in an era of mediocre ones. Hantei XVI, on the other hand, was one of the canniest politicians of any age (when he kept his madness in check). Early in his reign, Rin attempted several political maneuvers that seemed master-strokes to him but were quite transparent power plays to the Emperor. Okucheo's paranoid mind believed these were attempts to subvert his authority and he swore to destroy Rin by any means necessary. The most notable of these was Rin's attempt to create a new Imperial Legion, the Golden Legion, to patrol the Empire's newly renovated roads. The Crane Champion believed he had enough support to not only persuade the Emperor to form the new Legion but also to place his brother Doji Hekiro in command. This would have been a political coup for the Crane, giving them effective control of all of the Empire's land-based trade routes. Hantei XVI, however, believed it was a ploy to place Crane troops in strategic positions across the Empire. He turned the matter to his own advantage, naming Miya Karuo to command the new legion, and then began to plot Rin's downfall.

The Crane Champion was soon driven to despair and retirement by his own disgrace and the Emperor's seduction of his beloved daughter Hime. But there was worse to come. The Emperor's subsequent falling-out with his once trusted advisor Daidoji Tojo led to a seemingly endless series of reprisals and punishments against the Crane Clan, including the execution of Rin's brother Hekiro. An entire province was razed for its inability to pay taxes. Crane courtiers became the laughingstock of the Imperial courts and were treated with contempt and ridicule on all sides. A few ingratiated themselves to the people in power and were granted small amounts of power in return, but as a whole the Crane Clan fell on hard times.

This is not to say the Crane suffered economically or even artistically. In fact, under Hantei XVI the Crane arts flourished. Perhaps there is something about adversity that speaks to an artist's mind; there was certainly plenty of adversity during the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum. It was in this era that Crane artisans mastered the skill of hiding messages within their art; many of their paintings and sculptures from this time contain hidden cries of despair or pleas to the Celestial Heavens for help. Some contained more significant information; for example, a painting preserved in the library of Shiro Daidoji contains detailed information about the movement of Hida Tsuneo's troops.

Anonymous pillow books also became immensely popular. Many were "fictional" tales of pain and fear under the rule of an evil "Emperor of Flowers." A few of the authors were ferreted out by the Steel Magistrates and executed for treason, but that did not stop such books from being written and secretly distributed across the Empire.

The Dragon Clan

"A storm is coming, my cousins. Come home and take shelter until it passes."

– A letter from Togashi Orikan

The Kami Togashi spent much of his long life avoiding entanglements with the rest of the Empire. His gifts allowed him to see what would likely occur, but could not always show the results if he intervened to change things, and thus he seldom permitted himself to shift events in the Empire away from their natural course. Togashi could sense the reign of Hantei XVI would be a turbulent time for the Empire, and he knew it could potentially wreck great destruction on the Dragon Clan. Accordingly, he called his clan home to the mountains. Thus, while Hantei XVI slowly fell deeper into madness and sadism, the Dragon Clan quietly retreated from the Empire. Togashi left only a small portion of the clan's strength outside of the mountains in Chokai Province so that trade between the Dragon and the rest of the Empire could continue. Aside from that, however, the clan essentially vanished from Rokugan.

This decision allowed the clan to avoid the worst of what happened to the rest of Rokugan, but when things truly began to go downhill in the later years of the Steel Chrysanthemum's reign, the Dragon were not altogether spared. The Chokai Province suffered heavily in the famines which struck in the years 608-610, and like many such regions it received anonymous assistance from the Phoenix Clan. Hantei XVI's Steel Magistrates had begun to catch wind of mysterious benefactors who were helping the people without permission from the Emperor, and they eventually captured some of the Phoenix within Chokai Province itself. This led to Hantei XVI declaring the province to be committing treason and ordering the death of all the samurai within its boundaries. Only two Mirumoto escaped the slaughter, but their survival was one of the events which eventually led to the Steel Chrysanthemum's downfall. And when Hantei XVI was finally slain, the Dragon were among the first to step forward and help the regent and the new Emperor restore Rokugan to something their ancestors could be proud of.

The Lion Clan

"The duty of the Right Hand is to protect the Empire and the Emperor, regardless of the cost."

– Akodo Yoshiki, Clan Champion

The Lion Clan suffered less than some clans during the reign of Hantei XVI, although they did not do as well as the Crab. As a child, Okucheo respected the samurai of the Lion Clan, though he also realized they were one of the clans which could be a great threat if they decided to try to take their Empire for their own. He spent much time studying the texts of famed Akodo generals and even Leadership itself, though he found Tangen's Lies to be more congenial.

Because the Lion are known for their loyalty, honor, and devotion to duty, Okucheo chose one of them, Akodo Tsuriken, to be one of his closest advisors. He knew it was unlikely for such an advisor to betray him no matter what he did. In this he was correct, for Akodo Tsuriken remained loyal to the Emperor even after the Steel Chrysanthemum stripped the Lion of their position as Right Hand of the Emperor. Okucheo wanted Tsuneo's clan as his Right Hand because he knew the pragmatic Crab would never let Honor get in the way of their devotion to duty. Although many Lion were embittered by this decision and by the public shame it brought, they never openly rebelled. However, they later suffered a further loss of face when an open rebellion in the year 604 based itself in their lightly-peopled western lands. Although Lion troops served willingly in the campaign which defeated the rebels, Hantei Okucheo never forgave the Lion for allowing treason to inhabit their lands. After the rebellion was crushed, few Lion were invited to important court events anywhere in the Empire,



and those who did attend often found themselves merely as token attendees, nods toward tradition and courtesy. As the years progressed, some among the Lion – especially the Ikoma – began to marry its sons and daughters into other clans so they might have better opportunities to serve the Empire with honor.

Eventually, Hantei XVI's growing paranoid led him to kill his loyal follower Akodo Tsudiken, and after that incident he no longer showed any trust toward the former Right Hand at all. Despite this, most Lion remained loyal to the Emperor, convinced that honor and Bushido did not permit anything else. Lion samurai of this era tended to be long-suffering individuals who believed their duty was to continue in obedience to the Throne no matter how much misery it heaped on their shoulders. Perhaps, they reasoned, their clan had done something wrong without realizing it; the Emperor was supposed to be infallible, and there was no way he would punish a clan which did not deserve it.

The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix Clan was one of those clans hurt by the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum, though not so badly as the Crane. Hantei XVI was an impious man who did not really have much use for shugenja. When he was a child, he was initially fascinated by the things shugenja could do, but once he realized he could not speak with the spirits and thus would never share their power, he became distrustful and dismissive of shugenja instead. He knew nothing of whether spirits could be trusted, but he knew they could be manipulated by mortals... who could never be trusted. In fact, unlike most other Emperors, Hantei XVI refused to allow his Seppun shugenja to place the normal array of protective spells on him, since in his paranoia he feared what they might really be doing to him.

Because Hantei XVI did not trust shugenja, those Phoenix who were most successful in the courts during his reign were bushi and courtiers rather than priests. The Shiba and Asako dominated the clan's representation in the Imperial Court, while the Isawa were seldom seen outside of their clan's own lands. So long as they minded their own business, the Emperor left them alone, and the Elemental Council was for the most part willing to continue this policy rather than risk a confrontation with the Son of Heaven. Thus while there were a few atrocities in Phoenix lands at the hands of the Golden Legion and the Steel Magistrates, they were much rarer there than in many other clans' lands.

However, once Hantei Okucheo began to take actions which impinged on spiritual matters – such as naming various new "Fortunes" of offensive nature – the Isawa Council became more concerned. And once the Empire began to suffer a series of bad harvests and famines, they decided it was time to act. True to their pacifistic ways, they did not seek any kind of direct confrontation with the Empire; instead, they sent out small groups of samurai and shugenja to help the rest of the Empire covertly. These operations were coordinated out of the trade hub of Nikesake, which was the closest Phoenix stronghold to the rest of the Empire. Unfortunately, their activities were eventually discovered by the Steel Magistrates, leading to the subsequent razing of Nikesake by the Seppun.

Hantei XVI was not the sort to assume that such actions were limited to a single city. Had he lived, he doubtless would have visited his wrath on the rest of the clan... but he died first. Thus while the Phoenix were spared from the worst damage during Hantei XVI's reign, it is likely they would have suffered as much as anyone if he had lived a year longer.

The Scorpion Clan

"What power do secrets have in a world where mere suspicion means death?"

– Bayushi Hozaru, Clan Champion

Hantei XVI knew more about the inner workings of the Scorpion Clan than any other Emperor before – and perhaps any since – because they were betrayed by one of their own, Shosuro Tsia. Consequently, during much of the Steel Chrysanthemum's reign the Scorpion Clan found itself fighting a shadow war against a foe as tenacious, as knowledgeable, and as well-funded as they: the Steel Magistrates. The Scorpion did have an advantage in experience over their new foe, but they lacked the numbers and political support to prevail.

The Steel Chrysanthemum knew early on that the Scorpion Clan would be a problem for him. If any clan could manipulate others into moving against the Imperial line, it would be the Scorpion, and they clearly cared little for loyalty to anything beyond themselves – or so it appeared to him, at any rate. In order to mitigate the perceived threat, Hantei XVI befriended a young Scorpion of influential birth while he was still a child. Shosuro Tsia was brilliant and lovely, but she had little confidence in her own abilities, and thus fell under the sway of Okucheo's charisma and embraced his guidance. With his support she became one of the most powerful and ruthless women in the Empire, and nearly brought about the downfall of her own clan.

The Scorpion were pleased when one of their own became a close confidant of the young heir and actually gave Tsia extra training in the arts of interrogation, both open and covert. They were even happier when Tsia became one of the new Emperor's closest advisors. The clan knew she had been building her own network of informants, and in fact encouraged her to do so. What they did not know was that she was also gathering information about the Scorpion themselves.

In the year 596, Hantei XVI ordered Tsia to form the Steel Magistrates. By then she already had much of her information network in place, and she soon began using the Magistrates to take down the Scorpion Clan's secret networks and agents all across the Empire. Some she suborned into working for her instead; the rest were killed. Soon the Scorpion Clan found itself in a clandestine war against the Steel Magistrates for the secrets of Rokugan. While the Scorpion Clan was ultimately the victor in this struggle, this was due more to Tsia's own downfall when Hantei XVI's madness caused him to suddenly turn against her and destroy her Steel Magistrates – otherwise, the Clan of Secrets might well have lost the war and seen all its power stripped away. As it was, countless Scorpion samurai and shinobi perished in shadowy battles and hidden torture chambers. Many secrets which the Scorpion never wished to see the light of day fell into the hands of the Steel Magistrates during this era, and it is possible these secrets are still being guarded by their descendents in modern times.

Although the Scorpion Clan suffered heavily in this covert war, the larger "public" side of the clan made it through the reign of Hantei XVI with less damage than most. Life for the average Scorpion samurai was the same as it always was, save perhaps for a dearth of the information they were accustomed to having. Indeed, many such samurai never realized there was a war taking place in the dark corners of their cities and castles.

The Imperial Families

During an era with a strong Emperor, it may be expected for the Imperial families to be more unified and powerful than usual, but under the rule of Hantei XVI often the opposite was true. By the time of the Steel Chrysanthemum's death in the year 610, the three Imperial families were more factionalized then they had ever been before.

The Miya Family

The Miya initially benefited greatly from the rule of Hantei XVI. Early in his reign they were granted a prestige and respectability rarely seen when they became equal partners with the Kaiu in the project to renovate the Empire's roads. Then, when the Golden Legion was formed, not only was a Miya placed in command but the family as a whole became essential to its operations, functioning as messengers between the disparate squadrons of the Legion scattered throughout the Empire.

Miya Karuo, the Imperial Advisor and daimyo of the Miya family, was unfortunately not a man of honor. Rather, he was a thoroughly corrupt hedonist who used his position as the head of the Golden Legion to gather great wealth and power for himself and his family. Much of that wealth was spent on self-indulgence, such as hosting elaborate parties for his closest friends and



sycophants. These parties, which Karuo seemed to enjoy holding in the most troubled and poverty-stricken regions of the Empire, were known for their depravity and lack of respect for Rokugani traditions and decorum. This led to the expression, "To celebrate like a Miya," meaning to throw all rules of honor and decorum to the wind. Younger Miya samurai sometimes found themselves conflicted, as their parents and grandparents told them to reject Karuo's dishonorable new ways even as the twin lures of pleasure and ambition drove them to embrace them.

This time of corrupt self-indulgence came to an abrupt end in the year 608 when the increasingly mercurial Emperor suddenly turned on Karuo, executing him for treason and disbanding the Golden legion. After Hantei XVI's death, the Miya withdrew from politics and remade themselves as one of the most traditional and self-controlled families in the Empire, and thus in later years the phrase "To celebrate like a Miya" came to assume the opposite of its original meaning.

The Otomo Family

The Otomo family was greatly afflicted by the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum. Early in Hantei XVI's rule the Otomo were delighted with him, since he had a secure grip on power and ensured the clans served the Throne without ever becoming a threat to the dynasty. In essence, the Otomo family's traditional work was being done for them by the Emperor himself. For most Otomo, this was perfectly fine; they maintained their own vigilance and otherwise enjoyed what seemed to be an era of safety and stability.

When the Steel Magistrates were formed, many Otomo were recruited into the ranks by Shosuro Tsia, who saw that the skills they had been using for years would make them excellent covert agents for the Throne. However, as the years went by many of the Otomo began to oppose Hantei XVI's cruelty, fearing he might provoke more resistance than he would suppress. The most significant such opponent was Hantei XVI's own mother, Otomo Kaoichihime; later, she would be joined by his surviving brother, Otomo Nazeru. When young Otomo began to die mysteriously, Otomo Kaoichihime soon came to suspect her son had a hand in their deaths.

When the Otomo family realized those with a blood connection to the Throne were dying, they began trying to protect those who remained, but in the face of the Steel Chrysanthemum these efforts were largely in vain. The deaths of so many promising young Imperials caused division within the Otomo, as some believed the Emperor had betrayed them and wished to destroy the entirety of the family, while others remained slavishly loyal to the Hantei as the font of their own power.

Ultimately, Otomo Kaoichihime paid for her rejection of her son's methods with her life, but her death sparked the events which ended his tyrannical rule. After his death, Otomo Nazeru served as regent and worked to restore the dynasty's stability – and to ensure that the horrible truths of the Steel Chrysanthemum's reign would be left out of the later Imperial Histories.



The Seppun Family

"I did what needed to be done, but I am not proud of it. I have no hope to be forgiven."

– Seppun Katsuharu, Miharu to Hantei XVI

For much of this era, the Seppun family was the least conflicted of the Imperial families. It helped that they were also the least politically active Imperial family. They had a single job, to protect the Emperor and his family, and as always they did it admirably. There were no fewer than seven attempts on Hantei XVI's life over the course of his reign, and the Seppun foiled all of them, often at the cost of their own lives. Consequently, they were the only samurai other than the Crab which the Steel Chrysanthemum continued to trust and rely on even during his final descent into madness.

Although Otomo Kaoichihime and Otomo Nazeru sought to undermine the loyalty of the Imperial Guard, their efforts did not make much headway. It was only when the Seppun saw the Emperor murder his own mother in open court, in the most monstrously dishonorable fashion imaginable, that they finally turned against the threat to the Empire that was Hantei XVI. Most of those who did so committed seppuku soon afterward, for they considered themselves traitors to their own duty. Since their actions were erased from the later histories of the Empire (along with the details of Hantei XVI's reign itself), future generations of Rokugani never learned the names of these doomed heroes.

The Minor Clans

Although some of the Minor Clans fared reasonably well during the era of the Steel Chrysanthemum, for the most part they stuck to their own lands and stayed out of the way. Hantei XVI did not see the minor clans as a threat and generally ignored them, a policy which they wisely did not try to alter. Two clans, however, are worthy of special mention.

The Sparrow Clan

"I cannot stand by as you torture an innocent man, my lord. I must object! Please, do not do this!"

– Last words of Suzume Kirako

Hantei XVI respected the Sparrow Clan from the moment he met one of their number while traveling through their lands. He motioned for a field worker to give him directions and was astonished to discover that the 'peasant' was wearing a katana and a samurai topknot. Okucheo was fascinated that the Sparrow samurai worked alongside their peasants and later made an effort to befriend the daughter of the Sparrow daimyo himself. Suzume Kirako eventually became one of his advisors, much to the chagrin of many of the Great Clans, and the Sparrow Clan received more Imperial support during the reign of Hantei XVI than it ever had before or since. Kirako spent much of her time traveling the Empire, learning what she could about conditions in different regions and helping wherever she could. She was greatly beloved by the common folk, although often snubbed (as much as they dared) by samurai. However, Kirako's duties meant she was largely oblivious to the increasingly horrible realities of Hantei XVI's rule, and when she finally encountered his cruelty first-hand she spoke out – resulting in her death.

After Kirako was tortured to death (and declared the Fortune of Torture), the Sparrow Clan was cut off from all Imperial help. Thankfully for them, however, the Emperor otherwise forgot about their existence.

The Tortoise Clan

The Tortoise Clan was largely ignored during the reign of Hantei XVI, although many of their samurai were recruited into the Steel Magistrates. Since few pay attention to the movements of Minor Clan samurai, these Magistrates were able to gain information others could not. Although those samurai perished when Hantei XVI had the Steel Magistrates purged, the clan was left untouched and suffered little backlash even after the Emperor's death – after all, most samurai already believed them to be dishonorable scum.

Notable Personages of the Steel Chrysanthemum Era

The two most prominent figures of this era, Hantei XVI and Hida Tsuneo, have already been detailed in the War of Spirits chapter from the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*. This section depicts other notable samurai of the time, including some of Hantei XVI's infamous advisors.

Hantei XVI & Hida Tsuneo

Both Hantei XVI and Hida Tsuneo are detailed in the War of Spirits chapter of Imperial Histories. To adapt their statistics for their first lifetime, the GM need only make a few modest changes:

Hantei XVI lost the worst of his crippling paranoia after his death, so it is not reflected in the game stats presented in Imperial Histories. It can be represented in a number of ways. For example, Phobia (Betrayal), Bad Fortune (Paranoid), or Momoku. He should also likely have Dark Fate.

Hida Tsuneo is not yet cursed by Otomo Kaoichi-hime's dying words to follow Hantei XVI after death, so he should not have an Obligation. Instead, he should have Paragon (Duty).

Miya Karuo

Miya Family Daimyo and Hedonist

"Hmm, my darling, you are wearing entirely too many layers. Oh, and I'll have some more of that delightful plum wine, if you will."

Miya Karuo was a portly child who enjoyed the finer things in life much more than he enjoyed training as a shisha. His father insisted he learn everything he would need for his duties before he could be proclaimed as the heir to the Miya family. When Karuo made friends with young Hantei Okucheo, he saw an opportunity. He convinced his father that if he accompanied Okucheo on his travels across the Empire, he would learn more than he ever would traveling with other shisha.

When Karuo traveled with the Imperial prince, he eschewed Okucheo's long rambling journeys through small villages and holdings; instead, he would travel swiftly from one large settlement to the next, proclaiming Okucheo's approach and making preparations for the Prince's arrival. These preparations inevitably included sampling the food and entertainment of the region to make sure that it was fitting for an Imperial prince to consume. There were times when the Hantei did not arrive for weeks, but Karuo soldiered on, trying every pleasure on offer. Whenever the prince finally showed up, Karuo would greet him at the city gates and make certain Okucheo enjoyed the best each city had to offer. And when the prince decided to move on, Karuo would hurry ahead to the next city and start his duty – and his debauchery – over again.

By the time Karuo made it back to the capital, he had gained seventy pounds. Fortunately for him, when he returned home his father was on his deathbed and was unable to see what his son had become. Thus Karuo became the daimyo of the Miya family, and soon enough was named a direct advisor to the new Emperor.

When Hantei XVI appointed Karuo the commander of the Golden Legion, he was delighted. He used the Legion and its messengers to smuggle exotic delicacies from all corners of the Empire, having acquired a taste for a great many things he could not find in the Imperial Capital. He made certain the Golden Legion served as the Emperor required, of course, putting down rebellion wherever it sprang up.

Karuo's command of the Golden Legion made him rich beyond belief, and the subordinate officers of the Golden Legion acquired fabulous wealth as well. He threw infamously decadent parties all over the Empire, delighting in the awe and envy they inspired. He is believed to have kept four different concubines in different parts of the Empire, as well as an unknown number of ambitious lovers, and married three times, each bride dying mysteriously.

By the time Hantei XVI turned against Karuo, the Miya daimyo had grown to be over three hundred and fifty pounds in weight, and had servants carry him everywhere in a palanquin or sedan chair. He was shocked and bewildered by the Emperor's sudden reversal of attitude, and went to his death still pleading for mercy.

Miya Karuo, Daimyo of the Miya Family

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

Awareness: 5 Stamina: 4 Intelligence: 5 Perception: 4

Honor: 0.5 *Status: 8.5* *Glory: 5.0*

School/Rank: Miya Herald 4

Skills: Courtier (Rhetoric, Manipulation) 5, Calligraphy (Cipher) 5, Commerce 5, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy, Bureaucracy) 4, Games: Go 5, Intimidation (Bullying, Control) 5, Investigation (Interrogation) 4, Knives 2, Lore (Underworld) 5, Horsemanship 1, Lore: Heraldry 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 6, Temptation (Bribery, Seduction) 5

Advantages: Blackmail (many), Social Position (Imperial Advisor, Family Daimyo, Commander of the Golden Legion), Wealthy, Read Lips

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Hedonistic Pursuits), Disbeliever, Failure of Compassion, Lechery.



Shosuro Tsia

Betrayer of the Scorpion

Shosuro Tsia was the daughter of the chief sensei of the Shosuro Butei (Acting) School. She was a quiet girl who lurked on the fringes of social situations and watched. In fact, she was remarkably intelligent and observant, but she lacked the courage to interact effectively with others... until Hantei Okucheo took her under his wing and brought her out of her shell. The young Scorpion fell madly in love with the dashing Imperial, and blossomed into an extremely talented actor, spy, and assassin for the Scorpion Clan

When Hantei XVI asked her to come to the capital and serve as his advisor, she was quite pleased and happily accepted her new duty as his Mistress of Spies, while also becoming his secret lover. She knew that Okucheo could never marry her, but just being with him was enough for her. Whether Hantei XVI felt anything toward Tsia is known only to him and to the Fortunes.

Tsia was a genius at assembling individual pieces of information to create a coherent picture of what



was happening. When Hantei XVI ordered her to form the Steel Magistrates, she did so with alacrity and exploited her knowledge of events and conditions across the Empire to maximize the new organization's effectiveness. So complete was her loyalty to Okucheo that when he ordered her to wage war on her own clan she did so willingly, betraying their secrets and personally killing over a dozen Scorpion agents.

The Scorpion tried to kill Tsia many times, as well as making at least two attempts to kidnap her for the purpose of consigning her to Traitor's Grove. On one occasion their unsuccessful poisoning attempt may have caused her to miscarry the Emperor's child. These efforts only made her more loyal to Okucheo, and when he suddenly turned on her in the year 609 she was so shattered by the betrayal that she could not even summon the willpower to resist. She confessed to everything the torturers asked, and went to her death still unbelieving, waiting and hoping for her true love to forgive her.

Shosuro Tsia, Hantei XVI's Lover and Head of the Steel Magistrates

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

Awareness: 6 Intelligence: 6 Peeception: 5

Honor: 1.6 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Shosuro Actor 5

Skills: Acting 7, Athletics 5, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Etiquette 6, Forgery 5, Investigation (Notice, Search) 5, Jiujutsu 4, Knives 6, Lore (all Great Clans) 4, Lore: History 4, Lore: Underworld 6, Meditation 4, Perform (Singing, Dance, Biwa) 3, Sincerity (Deceit) 7, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 6

Advantages: Blackmail (many), Precise Memory, Silent, Social Position (Advisor to Emperor, Head of Steel Magistrates), Spy Network

Disadvantages: Black Sheep, True Love (Hantei XVI)

Suzume Kirako

Advisor to the Emperor

Suzume Kirako was a woman who did not deserve her fate. She was the daughter of the daimyo of the Sparrow Clan and was a charming, intelligent, lovely, and trusting young woman who made friends easily... including with the son of the Emperor. Hantei XVI was perversely fascinated with the idea that samurai would willingly lower themselves to the level of peasants and wondered what kind of samurai might do such a thing. He befriended Suzume Kirako in order to learn the answer, and found shortly that there was little to understand: the Sparrow did what they did from necessity. He quickly became bored with Kirako, but later realized she could have use to him. When he became Emperor he invited her to be his advisor and to go out into the Empire, gauging the feelings of commoners and poorer samurai about his rule. This provided him with a useful spy into the lower classes of Rokugani society. He provided Kirako with plenty of resources, and she soon became the face of Imperial charity. Everywhere she went, food was distributed and problems were solved... at least until she left. Many peasants called her the Spirit of Mercy and believed she was specially chosen by the Fortune of Mercy, Jizo. During her years in this service she saved hundreds of lives which would otherwise have been lost to starvation or natural disaster.

However, while Kirako was charming and innocent, she was also ignorant of her Emperor's true nature. None who knew her could bear to shatter her pleasant illusions by revealing how evil her master was. Then, in the year 607, she returned to the capital early because a friend had fallen ill. She visited the Imperial Court on the day Hantei XVI had a Crane nobleman tortured and killed in public. Suddenly, as though by Celestial revelation, Kirako understood the cause behind all the suffering she had tried to alleviate through her long years of service. Shaken with fear and horror, nonetheless she could not stand by and allow the Emperor to spit on the traditions of honor and propriety, and she spoke up.

Kirako's life ended that day, as Hantei XVI punished her "betrayal" by killing her in the same brutal manner as the man she had spoken up to defend. But there was worse to come. Hantei XVI proclaimed her the Fortune of Torture, forcing her to serve in the Celestial Order for all eternity as the patron of the very thing she had loathed. Few can be said to have paid a higher price for their lost innocence.

Suzume Kirako, Advisor to Hantei XVI

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

Awareness: 5

Honor: 8.3 *Status: 7.5* *Glory: 7.0*

School/Rank: Suzume Bushi 3

Skills: Animal Handling 3, Athletics 2, Calligraphy 4, Craft (Farming) 2, Courtier 3, Defense 2, Etiquette 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 2, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology 4, Medicine (Herbalism) 3, Perform: Storytelling 6, Sincerity (Honesty) 5

Advantages: Hero of the People, Social Position (Advisor to the Emperor), Fame, Paragon (Compassion)

Disadvantages: Gullible, Idealistic

Otomo Kaoichihime

Dowager Empress

Otomo Kaoichihime was born the daughter of an influential Crane daimyo and spent her early years training to be a courtier and artist. In her youth she was a remarkable dancer, and it was her superb skill at dancing that first brought her to the attention of Hantei XV. However, it was her intellect and wit that caused him to ultimately choose her as his bride. Otomo Kaoichihime kept the Imperial Throne strong during the reign of her wholly unremarkable husband.

When her second son Okucheo became Emperor Hantei XVI, Kaoichihime stepped into the background as was considered proper for a Dowager Empress. However, it was she who first realized her son's cleverness and apparent altruism were fronts for something darker and far more malevolent. Once she recognized her son's growing paranoia, she took steps to try to ensure she would not be a target for it. She took extended holidays in the country and made sure her other children spent as little time as possible in the capital, hoping they would stay out of their insane brother's line of sight (and thus his line of attack). She also did what she could to remain informed about events in the larger Empire. Indeed, aside from Shosuro Tsia she was probably the best-informed person in the Empire during Hantei XVI's reign. Kaoichihime had an extensive network of contacts throughout the Empire, built up during her days as the wife of the Emperor, and even managed to convince a few Steel Magistrates to send reports to her as well as to Tsia.

When Hantei XVI orchestrated the deaths of three of his four remaining siblings, Kaoichihime could take no more. She joined forces with the one surviving sibling, Nazeru, to try to bring down her maddened son. Unfortunately, her plots finally came to his attention, and she faced the same fate as so many others: torture in the Imperial court. However, the curse she hurled at Hantei XVI goaded him into executing her in a manner so heinous and disgraceful that even the most loyal of the Seppun miharu could not longer endure it. In her moment of death, Kaoichihime finally brought down the monster she had birthed.

Otomo Kaoichihime, Dowager Empress

Air: 2 Earth: 1 Fire: 2 Water: 1 Void: 5

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

Honor: 6.5 *Status: 9.0* *Glory: 6.0*

School/Rank: Kakita Artisan (Dance) 2/Otomo Courtier 5

Skills: Acting 5, Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Courtier (Manipulation, Rhetoric) 6, Defense 2, Etiquette (Courtesy, Conversation) 6, Games: Sadane 5, Intimidation (Control) 4, Investigation (Notice, Interrogation) 4, Kenjutsu 1, Knives 2, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: History 3, Medicine (Antidotes) 2, Perform (Dance) 6, Perform (Oratory) 4, Sincerity (Honesty, Deceit) 7, Tea Ceremony 4

Advantages: Allies (many), Social Position (Dowager Empress), Great Destiny (End Reign of Hantei XVI), Multiple Schools, Paragon (Courtesy), Spy Network

Disadvantages: Driven (protect her children)



Hantei XVI's Siblings

The other sons and daughters of Otomo Kaoichihime are interesting people in their own right. Each could potentially have been Emperor or Empress, and each was charismatic and intelligent, the boons of their mother's bloodline. Unfortunately, their fates were overshadowed by their maddened and sadistic brother. Only one of them, Nazeru, ultimately was able to influence the course of the Empire's history.

Each of the siblings had their own personality, training, and background which an enterprising GM may opt to expand. Each could potentially be the focus of a campaign set in this era, by leading a rebellion or even by taking the throne in Okucheo's place.

Below are some suggested schools and backgrounds for Okucheo's younger siblings.

Otomo Nazeru (Otomo Courtier 5): Okucheo's eldest sibling is one year younger than he is, and becomes regent after Hantei XVI dies. Nazeru is an honorable man but a cautious one, and refuses the Throne when it is offered to him.

Otomo Tsurichi (Seppun Bodyguard 4): Okucheo's second-younger brother, three years younger than the Steel Chrysanthemum. He is a fraternal twin to Otomo Michiko and a noted duelist. He is slain in an illegal duel with Akodo Tsuriken.

Otomo Michiko (Otomo Courtier 4): Michiko is Okucheo's only sister and a fraternal twin to Tsurichi. A gentle and well-spoken young woman, careful not to provoke the Emperor, she nonetheless perishes from a "bandit attack" while traveling on the Imperial roads.

Otomo Yurikan (Asako Loremaster 3): Okucheo's youngest brother and sibling, a full decade younger than the Emperor, is fostered to the Phoenix when Hantei XVI takes power. A bookish scholar with no ambitions of any kind, he perishes when the library he is visiting burns down around him.

The Golden Legion

After Hantei XVI arranges for the renovation of the Empire's roads, trade increases... but so does banditry. The Emerald Champion, seeing both need and opportunity, proposes a new Imperial Legion to patrol the Imperial roads and protect them from all those who would break the law. From this idea Hantei XVI creates the Golden Legion, placing his friend and advisor Miya Karuo at its head.

Unlike the other Imperial Legions, the Golden Legion is not a standing army, though its does train occasionally in large-scale battle tactics. Instead, it is made up of approximately two hundred independent squadrons. Each squadron comprises twenty soldiers commanded by a gunso, plus one or two Miya or Hiruma assigned as messengers. Each squadron is assigned to patrol a specific road along with the villages and cities on it.

The squadron messengers deliver reports to senior officers in various regional headquarters, usually located in larger cities or at major castles. From there orders go out to the squadrons and summary reports are forwarded to the Imperial Capital. This allows the Golden Legion to maintain rapid and reliable communication between units, so squadrons can quickly combine forces if necessary to respond to larger threats. The Legion's presence also improves overall communication across the Empire, since the messenger troops are usually willing to carry messages for local daimyo or in some cases even for ordinary ji-samurai.

The Shifting Face of the Legion

When the Golden Legion is formed, it is a unit where young idealistic samurai can make a name for themselves. There are frequent opportunities for combat against actual enemies of the Empire, and the legionnaires are able to travel the Empire and meet samurai from other clans, making contacts useful for their later lives. The Golden Legion provides a valuable service to the people of the Empire, and most peasants cheer when the squadrons march through.

When Hantei XVI's paranoia becomes more pronounced, however, the Golden Legion changes as well. The first generation of idealistic soldiers are slowly replaced with those who are less honorable, those attracted by Miya Karuo and his selfish, hedonistic ways. In time, the Golden Legion comes to be populated almost entirely by greedy and dishonorable samurai, bullies and thugs. In essence, the Golden Legion becomes the bandits it once fought, extorting the villages it once protected. It also becomes a tool for smuggling illegal and exotic goods across the Empire, evading tariffs and legal constraints. While a few of the Legion's squadrons retain their original purpose and morals, they are rare and often ridiculed by their peers.

As the Legion changes, so do the uses it is put to. Hantei XVI comes to see the Legion as a tool for putting down insurrection across the Empire. Whenever he believes the samurai of a particular region are acting against his reign, he orders Miya Karuo to send a few squadrons of Golden Legionnaires to deal with the problem. Often, the Legion's banners are the last thing an innocent samurai sees before being cut down.

The Steel Magistrates

When Hantei XVI begins to see enemies in every shadow, he decides to create a force that will let him know everything happening in the Empire. He assigns the task to his Master of Spies, Shosuro Tsia, who suggests forming a group with the power of Imperial magistrates and who are thus able to act as enforcers as well as spies. The Steel Chrysanthemum likes the idea and authorizes the formation of the Steel Magistrates, with Shosuro Tsia at their head. He takes to calling her his "Steel Champion," although the position is never formally recognized.

The Charter of the Steel Magistrates

The Imperial charter creating the Steel Magistrates says they exist to "root out dishonor and maintain the integrity of the Empire." They are authorized to seek out "those who are disloyal to the Throne," and to question and punish "those suspected of disloyalty" as necessary to "maintain the integrity of the Empire." Their powers are very broad and only partially defined, allowing them the maximum flexibility to enforce the Emperor's will. However, the charter specifically authorizes them to legally question, torture, and execute anyone they suspect of disloyalty to the Emperor. Only when questioning those of high ranks, such as daimyo, do the Steel Magistrates require permission from higher authorities – Shosuro Tsia, the Emperor, or the Emerald Champion – though neither Tsia nor Okucheo ever hesitate to grant such permission.

Secret Police

Although many of the Steel Magistrates operate openly, traveling around the Empire and enforcing the loyalty of the people, in fact majority of the Magistrates work in secret. They roam the Empire incognito, seeking out signs of disloyalty or rebellion against the Emperor. Those who are found suspicious are either reported to the "overt" branch of the Steel Magistrates or are simply kidnapped or killed in the night. Thus over time many in the Empire come to believe that the Emperor is always listening, that the Steel Magistrates know all and no secret can be kept. And of course the mere presence of a Steel Magistrate in a town is enough to inspire fear among the populace, since they never know who might be arrested or why.

The Steel Magistrates also act as an information gathering apparatus for the Throne, sending back hundreds of ciphered reports to Shosuro Tsia almost daily. This allows her to keep the Emperor constantly informed of conditions within the Empire at every moment.

The Clandestine War

One of Shosuro Tsia's first acts as commander of the Steel Magistrates is to launch a campaign against the covert information network of the Scorpion Clan, a network the Scorpion had built and relied on for centuries. Utilizing her own knowledge of the network (acquired during her time in the Shosuro school) as well as the information her agents gather, she mobilized the Steel Magistrates and in a matter of weeks killed hundreds of Scorpion agents all across the Empire. She did not manage to find all of them, however, and this act launched a covert war which would rage across the Empire until the dissolution of the Steel Magistrates (and Tsia's own execution) in the year 609. Until that time, the conflict continued unabated, and there were parts of the Empire where Steel Magistrates and Scorpion samurai alike were assassinated on an almost daily basis, with shadowed alleys turning into pitched battlegrounds in the dead of night.

An Alternate Explanation of the Steel Chrysanthemum

The era of the Steel Chrysanthemum is a peculiar time in the history of Rokugan for many reasons, but one of the subtler ones is the absence of the supernatural. This is truly an age when human problems come entirely to the forefront, a time of human failings such as fear, hatred, prejudice, greed... and above all, madness and paranoia. It is not the Taint which makes Hantei XVI a monster, but rather the very human failings of maddened suspicion and arrogant cruelty which make him the cause of so much misery and suffering in the Empire.

However, some GMs may consider that an age to focused on human evil lacks the magical and supernatural themes which are important to Legend of the Five Rings role-playing. After all, this game is set in Rokugan, not in historical Japan. Accordingly, we offer here a few suggestions for ways to alter this era to incorporate more aspects of the supernatural.

Hantei XVI's Curse

What if Hantei XVI's paranoia was more than merely mental illness? Perhaps a curse was laid upon young Okucheo or even on the Hantei line as a whole. Such a curse could have been inflicted by a vengeful maho-tsukai, a gaijin sorcerer who wished to destabilize the Empire, an angry Fortune, or any number of other such mystical sources. If the Emperor's madness is caused by a curse, this opens the door for a quest to remove the curse and thereby restore Hantei XVI to the man he was meant to be.

Hantei XVI as a Shugenja

There are no recorded instances of an Emperor of Rokugan exhibiting the gifts of a shugenja, but this does not mean it would be impossible for one to do so. What if Hantei Okucheo was in fact a shugenja, and his madness was due to difficulty in handling the overwhelming presence and power of the spirits? (This form of madness afflicted Toturi Sezaru during and after the Four Winds era.) What if he had an Elemental imbalance that caused sudden shifts of thought and mood? Or what if his gifts attracted a malignant kansen? Perhaps it was not internal paranoia that drove Okucheo but rather the subtle whispers of such a kansen.

The Corrupted Emperor

This is perhaps the most obvious choice, and thus potentially the least interesting, but it is worth exploring nonetheless. What if the Emperor became Tainted in his youthful travels and hid it from the Empire? Madness and paranoia are frequent symptoms of the Taint, and none would dare to suggest that the Son of Heaven could suffer from Jigoku's touch. Alternatively, perhaps the Emperor

was corrupted by the power of the Lying Darkness, which could also induce madness and fear. Either option would also neatly explain why Hantei XVI got worse as the years progressed.

The False Emperor

Finally, it is worth noting that the Shadowlands has long sought to infiltrate Rokugan using shapeshifters, deceptive creatures, and demonic possession. What if Hantei Okucheo never returned at all from his famous youthful travels around the Empire? What if what came back and claimed the Throne was a bog hag or an Oni no Pekkle? Other possibilities would include possession by an oni or a maho-tsukai, or perhaps even replacement by a gaijin shapeshifting monster such as a rakshasa.

An Empire of Fear: Life in the Reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum

"No man dares speak aloud of the Emperor of Flowers, not even to his wife in their bed."

– Anonymous pillow-book, year 605

What is life like for the common person under the Steel Chrysanthemum? For most of the peasants in the Empire, things do not actually change very much. A peasant who lives in a small farming village sees almost nothing different until the bad harvests in the final years of the Emperor's reign, though he may have sensed the general tone of hopelessness and despair which gripped much of the Empire's samurai population. Perhaps he saw members of the Golden Legion try to shake down a local merchant for money or food. Perhaps he saw a Steel Magistrate asking questions. But in general, most peasants lived out their lives unchanged during these years.

It was the samurai population of the Empire, along with those commoners who lived in the largest cities, who truly felt the pain of Hantei XVI's rule. After the relatively benign early years, Okucheo's reign became a time of pain and fear. No one could be sure their neighbor was not an informant for the Steel Magistrates, or perhaps even secretly a Steel Magistrate themselves. Travel outside of one's home became difficult and expensive as squadrons of Golden Legionnaires stopped travelers and demanded "processing fees" for looking at their travel papers. Anyone, at any time, could be dragged out of their home, tortured into confession, and then publicly executed – often in the most brutal and shameful manner. The normal protections of Imperial law vanished; the Steel Magistrates were essentially a law unto themselves, and the Golden Legionnaires became essentially bandit lords controlling sections of the Imperial roads.

A few samurai became desperate enough to flee from the Empire proper into the wilderness, setting up small villages deep in the mountains and forests, hoping to wait out the madness there. Often these groups were tracked down by the Steel Magistrates or Golden Legion and slaughtered for their disloyalty to the Emperor.

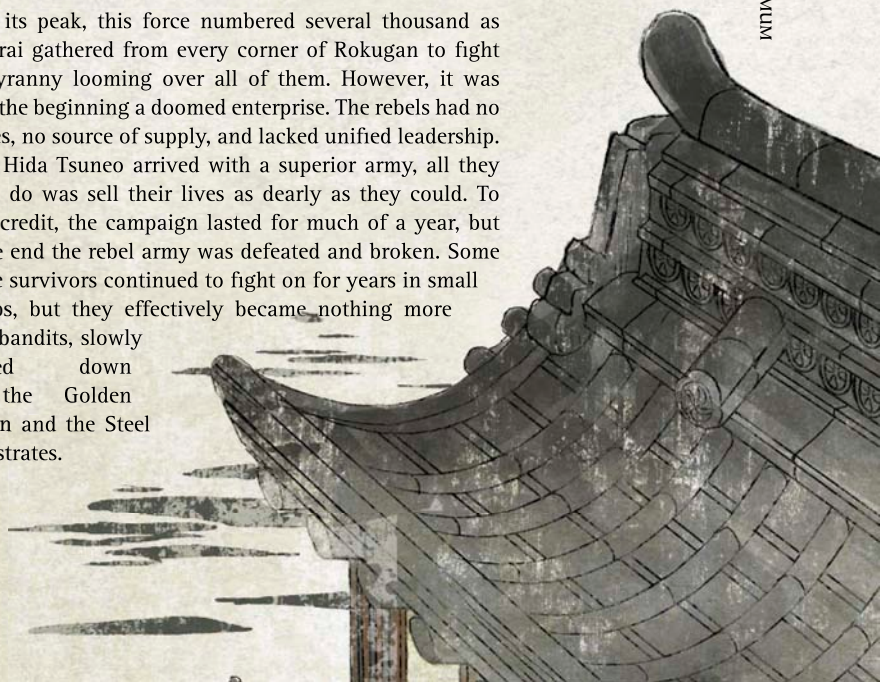
Other samurai fled their ancestral lands to the mountains of the Dragon, seeking asylum. They were usually turned away, though on rare occasions Dragon samurai were actually waiting for such refugees to guide them into the mountains. Other clans' lands were even less hospitable, and the Lion and Crab were noted for turning over refugees to the Steel Magistrates. The Phoenix occasionally offered temporary sanctuary to visitors, allowing them to stay in remote locations where they might avoid Imperial attention.

Resistance and Rebellion

During the reign of Hantei XVI two organized resistance movements arose within the Empire. The first, formed by members of the Phoenix Clan, was not so much an overt resistance movement as it was simply a relief effort. As famine stalked the Empire during the later years of Okucheo's reign, small groups of Phoenix secretly left their lands to bring assistance to the rest of Rokugan. They would appear wherever food or medical supplies were most needed and lend their aid as best they could, then vanish before Imperial authorities could arrive. Only rarely did they encounter the forces of the Steel Chrysanthemum, and they usually sought to avoid combat and simply use the magic of the Isawa to escape. Not until late in the year 609 was one of the groups finally captured by the Steel Magistrates.

The second resistance movement was a true rebellion that based itself within the western lands of the Lion Clan. While the Lion Clan itself remained loyal to the Emperor no matter what he did, their western lands were lightly populated and the rebels were able to gather there largely unnoticed. The rebellion drew samurai from almost every clan – even a few Crab and Lion – although its greatest numbers came from the Crane. They proclaimed the Emperor had betrayed the tenets of Bushido and was a traitor to the very Empire he ruled, and therefore it was their duty as samurai to save the Empire from his rule.

At its peak, this force numbered several thousand as samurai gathered from every corner of Rokugan to fight the tyranny looming over all of them. However, it was from the beginning a doomed enterprise. The rebels had no castles, no source of supply, and lacked unified leadership. Once Hida Tsuneo arrived with a superior army, all they could do was sell their lives as dearly as they could. To their credit, the campaign lasted for much of a year, but in the end the rebel army was defeated and broken. Some of the survivors continued to fight on for years in small groups, but they effectively became nothing more than bandits, slowly hunted down by the Golden Legion and the Steel Magistrates.



An interesting setting for an L5R campaign in the Era of the Steel Chrysanthemum is to make the PCs part of the rebel army, fighting a doomed war against overwhelming odds – a classic samurai story. Placing the PCs in the Phoenix "covert humanitarian" missions can also make for a compelling campaign, since the PCs will travel all across the Empire and see many aspects of Rokugan's troubles.

Aftermath of Tyranny: Recovering from the Steel Chrysanthemum

After Hantei XVI died, the Empire had to grapple with the consequences of his reign. Although the Imperial historians almost immediately began planning to erase the horrors of the Steel Chrysanthemum from the official record, that project lay in the future – the immediate problem was to rebuild trust in the Throne and restore stability to the Empire. Although the Emperor's young son was officially crowned as Hantei XVII, he was too young to rule immediately, and instead Okucheo's surviving brother Nazeru served as regent, working to restore trust in the dynasty.

A key step in this process was Seppun Hanako's work The Articles of Heaven, which was promulgated in the year 622, twelve years after the death of Hantei XVI. Hanako, Chancellor to the new Emperor, proposed a series of legal reforms to prevent a repeat of the gross abuses under Okucheo's reign. Likewise, a new system of proclaiming Fortunes was instituted to avert any possibility that a future Emperor might again make a mockery of the Celestial Order.

There were also more practical problems. Although the Golden Legion had been disbanded two years before Okucheo's death, many former Golden Legionnaires still roamed the Empire, living as bandits or criminals. The former Steel Magistrates were fewer in number, Okucheo having executed most of them when he turned against his lover Tsia, but some were still alive; the Scorpion Clan dedicated itself to hunting them down, a process completed within two years. Still, it would take many more years before the people of Rokugan would be able to truly trust one another again.

An interesting L5R campaign can be created by having the PCs be part of the effort to restore the Empire after Hantei XVI's death. They might be newly appointed Imperial Legionnaires tasked with hunting down Golden Legionnaires or Steel Magistrates, or they might be Emerald Magistrates trying to restore law to regions gutted by greed and vice. They might even be sent into the wilderness to tell those who have fled that it is finally safe to come home..

New Mechanics

New Disadvantage: Member of the Chrysanthemum Court [Social] (5 points)

You are a regular attendee at the Emperor's court, the vaunted Imperial Court of Rokugan. Under the reign of any other Emperor, this would be an incredible privilege and an opportunity for your family and clan to earn glory and make political alliances. Under the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum, however, it is a constant danger to your life; one misspoken word and you and all those you hold dear could pay the ultimate price. Whenever you fail a Social Skill Roll in the Imperial Court, if you fail by an amount greater than 10 you permanently lose five Points of Status, plus one additional Point for every Raise you declared on the failed roll. If your Status ever drops to 0, the Emperor capriciously kills you for some imagined slight.

This Disadvantage may be used in other eras of play to depict the "privilege" of being assigned to a court ruled by a cruel, capricious, or corrupt lord. In this case the "die at 0 Status" aspect should be dropped, and the Experience Point value of the Disadvantage should be reduced to 3.

New Alternate Path: The Order of the Stone Crab

Hida Tsuneo, known as the Stone Crab, was the trusted follower and personal champion of the Steel Chrysanthemum. He was a man of honor and skill whose unfortunate complete loyalty to his Emperor led him to commit a long series of horrific atrocities regardless of the cost to his own soul. Unfortunately, many among his own clan also embraced his willingness to commit horrors for his lord. The warriors who followed in his wake exemplified cruelty and horror, becoming the worst caricatures of what samurai are meant to be. The Technique they developed did not long survive Hida Tsuneo's death, since within a month's time all known members were dead from seppuku or shameful public execution.

GMs who wish to make broader use of this Path can have it depict ruthless groups in other eras who are committed to a villain (or anti-hero). For example, the Technique could represent followers of Akodo Gintaku in the Heroes of Rokugan setting, or followers of Hida Kisada during the Clan Wars.

New Alternate Path: Order of the Stone Crab [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Any Bushi School (of appropriate clan) at Rank 4
- **Requirements:** Must have an Honor Rank lower than 5.0

Technique: Scorn the Weak

Members of the Order of Stone are known for their particular relish in crushing those weaker than themselves, exploiting any weaknesses they might find. When attacking human opponents, you gain a bonus of +1k1 on your attack rolls for each Physical Disadvantage they possess.

New Alternate Path: Chrysanthemum Conspirator

The reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum was one of the most heinous time periods of Rokugan's history, and the excesses of the Emperor were such that he drove his own mother and brother – along with many other men and women of honor – to join together in secret to oppose him. The terrible crime of regicide, an act normally regarded as absolute blasphemy and among the greatest sins comprehensible in the Empire of Rokugan, became the only viable option.

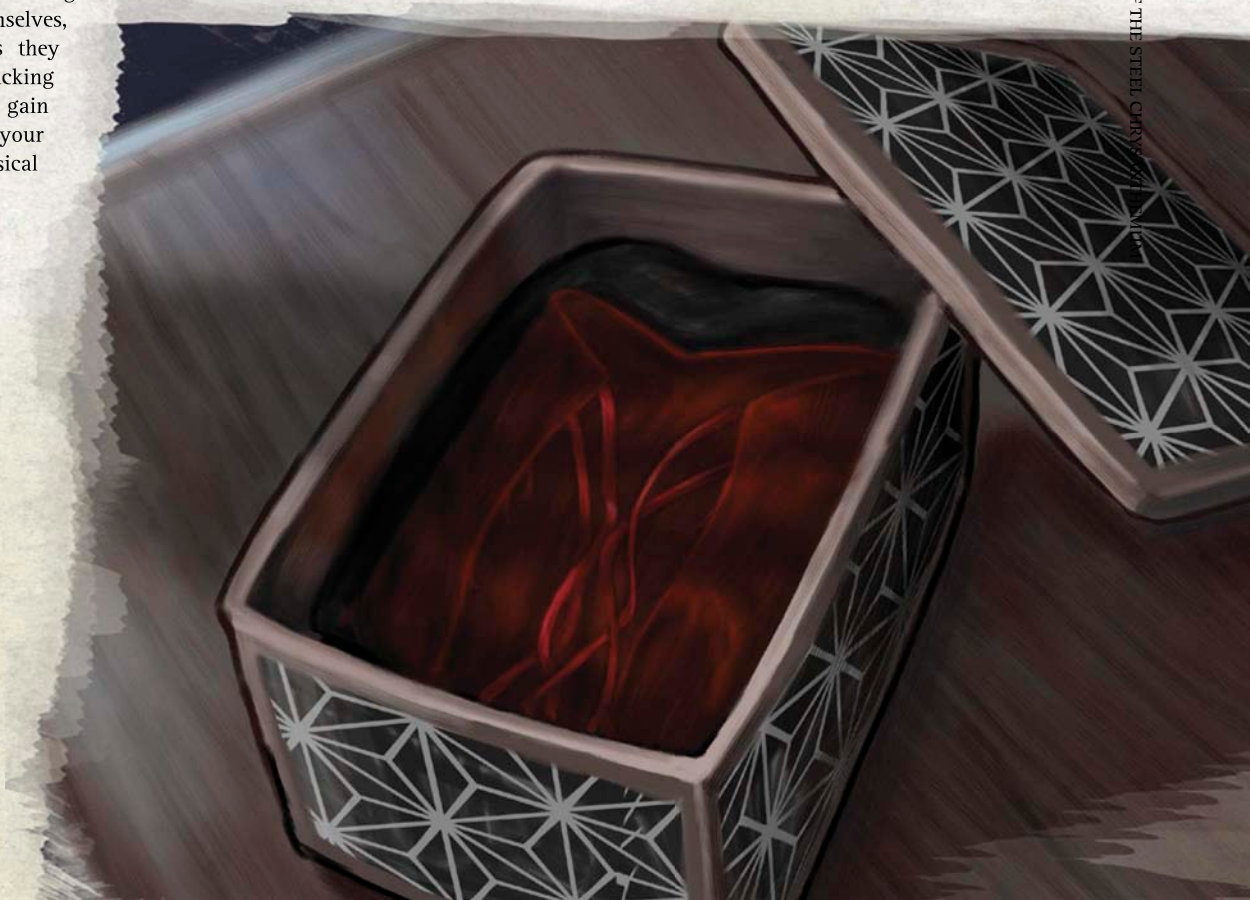
Otomo Nazeru created the Technique of this group, but stopped teaching it to others the moment his older brother died. Nonetheless, it is possible the Technique might be preserved into later eras, or even recreated by a different group rebelling against a tyrant. (Timelines such as a Thousand Years of Darkness would be good settings for this Technique.)

New Alternate Path: Chrysanthemum Conspirator

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Bushi or Courtier School at Rank 2
- **Requirements:** You must have the Disadvantage Dark Secret (Rebel)

Technique: No Course but One

Those who conspire against the Steel Chrysanthemum place greater value on Honor than on social status or Imperial authority. You gain a Free Raise on any attack roll made against an opponent whose Status Rank exceeds their Honor Rank.





The Eighth Century Crises

"I am sorry, lord Suru," Ochita whimpered, prostrating himself on the floor. The ronin kept his face firmly pressed to the lacquered wood, not daring to look the Bloodspeakers' general in the eyes.

Jama Suru frowned as the groveling man haltingly reported the loss of yet another cache of weapons and supplies. After a moment Suru turned away, stalking over to the winder and closing his eyes, breathing in the cool evening air. Normally he would already have cut the man down where he knelt, but his position – and that of his followers – was not nearly as strong as it had been just a month ago. Every follower was valuable now.

A corner of his mind whispered, "Our master would never have stood for this. You should slay this fool." The thought of Iuchiban made him smile a moment, and then wince in pain as he remembered: the Bloodspeaker had been defeated and imprisoned once again.

Opening his eyes, he looked down on the still-smoldering ruins of Ryoko Owari. The surviving Bloodspeaker forces had headquartered themselves in this extravagant mansion, barely damaged by their capture of the city. It was rumored the Crane artisan who designed and built it in the fifth century had used it as a retreat to host lavish parties for Gozoku conspirators. Jama Suru found a certain amusement in making use of the house.

Coming out of his thoughts, he turned abruptly and cut off his vassal mid-sentence. "Enough excuses, Ochita! Find whatever rabbit hole our quarry keeps disappearing into! Find him and destroy him... or you will suffer the fate he deserves!"

"–the fate he deserves!" The cultist leader's words echoed across the rooftops of Ryoko Owari.

"Almost too easy," Reichin thought to himself. He lay flat against the tiled roof of a ruined building, directly across from the Bloodspeakers' mansion. His dark clothing and ash-smeared face made him all but invisible in the late-evening darkness. Quietly he eased himself down through a hole in the rooftop, dropping soundlessly into the abandoned room below. He had a cultist's robes there, liberated from a man who was now accounting to Emma-O for his crimes. The ronin quickly garbed himself and picked up a small satchel – some of the same supplies he had captured earlier that same day. He slipped out of the ground floor, heading across the city to his next target.

The building was a warehouse, one of many in the city's large merchant district – and one of the few not burned by the initial Bloodspeaker attack a week earlier. A pair of cultists stood guard outside, looking around nervously at the darkened streets. At the sight of him they stiffened and reached for their knives, then relaxed as they saw his robes. Reichin lifted the satchel and waved it at them. "I've brought supplies for you," he called. The cultists relaxed, reaching eagerly for the satchel as he held it up with his right hand. Beneath the robes, Reichin's left hand closed on the hilt of his wakizashi.

The first cultist died without a sound. The second one managed a single strangled shout before the blade slit his throat.

Reichin grimaced and looked around quickly. He would not have much time before that shout brought visitors. He hurried inside the warehouse, taking in the stacks of supplies in a few quick glances, then reached into the satchel and pulled out a handful of small bottles. Even in the heat of action he felt wistful for a moment, thinking of the Mantis who had given him the foreign liquor. "I would so have preferred to drink this with you, my friend," he muttered as he poured out the pungent dark brown liquid, quickly scattering it across the bales of cloth and sacks of rice. Opening the last bottle, he gave it one last regretful look. "In for a zeni, in for a koku, I suppose," he sighed as he emptied it, then dropped a lit candle in the puddle. The gaijin drink flared up like a hanabi, just as the new-dead Mantis had claimed it would.

Yellow-orange flames were already rising up through the roof of the warehouse when Reichin emerged into the street. Sure enough, another group of cultists was coming up the street, and they shouted with fury as they spotted him. Drawing his wakizashi once more, Reichin raced up the street, away from the screaming cultists, and turned down one of the narrow alleyways that crisscrossed the district. Glancing back, he could see the warehouse fire rising up against the night sky like a Fortune's sword.

"I hope they think they've had a sufficiently warm welcome to Ryoko Owari," the ronin thought with a grin. He raced down the alleyway and disappeared into the maze of his city.

A Century of Peril

The time period covered in this chapter – the eighth century of Rokugan's history, with a particular focus on the first half of that century – does not have a single unifying event or overarching threat. Rather, it is simply an era in which the Empire faced multiple existential threats within a couple of generations of each other. It is in the eighth century that Rokugan grapples with both the attack of the monstrously powerful Oni Lord known as the Maw and with the second rise of the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban. There are also lesser but still significant events such as the wars over the creation of the Dragonfly Clan and the first known appearance of the Dark Oracles. Thus the eighth century was a time of great danger and conflict, an era in which Rokugan saw little peace and faced numerous threats great and small (not unlike the twelfth century, the era of the L5R card game). For GMs, an era like the eighth century can be ideal for a campaign in which the PCs advance to high Insight Ranks and face a whole series of deadly challenges. And for players who have become jaded by facing "traditional" twelfth century threats such as the Clan Wars and the Four Winds, the eighth century can be a breath of fresh air, an opportunity to take on new and unfamiliar foes.



Timeline of the Eighth Century

Year 701

Jama Suru, the Bloodspeaker General, begins recruiting heavily from the survivors and descendants of the rebel People's Legion. Since the survivors have good reason to be disenchanted with Rokugan and especially the current Emperor, it is not hard to recruit them into the ranks of the Bloodspeakers. They become some of the cult's merciless and devoted units, serving directly under Jama Suru.

Year 704: The Battle of Kyuden Tonbo

The Phoenix shugenja-ko Isawa Maroko breaks her betrothal to Akodo Yokutsu in order to marry her true love, Mirumoto Asijin, with whom she has already secretly had a child. Furious at this insult, Yokutsu leads a force of 5,000 Lion soldiers to attack the small village at the base of the Dragon Mountains where Maroko and Asijin have settled. His efforts are forestalled, however, by the arrival of both Dragon and Phoenix armies, and he is forced to retreat after agreeing to never again enter the environs of the couple's home.

The aging Emperor Hantei XX learns of the support the Dragon and Phoenix Clans have given to the small village created by Isawa Maroko and Mirumoto Asijin. He grants the couple Minor Clan status and the new family name of Tonbo, thus founding the Dragonfly Clan. This acknowledgement from the Emerald Throne protects them from any further immediate aggression by the Lion Clan.

Year 705

Isawa Shokan, a promising and devout shugenja and an Emerald Magistrate, stumbles onto the trail of Jama Suru. He spends the next four years tracking Suru across the Empire and finally pursues him into the Shadowlands.

Year 709

Isawa Shokan and his yoriki finally track Jama Suru to a tower deep in the Shadowlands and slay him. However, before he falls Suru uses a terrible maho ritual that nearly rips Shokan's soul asunder. Twisted by his exposure to dark magic, Shokan steals an array of maho scrolls from the tower; within a year, he becomes a *maho-tsukai* himself, mastering techniques designed to summon demons to the mortal realm.

Year 710

Isawa Shokan's first attempt at summoning an oni is interrupted by his former yoriki, who attempt to kill him. Wounded, he flees into the Shadowlands and discovers a hidden cave containing a powerful imprisoned Oni Lord, the creature which the Crab will soon know as the Maw. Fearing capture and thirsting for power, Shokan bargains half of his soul to the Maw in exchange for the powers of a demon. The Oni Lord agrees, and Shokan uses the power to destroy the former friends who are chasing him, absorbing their souls for later use. In the future, he will be known as Shokansuru.

The freed Maw, a demon of monstrous power and intellect, begins to assemble a vast army of Shadowlands monsters.

A new Jama Suru emerges in the ranks of the Bloodspeaker cult and resumes his role as one of the cult's leaders.

Year 711: The Battle of the Great Climb

An Agasha insults Adoko Yokutsu in court. The Lion uses this as an excuse to launch an attack on the Dragon Clan, taking revenge for their thwarting of his earlier campaign against the faithless Isawa Maroko and her lover, Mirumoto Asijin. Taking five legions of Lion Clan soldiers, Yokutsu lays siege to Shiro Agasha.

Yokutsu demands a duel with Mirumoto Asijin in order to end the siege. Dragon Clan Champion Togashi Ayoko (the name used by the Kami Togashi in this era) agrees, but in return promises Mirumoto Asijin to always protect the Dragonfly Clan. Asijin fights and is slain by Yokutsu. Yokutsu arrogantly proclaims himself daimyo of the Dragonfly.

Tonbo Kuyuden, the son of Maroko and Asijin, challenges Akodo Yokutsu and slays him. This secures the survival of the Dragonfly Clan, but also ensures the unending enmity of the Lion Clan against the Dragonfly.

The Origins of The Maw

"Oni do not offer their fealty lightly. We traffic in power and blood. Souls are our coin. What do you offer me for my service, tiny creature?"

Why was the Maw imprisoned in a cave, and how did it first come into existence? The origins of this most terrible of Oni Lords lie in the second century, when a shugenja named Kuni Nikoma conducted a forbidden experiment and summoned an oni from Jigoku. Nikoma did not truly understand what he was doing – and thus the oni was able to kill and devour him within minutes of its summoning, taking his name and becoming an Oni Lord. However, the Nikoma no Oni's victory left it trapped, for the Kuni had created crude but powerful wards that held it in place. The oni would remain there for five hundred years, waiting for someone to be foolish enough to free it.

Year 714

Asahina Yajinden, the leader of the Bloodspeaker cult, gives the relic known as the Ruby of Iuchiban to one of his fellow cultists, Iuchi Mohai, who wishes to conduct his own investigations into the artifact. Mohai soon unlocks the full potential of the stone and uses it to enhance his own power. Summoning dark spirits, he binds the most powerful kansen available to the stone, strengthening his own power and protecting the Ruby itself from being destroyed by any normal means.

The Maw encounters a mysterious being in the Shadowlands. The stranger calls himself the Dark Oracle of Earth. The Maw spends two years under the Dark Oracle's tutelage, learning powerful dark magic.

Year 715: The Battle of the Tidal Landbridge

Oni no Kinjiro, one of the Maw's servants, leads a strike force to test Crab defenses. The oni aims for the poorly defended eastern edge of the Crab border. While a major assault takes place to the west, drawing off the attention of the Crab armies, Oni no Kinjiro's force avoids detection by the Crab scouts and assaults the lightly defended watchtower on the shore of Earthquake Fish Bay. The Crab garrison is led by Hida Bokaru, the third son of the Clan Champion. They send up a signal arrow to call for help, but the only one to see it is Daidoji Masashigi, the daimyo of the Daidoji family, who happens to be hunting on the far side of the Tidal Landbridge.

Masashigi and his men charge into the battle, riding up just as Hida Bokaru is badly injured and nearly slain by Oni no Kinjiro. Masashigi holds the Shadowlands forces while the Crab evacuate, then lures them into the rising waters on the Landbridge, fighting on until both he and the oni drown.

Year 716: The Maw's Assault

In the year 716, Nikoma no Oni – the Maw – launched his massive assault on the Crab lands. The sheer scale and power of his army caught the Hiruma unprepared, and in a bloody battle on Last Stand Plain many Hiruma lost their lives. The remainder of their army retreated to Shiro Hiruma, confident that the walls which had stood for centuries against Shadowlands assaults would endure this time as well, allowing them to hold out until the Hida could arrive with the Crab Clan's main forces. The Maw, however, used the sinister magic it had learned from the Dark Oracle of Earth to transport its fiercest oni and beasts beneath the walls of the castle, right into the heart of the defenders. Although the Hiruma eventually slew the invaders, the walls of the castle were breached and the remainder of the Maw's army flooded in, slaughtering the defenders and claiming the castle for themselves. Only a small number of defenders managed to escape, fleeing east and north toward the Kuni and Hida lands.

The demon's next target was the lands of the Kuni, green, fertile, and now desperately vulnerable. The Maw's army advanced relentlessly, destroying every village in its way, spreading the Taint as well, swelling its ranks with undead slaves and gibbering madmen. When the Shadowlands force reached the Kuni family's primary temple, they found it empty, its libraries and chambers vacant, its corridors laced with traps. After losing several of his more valuable minions, the Maw simply burnt the temple to the ground, annihilating it completely.

With the Hiruma and Kuni both defeated, the Maw's force advanced directly toward Kyuden Hida, the core of the Crab defenses. What happened next has been described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, pages 11-12: Crab Clan Champion Hida Banuken asked his samurai for some way to secure their defenses, and a young shugenja named Kuni Osaku stepped forward, promising to secure the Seido River against the Shadowlands forces for sixty days. Osaku gave her life to turn the river into an insurmountable barrier for seventy-three days, and the Crab used that time to build a massive fortification – the basis of what would come to be known as the Kaiu Wall.



The monumental task of building a giant fortification from scratch was given to Kaiu Haruko, identified by her daimyo as the most brilliant engineer in the family. Using a new device which she called a soroban (abacus), Haruko was able to complete the incredibly complex calculations and designs for the new wall in just four days.

On the morning of the seventy-third day, Kuni Osaku collapsed and died, and the Seido River dropped back to its normal low level. The Maw's frustrated army surged forward, only to break itself against the new Kaiu Wall, where the Crab army had been reinforced by troops from many of the other Great Clans. One nightmarish creature after another threw itself against the wall, only to be hurled back or shot down. Casualties among the defenders were also heavy, and included Kaiu Haruko herself. But finally, with the Maw's forces exhausted by their fruitless assaults, the Crab launched a ferocious counter-attack spearheaded by the remaining Hiruma troops. The Maw was hunted down and weakened by a unit of the Damned, and Hida Banuken personally delivered the final blow. Without its leader the Shadowlands army collapsed.

Year 717

Under the direction of Kaiu Haruko's three students, the Kaiu Wall is extended, and plans are drawn up for its eventual expansion to cover the entire border of the Crab lands, from Razor's Dawn Castle to the Tidal Landbridge.

The Maw's skull is purified by the Kuni and hung over the gates of Kyuden Hida, both to prevent it from being reincarnated and to serve as an eternal warning to the Shadowlands.

The Kuni family begins the laborious effort of reclaiming its ancestral lands, slowly purging the Taint from the soil but in the process reducing the land to a lifeless waste.

Year 718: Battle of the Thundering Shrine

The Crab ask the Scorpion to cede the rich farmlands surrounding the Shrine of Osano-Wo in compensation for the loss of the Hiruma lands. The Scorpion refuse; in retaliation, the Crab raid the border and attack several villages in the area, attempting to take them by force. The Scorpion meet them in battle near the Shrine itself, and a bloody fight ensues, neither side wishing to give quarter. Shortly after the battle begins a massive thunderstorm erupts, making it difficult for both sides to fight. In the end the Crab carry the day and take possession of the Shrine (some of them claiming Osano-Wo himself appeared on the battlefield), but the Scorpion subsequently persuade the Emperor to order the Crab to withdraw from the occupied lands.

Year 728

Emperor Hantei XX finally dies at the advanced age of 97, passing suddenly but by natural causes. His elderly son becomes Emperor Hantei XXI. He will be largely viewed as a cheerful but ineffective leader.

Year 735

The Hiruma family makes the first of many attempts to recapture Shiro Hiruma from the Shadowlands. The attempt fails, and the attacking Hiruma are wiped out almost to a man.

Year 739

Several small children go missing from their homes in various villages of the Osari Plains. When their remains are found it is apparent they have been used for some form of maho ritual. A young lion magistrate named Akodo Shimizu is assigned to hunt for the culprit, and soon identifies the criminal as Agasha Enshoku, a shugenja banished from the Dragon lands for dabbling in maho. Unfortunately, she evades his pursuit and continues to terrorize the people of the Osari Plains for several years.

Year 740

Emperor Hantei XXI retires due to advanced age and his young grandson becomes Emperor Hantei XXII.

Year 743

The eligible daughters of the Kakita and Doji assemble in the Imperial Court for the young Emperor to make his choice of a bride. Out of all the women present he chooses the beauteous Kakita Edako, whose green eyes seem to capture his heart. At the same time, the magistrate Akodo Shimizu enters the court, intent on reporting his failure to capture the terror of the Osari Plains. Shimizu plans to ask permission to commit seppuku. However, just as the Emperor is about to announce his choice Shimizu recognizes Kakita Edako as none other than Agasha Enshoku. He cuts her down in open court, and her corrupted Taint is revealed before all.

The Emperor proclaims Akodo Shimizu to be Shimizu Gochoku, daimyo of the new vassal family of the Shimizu.

After a delay occasioned by the incident with Shimizu and Enshoku, Hantei XXII chooses a new bride from among the Crane: Doji Makiko. This once again solidifies the Crane Clan's influence on the Imperial Court.

Year 747

The Hiruma mount another and much larger attempt to retake their ancestral castle. The attacking force succeeds in capturing the castle's ruins and holds them for two weeks. By the end of that time the remaining soldiers are reduced to fighting with knives and fists, having lost everything else. None of them survive.



Year 748

The spirit of Iuchiban succeeds in leaping out of his imprisoned body and possessing an innocent Rokugani. Freed from his Tomb, Iuchiban quickly makes contact with the Bloodspeaker Cult and begins organizing them for a renewed assault on the Empire. He uses his new ability to possess others' bodies to travel all around Rokugan, aggressively infiltrating the counsels of every clan.

Year 750

Impatient and arrogant, Iuchiban infiltrates the Dragon court and makes a fatal error when he tries to possess Togashi Yamatsu. Yamatsu's mystical tattoos protect him from the Bloodspeaker's power, and Iuchiban is exposed and forced to flee. Yamatsu notifies the leaders of his clan of the attack, and they quickly spread the word to the rest of the Empire.

Furiously aware that he has tipped his hand, Iuchiban orders the Bloodspeakers to assemble near the Mountains of Twilight and prepare to conquer the Emerald Empire. Using hundreds of the porcelain masks created by his lieutenant Yajinden, he raises a vast undead army to supplement his human followers.

Advancing north through the fringes of the Shinomen Forest, the Bloodspeaker army loses nearly a third of its strength against a few handfuls of awakened Naga. Furious, Iuchiban pushes on, leading his legions across the Plains of Thunder straight to Ryoko Owari. The Scorpion spot the advancing force and hurriedly evacuate the majority of the citizenry to Yogo Shiro; a small defending force does its best to make the Bloodspeakers pay for taking the city, but cannot stand for long against the combined weight of terrifying undead and powerful maho. Iuchiban razes much of the city before pushing on toward Beiden Pass.

Battle of the Bloody Retreat. Iuchiban attempts to cross through Beiden Pass and advance on the Imperial Capital. The Scorpion send word to the Lion but know it will be many days before the Right Hand can assemble its forces. Accordingly, the Scorpion Clan assembles its forces at the southern entrance to the pass and fights a savage delaying action. For five days they hold the pass against the Bloodspeakers, making a slow retreat in the face of gruesome casualties. At last the ranks of the Scorpion break at the northern end of the pass, only to hear the roar of the Lion army arriving behind them. The Lion join the battle and drive the Bloodspeaker army north to the Way of Righteous Vengeance Road.

The Battle of Sleeping River

After the Battle of the Bloody Retreat, the Bloodspeakers regroup at a hidden plain near the Sleeping River. The cult maho-tsukai gather their own dead and those of their enemies, reanimating them by the thousands to swell their army's ranks. By now, all the clans are rallying to confront the Bloodspeaker's return, and their combined army finally reaches the cult's hiding place to confront a force of undead so vast that it darkens the plains in every direction. The Bloodspeakers, led by Iuchiban, Jama Suru, Mohai, and Yajinden, hurl themselves against the clan army with all their unnatural fury. The presence of so many undead is demoralizing to even the bravest bushi, and the power of the cult's maho-tsukai is like nothing the Rokugani have ever encountered. The ranks of the Empire's army are quickly broken and disarrayed.

At this critical juncture, the Phoenix Elemental Masters step forward, unleashing their full power on the battlefield for the first time since the Five Nights of Shame. Huge numbers of undead and maho-tsukai are obliterated by the powerful forces at the Masters' command. This action allows the armies of Rokugan to rally and resume the offensive, but the battle is far from won, especially since the Bloodspeakers continue to raise fresh undead to replenish their ranks. Desperate combat rages for seven days, and in all that time only one of the cult leaders, Mohai, is slain.

Finally, the decisive moment comes when Togashi Yamatusu confronts Iuchiban and uses a new tattoo to capture the Bloodspeaker leader's soul within his own body (recounted in *The Great Clans,* pages 88-89). Without their leader, the cultists lose their organization, and Yajinden and Jama Suru flee the field rather than share their master's fate.

The Phoenix, recognizing that the body-hopping Iuchiban can no longer be physically imprisoned, use a powerful magical ritual to bind his soul into the very stone of his Tomb. Several shugenja die performing the ritual, but it is ultimately successful.

The ronin called Reichin shows great bravery during both the Battle of Sleeping River and in subsequent actions in Ryoko Owari. Some rumors claim he actually managed to wound Iuchiban during the battle. Whether or not that is true, his subsequent heroism in Ryoko Owari is beyond dispute. When the Emerald Champion, Doji Daisetsu, storms the city and attempts to capture and slay Jama Suru, an arrow nearly ends his life – but before it can strike him, Reichin leaps in the way. The Emperor rewards Reichin for his bravery in battle and service to the Empire by granting him a new family name, Usagi, along with Minor Clan status and lands. Many ronin in Ryoko Owari immediately swear fealty to Usagi Reichin.

Year 755

Hiruma Sokokai, the last surviving master of the Hiruma Bushi School, dies from age and the lingering effects of his youthful injuries. He has toiled for years to try to rebuild the school, but lacks the skills to properly teach what he knows. With his death the secrets of the Hiruma Bushi School die as well.

Year 763

Isawa Uso, a talented shugenja in the path of Fire, is chosen to become the new Oracle of Fire. Shortly after ascending to this office, he disappears.

Year 774

The Oracle of Fire reappears and goes on a violent rampage in the Phoenix and Dragon lands. He destroys several villages, burning structures and people alike into ashes, and slaughters the legion of Shiba troops sent to stop him. Finally he is seemingly overwhelmed by his own power, erupting into an explosion that destroys everything within a mile.

At the same time as the Oracle's death, Crab scouts report seeing a massive explosion of fire deep within the Shadowlands. The Kuni later come to believe this marked the birth of the Dark Oracle of Fire.

Year 782

The master of Morikage Toshi, a Phoenix castle within the Mori Isawa, angers the Oracle of Air when his disregard for his wife (who is the Oracle's daughter from her former mortal life) results in her suicide. The Oracle lays a mighty curse upon the castle and the surrounding forest begins actively reclaiming it. Within months, the inhabitants are forced to abandon the castle and its adjacent town.

Overview of the Clans and Factions

In many respects the eighth century was a "normal" period in Rokugan's history, but one which was then suddenly and violently interrupted by the successive crises which beset the Empire.

The Crab Clan

Of all the Great Clans, the Crab experience the most upheaval and loss during the eighth century. At this time, their long proximity to the Shadowlands has somewhat inured them to constant assaults and skirmishes. They routinely turn back the unorganized efforts of small bands of goblins, wandering packs of oni and beasts, and other such minions of the corrupted lands. All of this changes, however, when Isawa Shokan unleashes Nikoma no Oni, more commonly known as the Maw. In exchange for the strength in becoming half-demon, Shokan breaks the wards that have kept the Oni Lord trapped for hundreds of years.

The Maw raises an army of Shadowlands creatures larger than any seen since at least the days of Hantei V, and perhaps even since the First War. The Crab suffer a series of devastating defeats, including the loss of Hiruma Castle and all of the Hiruma and Kuni lands. They are simply not prepared for an assault of such scale, commanded by an Oni Lord who is not only powerful but also immensely cunning and who uses terrible magics learned from the Dark Oracle of Earth.

Although the Crab ultimately prevail against the Maw at the Battle of the Cresting Wave, the long-term cost to them is impossible to calculate. The clan has lost both huge numbers of samurai and huge amounts of land, and Clan Champion Hida Banuken demands compensation from the rest of the Empire. Many of the other Great Clans



comply with this, some out of fear of Crab retribution, some from genuine appreciation for their service. The Scorpion refuse, however, claiming the Crab should not expect any special reward for performing their duty to the Empire. This deepens the perpetual animosity between the two clans and leads to many border skirmishes and a few major battles; the bitterness will continue well into the next century.

The heaviest blow from the Maw's assault is to the Hiruma family, which is left without a home or a school. Hiruma samurai refuse to wear a mon until they can redeem their ancestral lands; the family will spend the next three centuries spilling immeasurable amounts of blood trying to retake its home.

The Kuni begin the task of cleansing their lands, an endeavor which will permanently turn their once verdant fields into the Kuni Wastes.

The Crane Clan

During this era the Crane are only lightly touched by the troubles facing other Great Clans throughout the Empire. They have a strong political position, high productivity in their lands, and are welcome in the courts of all the Great Clans. In this era Crane political power cannot be rivaled, surviving even the embarrassment of a maho-tsukai disguised as a Crane being presented to Hantei XXII.

In the early half of this era, the Crane for the first time win the respect of the Crab at the Battle of the Tidal Landbridge. The Daidoji daimyo, Daidoji Masashigi, sacrificed his own life to defeat a Shadowlands assault, saving the life of Hida Bokaru, one of the Crab Clan Champion's sons. Although the incident did not improve the overall Crab image of the Crane Clan, it did forge a powerful bond between the Crab and the Daidoji family. The Crab built a shrine to honor Daidoji Masashigi's memory, and thereafter referred to the to the Daidoji as the "Iron Crane." The tradition of many Daidoji spending a year on the border with the Crab began in this century.

The Crane also managed to establish greater respect, if not an actual alliance, with their greatest political opponents, the Scorpion. Crane ambassador Doji Taehime rose to prominence due to her skillful work in the Scorpion courts, earning the respect of the Clan of Secrets for her ability to maneuver through their intrigues and plots without getting entangled in any of their schemes. Her hosts named her the Poison Crane, a term which seemed outwardly hostile but was actually a mark of respect, and she eventually became a known confidante of the Scorpion Clan Champion, Bayushi Riozu.

In contrast to other war-torn eras such as the Clan Wars, the Crane in the eighth century were spared from any military conflicts on their lands. Of course, Crane troops did participate in the Battle of Sleeping River as bravely as any others, but the Bloodspeakers never crossed into Crane territory. Thus this era was one of prosperity and renaissance for Crane, with their artisans developing new crafting techniques and producing works of art unparalleled during any earlier time period.

The Dragon Clan

In this century the Kami Togashi took on the guise of Togashi Ayoko. As in most eras of the Empire's history, he kept his clan largely aloof from the larger affairs of the Empire. The principle exception was the series of conflicts with the Lion Clan over the love affair of Isawa Maroko and Mirumoto Asijin, conflicts which would eventually give birth to the Dragonfly Clan and its role as the "gatekeeper" for the Dragon. Presumably Togashi saw the Dragonfly as necessary to the future of the Dragon Clan, since otherwise it is difficult to understand why he was willing to commit Dragon troops to the protection of a pair of dishonorable lovers. Moreover, while the death of Akodo Yokutsu did the series of battles over the Dragonfly, the Lion Clan remained hostile to the Dragon for some time to come. Minor skirmishes continued along their mutual borders and it was commonplace for many year for Lion samurai to take any pretext to duel a Dragon. Ikoma courtiers likewise made a point to attack Dragon representatives at court, trying to trap or embarrass them whenever possible.

One Dragon samurai who did earn considerable attention in the larger Empire was the shugenja and scholar Agasha Nodotai. Those seeking to better understand the cryptic wisdom of Shinsei sought him out, for he was noted for being able to explain heretofore incomprehensible passages. His reputation for great wisdom garnered him a post as advisor to Akodo Ukija, a general in the Emperor's Imperial Legions. Nodotai died in a skirmish against bandits in the year 744, taking an arrow which would have slain his commander; in reward, Ukija (who was a widower) took in his family.

The Dragon Clan did play a more prominent role in the Empire in the middle of the century when it was they who learned of the second rising of Iuchiban. At first searching secretly for the Bloodspeaker, the Dragon soon began warning the other clans of the danger, and without them it is quite likely Iuchiban would have succeeded in overthrowing the Empire. Moreover, it was a Dragon tattooed man, Togashi Yamatsu, who was instrumental in ultimately trapping Iuchiban back in his tomb.

The latter half of the eighth century was a peaceful time for the Dragon Clan, which resumed its isolation from the rest of the Empire.

The Lion Clan

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Lion spend much of the eighth century at war, primarily with the forces of other clans. During the first half of the century they are often in conflict with the Dragon Clan over the affair of Akodo Yokutsu and his faithless betrothed. The antagonism and distrust between the two clans extends to court intrigue as well as military conflict, and sows the seeds of enduring hatred between the Lion and the Dragonfly. Few clans can hold a grudge like the Lion, and the events of this century will lead to renewed conflicts in many later eras.

In the face of any great threat to the Empire, the Lion are always the first reinforcements called in, and the attack of the Maw in the early part of this century was no exception. However, this attack lead to an infamous incident involving the Lion Clan Champion of the time, a man named Akodo Fuso. Fuso was bitter over his clan's humiliation in the conflicts with the Dragon, and this weakness in his soul caused him to conspire with an oni in the Maw's army. Fuso promised to provide a way through the Crab Clan's new defenses in return for unmatched battle prowess. The Dragon samurai at the Battle of the Cresting Wave were already wary of the Lion; as a result, they detected Fuso's treachery and managed to block the breakthrough of Shadowlands forces he created. Fuso himself was executed by his fellow Lion as a traitor. Unfortunately, he had been wearing Junsui, the clan's Ancestral Armor, at the time of his foul bargain and the nemuranai became Tainted. The armor was locked away in the Lion Ancestral Hall until it could be cleansed, and many of Fuso's subordinates committed seppuku to atone for their association with his shameful actions.

Two generations later, the Lion Clan redeemed itself at the Battle of the Bloody Retreat, where they arrived in time to block Iuchiban's undead army from advancing past Beiden Pass and drove it to the final confrontation at Sleeping River. Without their timely arrival, just as the Scorpion forces guarding the pass were collapsing, Iuchiban would have been able to continue his way towards Otosan Uchi unfettered.

In the aftermath of Iuchiban's defeat, the Empire entered a period of relative peace, a time which the Lion found rather frustrating and which would last, with only minor interruptions, until the return of the Unicorn in the early ninth century. However, the Lion did enjoy one notable non-martial accomplishment in this era: the career of the gifted shugenja Kitsu Taiko, whose unusual affinity for Fire made itself known at an early age. After long service in the Kitsu family, he was eventually offered the position of Master of Fire by the Phoenix Clan. This was a remarkable event, the first time in history that the Phoenix accepted someone from outside their clan into the Council of Masters, and brought great honor to the Kitsu family and the Lion Clan as a whole. In later generations Kitsu Taiko would be venerated by both the Kitsu and the Isawa, a rare instance of harmony between the Empire's most warlike clan and its most peaceful one.

The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix in the eighth century continued to adhere to the tradition of pacifism for which they had long been known, for the most part staying out of the squabbles between the other Great Clans. Their only notable intervention in inter-clan conflicts was at the Battle of Kyuden Tonbo, where a Phoenix army arrived to prevent the destruction of the village where Isawa Maroko and Mirumoto Asijin had settled. Maroko's sensei at the Isawa School had given his blessing to the marriage, since he foresaw the creation of the Dragonfly Clan. The Phoenix intervention helped forge a bond of respect between the Dragon and Phoenix that would endure for generations.

Within the Phoenix Clan's own ranks, the most remarkable event of this era was one known only within the ranks of the Asako family. Asako Beiwa was a henshin of notable enlightenment who had attained the secret to immortality nearly four hundreds years earlier. Beiwa claimed to be the reincarnation of two earlier henshin, Asako Ingen and Asako Reiha, each of uttered the phrase "I would be as a god!" at their moment of death. Beiwa led the Asako studies of the Path of Man for generations, but near the end of the eighth century (in the year 779) he died in mysterious circumstances – possibly poisoned, though no one could tell for sure. At the moment of death he too uttered the phrase: "I would be as a god!" No henshin since that day has said those words.

During the second rise of Iuchiban, the Phoenix demonstrated just how far they were willing to go in the pursuit of peace: they attempted to negotiate with Iuchiban himself. A Phoenix delegation led by Isawa Ryuiso offered an alliance to Iuchiban if he would abandon his quest to overthrow the Emperor. Despite their efforts, however, the Bloodspeaker refused to be turned from his path,



and in the face of his continued aggression the Phoenix joined the forces of the other Great Clans to oppose him. This extreme commitment to a peaceful outcome caused significant suspicion among the other clans, but they nonetheless accepted Phoenix assistance, knowing they need the magical strength of the Isawa to defeat Iuchiban's forces. This proved wise, for at the Battle of Sleeping River the Elemental Council proved instrumental in containing the massive assaults of the Bloodspeakers and their massive hordes of mindless undead. Likewise, after Iuchiban was finally defeated it was the Phoenix who bound his spirit into the walls of his tomb, many of them giving their lives to carry out the powerful ritual.

Ironically, in the latter half of the century, while other clans enjoyed (or endured) an era of peace and prosperity, the Phoenix faced several unfortunate incidents. Their lands were ravaged by Isawa Uso, a corrupted Oracle of Fire, who destroyed many villages near Shiro Shiba and wiped out an entire legion of Shiba bushi before disappearing in a titanic explosion. And toward the end of the century, they lost one of their more prominent holdings, the castle and city of Morikage Toshi. The master of Morikage Toshi, Shiba Kojiro, earned the wrath of the Oracle of Air when his young Dragon bride, Agasha Mijiko, killed herself – driven to despair by marriage to such a cold and unfeeling husband. The Oracle's curse caused the very land to turn against Morikage Toshi; brambles, vines, and trees overwhelmed the castle. All attempts to reclaim the holding were futile, and in the end the Phoenix had no choice but to abandon the city to be reclaimed by the surrounding forest.

The Scorpion Clan

At the start of this era the Scorpion Clan was under the leadership of Bayushi Riozu and enjoyed good relations with their traditional court rivals, the Crane. The influential ambassador Doji Taehime, the so-called "Poison Crane," ensured both clans worked toward mutual benefit. In fact, the two clans would spend the whole first half of the eighth century working in sync, to the prosperity of both. Taehime and Riozu were close friends, and persistent rumors claimed they were lovers as well.

The Scorpion played only a small role in the battles against the Maw's army. After the Maw was finally defeated, the Clan of Secrets refused to give up any of their holdings to compensate the Crab Clan for its losses; Scorpion diplomats claimed the Crab Clan's inability to keep its own holdings free from the Shadowlands did not merit reward. This intransigence set off a series of skirmishes and border conflicts that lasted over a hundred years, with one of the largest clashes being the Battle of the Thundering Shrine in the year 718, where it seemed as if Osano-Wo himself was displeased, given the fierce storms that raged throughout the fight.

The Crab were thus rather perversely pleased when the return of Iuchiban in mid-centurty caused such great





destruction in the Scorpion lands. The Bloodspeaker's undead army wrecked the city of Ryoko Owari and razed countless smaller villages along the way. Finally at Beiden Pass the Scorpion made a stand, buying time for Lion reinforcements to arrive. The Battle of the Bloody Retreat marked the first time in centuries that the Scorpion fought with their entire military strength, and their accomplishments were impressive – especially given their lack of experience in facing opponents like undead and maho-tsukai.

After the final defeat of the Bloodspeaker's army, the Scorpion joined their efforts to those of the Phoenix to trap his soul in his tomb once again, and the Yogo family placed wards on the Tomb to ensure Iuchiban could not somehow free his soul once more.

Aside from their ongoing periodic fights with the Crab Clan, the latter half of the eighth century saw the Scorpion facing relative peace – which was a good thing, since their lands required time and effort to rebuild from the destruction wrought by Iuchiban's army. Their close association with the Crane went into decline after the death of Doji Taehime, but the Scorpion utilized this era of peace and the repute they had gained in the Battle of the Bloody Retreat to strengthen their political power on every front, steadily increasing their influence and control in all of the courts. By the end of the eighth century the Clan of Secrets was politically stronger than at almost any time in its history.

The Minor Clans

As in many other periods in Rokugani history, during the eighth century the Minor Clans mostly struggle merely to survive and avoid the notice of the Great Clans. The most notable aspects of this era from their standpoint was the addition of two new clans to their ranks.

The first of these was the Dragonfly, created from the notorious marriage of Isawa Maroko and Mirumoto Asijin. This unusual love-match, breaking a betrothal between Maroko and Akodo Yokutsu, was supported by both the Phoenix and the Dragon Clans, much to the fury of the Lion. The subsequent conflicts between the Lion, the Dragonfly, and the Dragon Clan were some of the most notable incidents in the first half of the eighth century. Ultimately, the Dragonfly became the gatekeepers of the Dragon Clan; all future visitors and petitioners to the Dragon lands had to pass through the screening of the Dragonfly in order to gain audience. In return, the Dragon Clan protected the Dragonfly from any future retaliation by the Lion.

The second event was the creation of the Hare Clan, which was intimately tied to the second return of Iuchiban at mid-century. A ronin named Reichin who called himself "Usagi" ("the Hare") was a resident of Ryoko Owari, and was credited with spotting the approaching Bloodspeaker forces and helping raise the alarm. Reichin fought in the defense of the city and later in the Battle of the Bloody Retreat, where he managed to survive despite the loss of several comrades. At the Battle of Sleeping River he distinguished himself, picking up the banner of a fallen general and leading a group of men into combat despite overwhelming odds. Some tales even claim he managed to wound Iuchiban, although these may be later embroideries. After the defeat of Iuchiban, Emerald Champion Doji Saisetsu asked for a volunteer to sabotage the defenses of Jama Suru, who had taken up residence in the ruins of Ryoko Owari with the remaining remnants of the Bloodspeaker forces. Reichin volunteered for the task and engaged in a variety of creative actions within the city, destroying supplies and spreading chaos amongst the Bloodspeakers. During the final battle to retake the city, he saved Doji Saisetsu's life by taking an arrow meant for him.

In reward for his bravery, Reichin was given the family name of Usagi and the right to found a Minor Clan. He was granted lands on the plains to the south of Ryoko Owari, the very place where he first spotted the advance of the Bloodspeaker army.

Aside from these two instances, the Minor Clans for the most part kept out of the larger affairs of the Empire. The Mantis remained focused on trade and exploration of the seas; their isolation from the mainland insulated them from both of the major crises which assail the Empire. The Fox, Badger, Centipede, Sparrow, and Tortoise all tended to their own affairs without involvement in larger events, although the Centipede did send a few shugenja to the Battle of Sleeping River, lending their magical might to that of the Phoenix.

The Imperial Families

At the dawn of the eighth century, the aging and embittered Emperor Hantei XX sits on the throne. He is one of the most unpopular rulers in Rokugan's history, exceeded only by the long-forgotten monstrosity of Hantei XVI, and his advanced age and stubborn refusal to retire has lead to his becoming disconnected from the Empire and from his duties. This leads to a resurgence in the influence of the Otomo and Seppun as they step in to support Imperial power. When the old Emperor finally dies at the extremely advanced age of 97, he is succeeded for a short time by his elderly son, who becomes Hantei XXI. He is well into his seventies by the time he ascends the Emerald Throne, and his reign lasts for little more than a decade before he dies in turn and is succeeded by his grandson, who is proclaimed Hantei XXII.

The rule of this young Emperor begins on an unpromising note when he nearly marries a *maho-tsukai* concealed among the delegation of women the Crane Clan sends as suitable brides. He is saved only by the timely intervention of a magistrate named Akodo Shimizu. Aside from this incident, the Emperor's reign is mostly undistinguished; it is the actions of the Great Clans which determine the outcome of the desperate struggle with Iuchiban and his undead army.

The Shadowlands

In contrast to the previous century, this era opens with a tremendous resurgence of the Shadowlands. The creature called the Maw, also known as Nikoma no Oni, is freed from his imprisonment and rallies a vast army to assail the Empire. All the horrors of the Shadowlands flock to his banner, amassing an army that rivals that of the Dark Kami in the First War. The destruction of Hiruma Castle is the single greatest victory for the Shadowlands since the days of Fu Leng himself, and only the incredible heroics of the Crab – especially Kuni Osaku and Kaiu Haruko succeed in turning back the Maw's final assault at the Battle of the Cresting Wave.

After the defeat of the Maw, the Shadowlands sinks once more into relative inactivity – which is fortunate, since the Crab will take generations to recover from their losses. In fact, only the gradual extension of the new Kaiu Wall to cover the entire border allows the Crab to hold off even the weak, disjointed attacks which the Shadowlands mounts in the latter part of the eighth century.

Important Personages of the Eighth Century

There are many notable events in the eighth century and thus many significant historical figures throughout the era. The following section provides a sampling of such individuals for the GM's use. They can, of course, be relocated to other campaign settings with only minor changes.

Shimizu Gochoku (Akodo Shimizu)

Founder of the Shimizu Family

Akodo Shimizu distinguished himself from his peers at an early age with his problem-solving skills, often seeing solutions his classmates missed. After his gempukku he was assigned as a yojimbo to a clan magistrate named Ikoma Daikiko. For the next three years he proved himself an invaluable member of her entourage. Beyond protecting the magistrate from harm, he often picked up clues Daikiko missed and would tactfully bring them to her attention. Some magistrates might have been irritated with this, but Daikiko recognized Shimizu's promise and encouraged him to hone his natural talents.

After he assisted in the successful capture of a provincial governor's murderer, Shimuzu was promoted to the position of clan magistrate. Over the next few years he solved every case that was brought to his attention... until he was assigned to hunt down the so-called Terror of the Osari Plains. For several years he chased this elusive maho-tsukai, identifying her as a disgraced Dragon shugenja named Agasha Enshoku. On a couple of occasions he even managed to come face-to-face with the green-eyed sorceress, but Enshoku was always able to escape using her maho spells. Finally she disappeared entirely, leaving no clues behind. Shamed by his utter failure, Shimizu went to report to his daimyo at the Imperial Court, intending to beg permission to commit seppuku.

It was just as he was reporting his failure that the Crane courtier Kakita Edako caught his eye. While she was quite beautiful, what drew his notice was her brilliant green eyes, quite unusual among the Crane Clan. As Shimizu's gaze met hers he saw her eyes widen in recognition – and he knew, in that instant, exactly who she really was. Shimizu instantly drew his katana and cut her down in open court. The Seppun guards surrounded him within moments, and only the intervention of his daimyo saved him from immediate reprisal. However, before any questions could be asked the form of the dead woman shimmered and was revealed as the Taint-twisted form of Agasha Enshoku.

Akodo Shimizu lived out the rest of his life as Shimizu Gochoku, the founder of the Shimizu vassal family.

Shimizu Gochoku, Founder of the Shimizu Family

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

Honor: 7.5 *Status: 4.5* *Glory: 4.2*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 2, Courtier 4, Defense 5, Etiquette 4, Horsemanship 3, Investigation (Notice, Interrogation) 7, Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Law 4, Lore: Maho 3, Sincerity 4

Advantages: Ally (Ikoma Daikiko), Clear Thinker

Disadvantages: Sworn Enemy (Agasha Enshoku)

Reichin

Founder of the Hare Clan

Reichin started out life as the third son of a Yasuki merchant, and his promise as a warrior led his father to arrange for him to attend the Hida Bushi school. Although he excelled at his classes and seemed to have a natural affinity for every sort of weapon, he suffered from an irresistible urge toward drink and gambling. Once he became an adult, he served his father as a caravan guard, but spent most of his time gambling with the ronin who worked alongside him. Soon he found himself deeply indebted. He was cast out of the family and made ronin; after several years of wandering, he settled in Ryoko Owari, where he worked as a sword-for-hire for Mantis smugglers and other disreputable types. He also worked as an information peddler, and carefully cultivated good relations with the Scorpion authorities – his experiences as wandering ronin had convinced him it was a good idea to befriend the local magistrate.

Over time, Reichin grew to be a fixture on the docks of Ryoko Owari, well-known among the locals for his charming personality and shrewd nature. He acquired the nickname of Usagi, "the Hare," and reveled in the mixture of mischief and skill which it suggested. Reichin still gambled, but now he won more often than he lost, and he used his time in the gambling parlors to garner the information he traded to the Scorpion magistrates.

Reichin's transformation into one of the great heroes of Iuchiban's second assault on Rokugan is well-known. The gambler and rogue found himself in the midst of desperate events, fighting to preserve not only his own life but all of Rokugan against monstrous foes. With every battle, the degenerate man from before was slowly burned away, revealing a brave and cunning warrior. His greatest accomplishment was destroying the defenses of Jama Suru, thus assisting the Emerald Champion in retaking the city, and he nearly died taking an arrow meant for Doji Saisetsu. Out of such deeds came the appointment of a family name and a Minor Clan – a fate which a young Reichin could never have imagined when he was exiled from his family years before.

Still, perhaps some measure of the roguish gambled still lurked in Reichin's heart, for while the Hare Clan he created was certainly honorable and brave, their warriors always retained a certain edge of pragmatism.

Reichin, Founder of the Hare Clan

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

Honor: 2.7 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 5.2* *Infamy: 3.7*

School/Rank: Hida Bushi / Ronin (Insight Rank 3)

Skills: Athletics 7, Commerce (Appraisal) 3, Defense 4, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo) 2, Hunting 3, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Shadowlands 1, Stealth 7, Temptation (Bribery) 4

Advantages: Crab Hands, Crafty, Great Destiny (Found the Hare Clan), Quick

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Gambling), Dishonored

Kitsu Taiko (Isawa Taiko)

Master of Fire

Taiko began his life as an abandoned babe, adopted into the family of a farmer. He led a peaceful early childhood, but that changed when bandits attacked his village. His adopted family was slaughtered, and as some of the bandits looted his home, Taiko suddenly felt a terrible wrath rip through him – and with it, a terrible heat. He unleashed a storm of fire kami, incinerating the bandits as well as the hut where he had lived all his life.

A contingent of Kitsu shugenja arrived in the village soon after, claiming they were led there by the spirit of Kitsu himself. They found the boy Taiko sitting amidst the smoking ruins of his house, his body untouched by the fire. They investigated and discovered he carried some of the Kitsu bloodline, albeit not enough to become a true sodan-senzo. Nonetheless they adopted him into the Kitsu family and began to teach him how to manipulate the kami and control his magic. His greatest strength was in the Element of Fire, one which the Kitsu normally abjured, and as he grew up he became known as a magical innovator, finding new ways of using his chosen Element. Like his new Lion brethren, he believed in confronting problems head on, and after his gempukku he served in the Lion armies, earning repute as a fierce combatant who used his Fire magic to destroy any perceived threat.

At the Battle of Sleeping River, Kitsu Taiko's magic proved to be just as formidable as that of the Elemental Masters, and his deeds there brought him to their attention. The Council needed a new Elemental Master of Fire, but there was no suitable candidate within the Phoenix Clan, and the Council could not help but notice this extraordinary Lion prodigy. When he retired from the Lion Clan some years later, the Council invited him to visit the Phoenix and learn of their ways. Taiko was delighted



with the chance to further his magical studies at the most advanced shugenja school in the Empire, and within a few years he dropped his Kitsu name, swore allegiance to the Phoenix, and joined the Council as Master of Fire.

Kitsu Taiko (Isawa Taiko), Master of Fire

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

Honor: 8.2 Status: 7.0 Glory: 4.7

School/Rank: Kitsu Shugenja 4 / Isawa Shugenja (Fire) 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 5, Calligraphy (Cipher) 5, Courtier 4, Defense 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Kenjutsu 3, Knives 2, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: History 7, Lore: Shugenja 5, Lore: Theology (Ancestors) 7, Meditation 7, Sincerity (Honesty) 5, Spellcraft 10, Staves 3

Advantages: Elemental Blessing (Fire), Friendly Kami (Fire), Multiple Schools, Social Position (Master of Fire)

Disadvantages: Brash

Doji Taehime

The Poison Crane

The girl named Doji Taehime was always considered a beauty, and from youth she learned to manipulate those around her and to hide the fact that behind her lovely face she possessed a keen mind. Many underestimated her and she used this to her advantage. After her gempukku, she was sent to Kyuden Bayushi as part of the ambassador's retinue. Little was expected of her initially, but she quickly managed to uncover many of the Scorpion plots. She was particularly adept, however, at saving face for all concerned by making her Scorpion hosts aware when they were "mistaken," allowing them to avoid further embarrassment. Within a few years, Taehime's success caused her to be elevated to the position of senior Crane ambassador at Kyuden Bayushi.

She also came to the attention of the Scorpion Clan Champion, Bayushi Riozu, when she uncovered a conspiracy within his own court that would have proved a great embarrassment to his clan. Rather than expose it publicly, she reported it privately to him, allowing him to deal with it covertly. Riozu was entranced with Taehime's combination of beauty and intellect, and the two became close friends; it was Riozu who bestowed the title of "the Poison Crane" upon her, although he allowed lesser courtiers to take the credit for it.

It seems likely that Taehime and Riozu fell in love with each other, each admiring the skills and intelligence of the other, but whether they ever actually consummated their passion is unknown. Taehime remained loyal to the Crane and worked throughout her life to ensure her activities in the Scorpion court benefited her clan as much as possible. After many years of service, she finally died of old age in the year 745. Her will directed that all her possessions be sealed in an iron box and buried beneath the walls of Kyuden Kakita, and the final lines proclaimed, *"Let all my knowledge go to my family, but let no man betray my trust to the lord who has been my host for so many years."* Thus she died loyal to both the clan of her birth and the clan of her true love.

Doji Taehime, the Poison Crane

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

Honor: 6.0 Status: 4.7 Glory: 2.0

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 5

Skills: Artisan: Painting 3, Calligraphy 7, Courtier (Manipulation) 7, Defense 1, Etiquette (Courtesy) 8, Horsemanship 2, Intimidation (Control) 3, Investigation (Notice, Interrogation) 5, Perform: Storytelling 4, Perform: Dance 5, Sincerity (Honesty, Deceit) 7, Tea Ceremony 5, Temptation 4

Advantages: Balance, Clear Thinker, Darling of the Court (Kyuden Bayushi)

Disadvantages: Small, True Love (Bayushi Riozu)



The Political Climate Before and After Iuchiban

Prior to Iuchiban's second emergence, Rokugan enjoyed about four decades of peace after the depredations of the Maw (which in any case only really affected the Crab Clan). During this time the Crane prospered; their strongest adversaries are the Otomo, who still resent the Crane for their loss of standing with Emperor Hantei XX (he had given the traditional Otomo duties to Crane Clan favorites). The Crane are also strengthened by the shame and suspicion heaped on the Lion after the treason of Akodo Fuso at the Battle of Cresting Wave. Relations between the Lion and the Crab and Dragon are especially hostile, with near-constant clashes on mutual land borders. The Crab, the Crane Clan's other traditional military rival, are busy feuding with the Scorpion over border territories, while the Scorpion themselves are essentially Crane allies due to the labors of Doji Taehime. With the Phoenix remaining mostly aloof from politics, this makes this era a period of Crane political and economic dominance, rivaled perhaps only by their powerful position in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

When Iuchiban returns to the Empire, his threat forces the contentious clans to work in concert, but even so some of the Great Clans initially believe the threat to be exaggerated and do not send a large commitment of troops. The Crane especially see little reason to fear a few peasant cultists, and regard the early warnings by the Dragon with skepticism. The Crane send a single legion to join the united Imperial army confronting Iuchiban at Sleeping River. The Crab respond minimally for a different reason – they believe threats beyond the Kaiu Wall should be handled by the other clans, and in any case they are still recovering from the heavy losses a few decades earlier against the Maw. They dispatch only a few bushi and a group of Kuni shugenja and Witch Hunters. By contrast, the Dragon, Lion, Phoenix, and Scorpion Clans all understand the full extent of the danger and send as many soldiers as they can spare while still protecting their own lands. The bravery of the Lion at Beiden Pass helps to restore the clan's good name with the rest of the Empire, and the Scorpion win respect and admiration all across the Empire for their deeds in the Battle of the Bloody Retreat.

After Iuchiban's defeat, the Scorpion see a significant loss of wealth (much of it now lost in the smoking rubble of the City of Lies) but a significant boost in political influence, which they capitalize on aggressively. Although it will take them decades to fully rebuild the city, the political strength they parlay out of their deeds soon makes them the strongest clan in the Empire. By contrast, the Crane Clan lose much of their influence at court, both due to their weak support for the battle against Iuchiban and also due to the lingering effects of letting a maho-tsukai infiltrate their bridal candidates for Hantei XXII. The Scorpion poison the ear of the young Emperor against them, with plenty of help from the Otomo and Seppun, who have been waiting for a chance to tear down the Crane and regain their former stations.

While the Empire is grateful for the magical assistance of the Phoenix at Sleeping River, they also are deeply uneasy about the Phoenix efforts to broker a truce with Iuchiban. What honorable samurai would seek peace with a group of blood sorcerers? Many samurai from the other Great Clans begin to suspect maho-tsukai may have infiltrated the Phoenix ranks, and relations between the Phoenix Clan and the rest of the Empire suffer – a problem further exacerbated by incidents such as the madness of the Oracle of Fire and the cursing of Morikage Toshi. Even the Crane Clan tries to distance itself from a clan that appears it might have darker allegiances.

Attitudes toward the Crab are less hostile, since even the Scorpion grudgingly admit that the clan of Hida must guard the new-built Wall as its first duty. The Lion, meanwhile, regain their role as protectors of the Empire and in general see a revival of their repute and fortunes, although their bitter enmity with the Dragon over the Dragonfly Clan remains in place for decades.

Alternate Paths: The Maw Successfully Conquers Crab Lands

Historically, the Maw's bid to conquer Crab lands failed during the Battle of the Cresting Wave. However, despite the Crab Clan's heroism and the extraordinary sacrifices of individuals like Kuni Osaku and Kaiu Hiroko, the Maw still had a chance to win when the Lion Clan traitor Akodo Fuso made a bargain to allow Shadowlands troops through one of the hidden tunnels



beneath the new-built Kaiu Wall. Only the vigilant observation of the small Dragon contingent at the battle stopped this plot from succeeding. What if the Dragon had not noticed the threat?

It is quite likely that without the Dragon intervention a considerable amount of the Maw's forces would have made it through the Wall, outflanking the defenders and spreading chaos and ruin everywhere. The battle would have been lost and the Maw would have wiped out a large portion of the Crab army as well as the reinforcements sent by the other Great Clans. From there, the Maw would have pushed on to Kyuden Hida, where the remaining survivors would have taken refuge. Given the powers Nikoma no Oni had acquired from the Dark Oracle of Earth, it is probable that Kyuden Hida would have fallen with almost as much ease as Shiro Hiruma.

At that point the Shadowlands army would have had free rein to loot and obliterate every village and settlement in its path. Without the experienced soldiers of the Crab Clan to lead them, and with the other clans' reinforcements splintered and scattered after the Battle of the Cresting Wave, Nikoma no Oni's army would have very little opposition. The Crab lands would already be largely lost (although some of their northwestern territory might survive in isolation), and the adjacent Crane territories would not be well-defended. Most of the samurai residing in the southern Crane provinces were wholly unused to the rigors of combat, let alone combat with the nightmare creatures of Jigoku; it is highly unlikely they could have withstood an onslaught of this magnitude.

Moreover, the Maw's advancing forces would have become steadily stronger as they moved forward, since the Taint which advanced with them would have corrupted everyone who did not manage to flee and would also have re-animated every corpse as an undead soldier in the Oni Lord's army. It is highly unlikely that the Scorpion would have fared any better than the Crane in withstanding this invasion – their army was relatively small, and their preferred tactics of stealth and ambush were ill-suited to fighting a horde of Shadowlands beasts which cared nothing for supply lines or command networks. Thus, it is most likely the Maw would not have been stopped until he reached the Spine of the World Mountains and the easily defended Beiden Pass. All of the southern Empire would have become an expanded Shadowlands, bounded on the north by the mountains and the west by the Shinomen Forest. The Crab Clan and Scorpion Clan would both have been reduced to small groups of homeless exiles, as would the Fox Clan, while the Crane would have been greatly weakened by the loss of their southern provinces and population. The remaining rump Empire would have been dominated by the three surviving Great Clans: the Lion, Dragon, and Phoenix. Despite the desperation of this situation, inter-clan conflict would most likely have become even worse, since there would be so much less arable land available.

Aside from the profound change this would make on the Empire's later history and culture, there are two more short-term effects that should be considered. The first is that when Iuchiban managed to free his soul from his body, the only other bodies he would be able to leap into would be those of Shadowlands beasts and Lost humans. Thus the Second Rise of Iuchiban as we know it would never happen, and the Bloodspeaker would most probably wind up as a general in the Maw's tremendous army.

The second change would come with the return of the Unicorn at the dawn of the ninth century. Instead of crossing the northern Shadowlands and reaching the Kaiu Wall, they would find themselves advancing hopelessly into a far larger and more powerful Shadowlands. It is likely that most of them would perish or succumb to the Taint, although a few fortunate or desperate individuals might make it to the Spine of the World. This in turn could actually lead to the victory of Fu Leng at the Second Day of Thunder, since there would be no Unicorn Thunder to fight against him – although it is possible a samurai from the Fox Clan might step forward to take up that mantle.

Alternate Paths: The Maw is Never Freed

The Attack of the Maw was one of the most devastating events the Crab Clan ever faced. They lost the ancestral lands of the Hiruma, the fertile lands of the Kuni were corrupted and ruined, and casualties for the entire clan were immense. But there was nothing inevitable about the Maw's assault on Rokugan. If the Witch Hunters tracking down Isawa Shokan had managed to capture or kill him before he reached the cave where Nikoma no Oni was imprisoned, the Oni Lord might have remained trapped indefinitely

How would this have changed the history of Rokugan? The most obvious impact would be on the Crab Clan. At this time in history, there had not been a significant threat from the Shadowlands in many generations. While skirmishes with wandering bands of goblins and the occasional rampaging ogre or oni were common, the strength and preparedness of the Crab easily contained these threats. Thus without the Maw's attack the Crab would remain strong and even somewhat complacent. The Hiruma would retain their lands and their ancestral school; the Kuni school would continue to flourish as a centralized institution, without the paranoid redundancy of later generations, and their research into the Taint would advance more slowly without the need to cleanse their own lands. Since there would be no need to seek recompense for territory lost to the Maw, relations with the other Great Clans would be better, and the Crab and Scorpion would remain reasonably amicable neighbors – they would always view each other with veiled hostility, but no border wars would erupts. And perhaps most important of all, there would be no Kaiu Wall – the

Crab would continue to rely on the "layered" defense they used throughout the first eight centuries of their existence.

The impact on the rest of the Empire would be subtler but still significant. Without the shame of Akodo Fuso's actions to restrain their aggression, the Lion Clan would likely seek battle with its neighbors, and the rest of the century would see many more internal conflicts than in the canonical history. The Scorpion Clan's political fortunes would not recover as they did in the actual history, and the Crane would likely remain the strongest and most influential clan throughout the rest of the century.

Due to the increased infighting between the clans, the Empire would probably not respond as quickly or effectively to the threat when Iuchiban escapes his tomb and reenters the Empire. The unified Imperial army would take longer to rally and there would be more political infighting within its ranks. Although Iuchiban would most probably still be defeated, the cost would be far higher and the aftermath of the conflict would include considerable resentment between the clans as each blamed the others for its own losses. The Crab would become more convinced than ever that the rest of the Empire could not be trusted to deal with the threat of the Taint, would demand more privileges for their Witch Hunters, and would likely cease cooperation with the Phoenix Inquisitors due to the suspicions attached to the Clan of Shiba over their attempted truce with Iuchiban. On the other hand, when the Unicorn returned a few generations later they would not face the Kaiu Wall, and would be able to pass into the Empire more quickly and easily than in the canonical history. Their position in Rokugan might end up being even stronger.

Alternate Paths: The Phoenix – Bloodspeaker Alliance

Before the Battle of Sleeping River, the Phoenix attempted to negotiate with Iuchiban and his lieutenants. They offered to ally themselves with the Bloodspeakers if Iuchiban would swear allegiance to the throne and abandon his attempt to take over Rokugan. Historically, the stubborn arrogance of Iuchiban led to the failure of these negotiations, but if the talks had gone differently the subsequent history of the Empire would have been significantly changed.

What changes would an alliance between the Phoenix and the Bloodspeakers have wrought on the Empire? The Phoenix support would allow Iuchiban to negotiate with the Emperor on his own terms, and if those terms were rejected he would be able to call on the strength of the Phoenix in subsequent battles with the Imperial army – or at the very least, deny the Phoenix assistance to the forces of Rokugan. If the Battle of Sleeping River was fought without the Phoenix Clan, the Bloodspeakers might well have overwhelmed the forces of the other Great Clans with their waves of undead and powerful maho spells. Indeed, the prospect of fighting the Bloodspeakers without the Phoenix (or worse yet, of the Phoenix taking the other side) might have been enough to force the Emperor to accept some sort of accommodation.

If Iuchiban was able to force a favorable peace with the might of the Phoenix Clan behind him, one possible result would be the creation of a new Great Clan under his leadership, probably settling in the former Unicorn lands (which were controlled by the Lion but were relatively lightly populated). He would probably also insist on changes in the Imperial laws to make maho a legal practice, at least within the borders of his own territory. Iuchiban's "clan" (which could be represented mechanically by the Spider Clan) would effectively become a cancer growing within the borders of Rokugan, continuing its relentless study and perfection of maho and maintaining constant enmity with the other Great Clans. Yajinden and his apprentices would learn to create new and more dangerous artifacts, and the power-hungry from other clans would defect to the Bloodspeakers, making their numbers grow even more. Thus while the Phoenix bargain might bring peace in the short term, in the long run the inevitable result would be a larger and more desperate war against a far stronger Bloodspeaker.

Nemuranai of the Eighth Century

The Ruby of Iuchiban

In the year 504, while he was still masquerading as Otomo Jama, Iuchiban visited the Imperial treasury and discovered a strange red gem lying with other dusty relics in a forgotten vault. He realized the stone possessed gaijin magic similar to that he had seen practiced in the Burning Sands. With a small amount of experimentation, he discovered he could use the gem to capture the souls of his opponents, and he used it in this way several times during the Battle of Stolen Graves in the year 510. After Iuchiban's defeat, the stone was retrieved by an inhuman ally of the Bloodspeakers, a pennaggolan which called itself Shinko Kamiko. She gave it to Asahina Yajinden, and he in turn eventually passed it to one of his apprentices, a man named Iuchi Mohai. Mohai unraveled the mysteries of the ruby and learned to imprison spirits within it as Iuchiban had done. He summoned five powerful kansen and bound them to the stone to guard and protect it.

When Mohai lost his life at the Battle of Sleeping River, the ruby was smuggled away by a low-ranking Bloodspeaker, who swallowed it. Unfortunately, he did not make it far from the scene of the battle – the ingestion of the Tainted artifact twisted his form, and he was cut down by a Scorpion who noticed his strange appearance. The Scorpion sold the gem and it migrated through many



different hands in later centuries, with almost none of its owners realizing what they possessed. It would eventually influence Rokugan's history in the twelfth century.

The Ruby of Iuchiban has the ability to capture another person's soul, holding them indefinitely within the gem. The victim's physical body disappears and they vanish completely from the world, returning to physical existence only if they are somehow freed from the gem. In game terms, anyone who studies the Ruby intensively (for at least one month, if not longer) can roll Meditation / Willpower at TN 30 to master its ability. Successfully capturing someone else's soul is a Complex Action and requires a Contested Willpower roll to succeed.

Due to the protections of the kansen bound into it, the Ruby is physically indestructible, although at the GM's option powerful anti-Taint magic might be able to overcome that.

The Helm of Daidoji Masashigi

During the Battle of the Tidal Landbridge, the Daidoji family daimyo Daidoji Masashigi sacrificed his life to pin down the Shadowlands forces that threatened to overrun the Crab defenses. At the peak of the fighting Masashigi stood over the body of Hida Bokaru, the third son of the Crab Champion, who had been gravely wounded in the initial Shadowlands assault. Ultimately, Bokaru was rescued, while Masashigi and his three remaining men forced the enemy to fight them on the beaches even as the tide came in and the waters rose. Finally the waves swept away both men and oni. When the tide receded, the only thing to come to shore was Masashigi's helm, which the Crab placed in a shrine to his memory.

Masashigi's helm is not outwardly impressive to gaze upon, for the seawater rusted its metal, but the spirits within the kabuto are infused with the daimyo's fearlessness and determination. Anyone wearing the helm gains a +3k3 bonus to resist Fear effects and to resist infection by the Shadowlands Taint.

Junsui, the Ancestral Armor of the Lion

At the dawn of the Empire, Akodo One-Eye was given this powerful suit of armor by his brother Hida. Crafted entirely from steel (something extremely rare in those days), the armor's breastplate was engraved with the image of Akodo's heavenly mother Amaterasu, and it was said to be able to withstand almost any blade. After Akodo's death, the armor became an heirloom of his family and was said to enhance the skills and empower the deeds of every bushi who wore it.

Tragically, however, during the Battle of the Cresting Wave the armor was worn by a man unworthy of its powers. Akodo Fuso desired acclaim and glory on the battlefield, desired it so intensely that he conspired with Ozaki no Oni to find a way for the Maw's army to break through the newly built Carpenter Wall. In exchange, the oni promised Fuso unequaled skill in battle. Happily, Fuso's betrayal was detected in time, and the Shadowlands forces were defeated. Akodo Fuso was executed for his crime and many other Lion committed *sepukku* when word of their lord's betrayal became known to the clan.

Due to Fuso's treason, Junsui was empowered even more strongly than before, but was also corrupted by the Shadowlands Taint. Afterward it was placed in the Lion Ancestral Hall, resting unused while their shugenja try to figure out a way to cleanse the Taint of the Oni's gift. In modern times they still have not succeeded, and the armor remains waiting for the one who can make it safe to use once more.

The curse on Junsui causes anyone who wears it to feel compelled to continue to do so under almost all circumstances, regardless of social propriety (although the GM might permit the wearer to make a Willpower roll to remove the armor for truly exceptional situations, such as an audience with the Emperor). Mechanically, Junsui is a suit of Heavy Armor of truly exceptional quality, awarded a +15 to the wearer's Armor TN instead of the normal +10. The wearer has the ability to spend up to three Void Points on Enhancement effects in the same Round – however, on any Round in which he spends all three Void Points, he also gains a point of Taint. .

Nightmares of Jigoku

Kinjiro no Oni

A notorious unique oni with formidable skills as a leader and tactician, Kinjiro no Oni harassed the Crab border for months in the years 714-715, employing feints and harassing attacks to keep the defenders off-balance and disperse their forces, then launched a sudden and devastating attack on the all but undefended eastern edge of the clan's territory. Had it not been for the heroic intervention of Daidoji Masashigi, Kinjiro's attack would likely have breached the clan's defenses and inflicted untold damage on the Crab lands.

Physically, Kinjiro no Oni resembled a gigantic jellyfish, its flesh only partially solid at best. When prey approached, the oni lashed out with hundreds of whip-like tentacles, snaring its victims and then dragging them into its flabby bulk; only Masashigi's formidable defensive fighting skills allowed him to hold off the creature's relentless grappling attacks.

Kinjiro no Oni did not actually die when it was swept away by the tide; it managed to absorb the life-energies of its dying followers and survived when the currents dragged it down to the deepest levels of the ocean. It remains there still, trapped by the crushing weight of the water and driven to near-mindlessness by its miserable existence.

Kinjiro no Oni

Air: 2	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 4
Awareness: 5		Agility: 5	Strength: 6

Initiative: 6k2 — *Armor TN: 15*

Attack: Tentacle Lash 7k5 (Simple) or Tentacle Grapple 8k5 (Complex) — *Tentacle Lash 3k3 or Tentacle Grapple 6k1*

Reduction: 8 — *Wounds: 32: +5; 64: +10; 96: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Battle (Mass Battle) 4, Jiujutsu 4

Special Abilities:

Devouring Attack: If Kinjiro no Oni successful Grapples an opponent, if it retains control of the Grapple on its next Turn it will pull the victim into its body, devouring it. Devoured opponents are unable to move and suffer 3k2 damage per Round. (Others may attempt to drag them free of the oni's mass with a Contested Strength roll.)

Fear 4

Invulnerable

Poison: Kinjiro no Oni's flesh exudes a paralytic poison. Anyone who touches or is touched by its flesh (including its tentacle attacks) must make a Contested Earth roll against the oni or suffer a +5 TN penalty on all physical actions. This applies each time the victim is touched and the effects are cumulative.

Semi-Solid: Kinjiro no Oni can squeeze its semi-liquid bulk through spaces small enough for a child.

Notes: The stats presented here represent Kinjiro no Oni in its prime, when it masterminded the attacks on the Crab territories. To represent the "modern" Kinjiro trapped on the ocean floor, reduce its Air to 1 (Reflexes 2) and its Fire to 1 (Agility 4), and delete its Battle Skill.



Kiri no Oni

The Kiri no Oni are enormous arachnid creatures with long spine-covered limbs that taper down to huge, lethal blade-like claws. It is believed the original Kiri no Oni emerged from the Festering Pit many centuries ago, and its spawn are numerous. They tend to be solitary hunters, but occasionally appear in the armies of more powerful Oni Lords and Lost champions.

Kiri no Oni's preferred strategy is to build highly elaborate traps, including webs and deadly pits. Once the prey is caught and immobilized, the oni kills and devours them slowly. However, the oni is perfectly capable of killing its enemies in direct combat.

Kiri no Oni

Air: 6	Earth: 6	Fire: 6	Water: 5
Initiative: 8k6			*Armor TN: 40*
Attack: Claw 8k6 (Simple)			*Damage: Claw 10k5*
Reduction: 12			*Wounds: 50: +5; 100: +10; 150: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Craft: Traps 5, Stealth 5

Special Abilities:

Blade Breaker: Kiri no Oni's hard spiny carapace can sometimes break sword blades that strike it. A normal (unawakened) bladed weapon which strikes Kiri no Oni but fails to inflict damage due solely to the creature's Reduction will break.

Fear 4

Huge

Traps: Kiri no Oni is adept at the creation of traps, using its webs as a substitute for the ropes and bindings which humans employ in such endeavors. The Oni may create any of the Rural Traps listed on page 71 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, and may do without the material requirements listed in that book.

Yattoko no Oni

The Yattoko no Oni stand fourteen feet tall and resemble a gigantic praying mantis; their bodies are covered with chitinous armor and they have bulbous eyes protruding from an insectile head. They have six limbs, each ending in sharp serrated pincers – sharp enough to cut a katana in half. In the center of their torso is a vertical mouth which can swallow anything the oni can grasp and stuff inside. These creatures are legendary for being all but impossible to harm with any kind of edged weapon, and are thus one of the major motivations for the Crab Clan's preference for the tetsubo. Experienced Crab have learned to strike at the creature's relatively thin and vulnerable limbs, crushing them with blows from heavy weapons and leaving the monster unmoving and helpless.

Yattoko no Oni

Air: 4	Earth: 5	Fire: 3	Water: 6
		Agility: 5	
Initiative: 5k4			*Armor TN: 30*
Attack: Claw 6k5 (Free, may make this attack up to four times per Round)			*Damage: Claw 6k3*
Reduction: 8 (24 to edged weapons)			*Wounds: 60: +5; 120: +10; 180: Dead*

Taint Rank: 9

Skills: Battle 4, Hunting 5, Kenjutsu 5

Special Abilities:

- *Eating: If a Yattoko no Oni strikes the same foe with all four Claw attacks in the same Round, that opponent is automatically thrust into the maw located in the oni's torso. The victim suffers 4k2 digesting damage each Round thereafter, and cannot take any Actions other than to try to break free (with a Contested Strength roll). Yattoko no Oni may only eat one opponent at a time.*
- *Fear 3*
- *Huge*
- *Limb Weakness: An attack with a blunt/crushing weapon which uses a Called Shot to target one of Yattoko no Oni's limbs can break and destroy that limb by inflicting at least 15 Wounds. The oni needs two of its six limbs to stand, so destroying its limbs can reduce the number of attacks it can make in a Round. If it is reduced to two limbs, it cannot attack. If reduced to one or zero limbs, it falls to the ground helpless.*
- *Superior Invulnerability: In addition to the normal benefits of Invulnerability, the Yattoko no Oni is immune to all Fire and Water spells.*

Nikoma no Oni, The Maw

One of the most powerful Oni Lords ever to walk the surface of Ningen-do, the creature known to Rokugan only as the Maw led an army out of the Shadowlands which nearly broke the Crab – only the construction of the Kaiu Wall in less than a month allowed his defeat at the Battle of the Cresting Wave. After he was killed, his skull was purified and mounted over the gates of Kyuden Hida as a demonstration of the Crab Clan's might. Unfortunately, during the twelfth century the sorcerer Shokansuru succeeded in stealing the Maw's skull and used it to reincarnate the demon lord once more.

The Maw's true name is unknown to the Empire, but it is actually Nikoma no Oni, taken from the Crab scholar Kuni Nikoma who summoned it in the second century. Regardless, there is no denying the sheer power of this terrible demon lord. The Maw is a massive creature, fifteen feet tall and with a grotesquely muscular body and thick scaled skin. Its massive head is vaguely reptilian, with huge fanged jaws and a heavy bone ridge that protects its small but disturbingly intelligent eyes. Vicious spikes sprout from its spine and limbs, and its body ends in a powerful tail covered in more spikes. However, more terrifying than the Maw's physical powers (formidable though they be) are its magical talents and its ability to rally and lead huge armies of lesser Shadowlands creatures. The Maw is a consummate general, a tactical and strategic thinker able to match wits with the finest generals in the Empire. He almost destroyed Rokugan once, and he may yet do so again.

The Maw

Air: 4	Earth: 10	Fire: 6	Water: 10
Reflexes: 6		Intelligence: 7	

Initiative: 10k7 — *Armor TN: 40*

Attack: Claw 10k8 (Simple) or Bite 10k9 (Complex) — *Damage: 10k6 (claw) or 10k8 (bite)*

Reduction: 20 — *Wounds: 200: +10; 400: +20; 600: Dead*

Taint Rank: 9

Skills: Battle (Mass Battle) 8, Investigation 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 5

Special Abilities:

- *Fear 6*
- *Huge*
- *Maho-Tsukai: The Maw can cast any maho spell as though it has Insight Rank 5. It knows all maho spells in both the L5R core rulebook and the supplement Enemies of the Empire, and it does not need to spill blood to cast maho spells.*
- *Regeneration: The Maw heals 10 Wounds during the Reactions Stage of each Round.*
- *Shadowlands Power: The Maw has the akutenshi power Awe of the Dark One (see the chapter on "The Lost" in Enemies of the Empire for details).*
- *Superior Invulnerability: In addition to the normal benefits of Invulnerability, the Maw cannot be harmed by any elemental spell of Mastery Level 1 or 2. Higher Mastery Level spells can affect it, but it has three Ranks of Magic Resistance against them.*





Chapter Seven

The Return of the Unicorn

The massive shoji doors of the Imperial Court slid open, interrupting the speech of the two diplomats standing before the Emperor's dais. The eyes of the court shifted to the back. A small cloud of Phoenix samurai entered the vast chamber, led by a demure woman in a kimono of alternating red and gold layers. Although they were unarmed, the accompanying Seppun Miharu regarded them warily, hands on their weapons as they flanked their stride to the center of the court. The Phoenix kept their eyes lowered with respect, saying not a word as the whispering din of the courtiers gradually died around them. The Emperor, seated on the Emerald Throne, flicked his eyes to the entering congregation, ignoring the exchange of confused looks and the tenseness of his personal guardians. He said nothing, his face showing no discernible expression. Like the others, he watched, his eyes were drawn to an unfamiliar figure.

At the center of the ring of Phoenix walked a man whose features were obscured by the shadow cast from his midnight-dark cowl. He walked with an unfamiliar step, a strangely rolling gait, and his head turned to observe the sea of courtiers who eyed him. He was tall, cloaked in rich purple garments that were recognizable yet strangely unfamiliar; what passed for his kimono had sleeves that were too long, the collar too tall and extending up to cover part of his neck. Strange objects swung from his tight belt: chains and pouches, and an odd cylindrical thing resembling a bottle, but instead of ceramic it was smooth and clear as crystal. His hakama were worn inside his closed kimono, instead of outside as was customary, and his hands were hidden in thick gloves. The entire ensemble was rich with white trim and dark purple colors, but it did not shine with the telltale gloss of fine silk. It was dull and thick, like a peasant's kasuri. It was as if someone had embellished the kimono style of the most ancient days with needless adornments.

The odd delegation came to a stop at the center of the room. The court was deathly quiet but for the flutter and occasional snapping of fans. All eyes were upon them. Even the two courtiers who had previously held the court's attention, a Scorpion and a Crab, had turned to stare at them.

The woman leading the cluster of Phoenix regarded the two courtiers who blocked her path before the dais, as if noticing them for the first time. She smiled. "Go on," she bid them, "we shall wait out turn."

"What is the meaning of this?" the Chancellor blurted. An aged Scorpion in a scowling mask, he now stood beside the Son of Heaven and pointed his fan with rude directness at the gathering of Phoenix. "Do the Phoenix dare to insult this court by interrupting these proceedings?"

The woman shook her head, then bowed before the Emperor, first kneeling and then going into the full prostration, pressing her forehead to the floor. Those behind her followed suit. Even the strange figure pressed his gloved hands to the floor, the hood of his cloak still concealing his face as he kowtowed to the Son of Heaven.

"I beg the forgiveness of this court," the Phoenix said, her voice calm and practiced. "It was not our intention to interrupt. I offered to wait for a more opportune time, but once your honorable Miharu understood the purpose of our arrival, they insisted we appear before you now."

Rising, the woman kept her eyes respectfully lowered, never meeting the Emperor's eyes. She turned and addressed the crowd, pointedly acknowledging and bowing to every delegation in turn. "My name," she said, "is Isawa Yamiko. I have come to you at the behest of the Elemental Council. The Phoenix have uncovered a shocking revelation that must be known to all, a revelation regarding the remarkable and unsettling recent events that have occurred within our glorious Empire."

The gathered courtiers exchanged looks. That Yamiko spoke of the recent invasion of barbarians from the south, the failure of the Crab and the subsequent closing of the Imperial Roads, was obvious to all. At once several samurai within the Crab delegation flushed red and reached to where their swords would have rested had they been armed. For a moment it seemed there would be challenges issued, but then the Crab controlled themselves with effort. They knew they were not in the Empire's good graces, and they dared not speak until they knew what game the Phoenix were playing.

Yamiko paused, then turned towards the stranger. He was still prostrated before the court. She gestured at him, and all eyes followed her gesture. "Perhaps it is best if I allow their leader to speak for himself."

Her words seemed to unleash a tsunami. The crowd rippled with activity and noise rose to unimaginable levels as the younger samurai within the court lost their On at the audacity of the revelation. Those few who were permitted arms began to unwork the peace-knots that locked their katana in place. The Miharu on the dais readied their own weapons, as if the strange man might lunge at the Emperor at any moment.

The man rose majestically to his feet, pulling away his cloak's hood. His skin was dark like a farmer's, his face narrow and long. His hair was pulled into an audacious topknot, as if he could possibly be a samurai. His gaijin features were offensive to the gathered court, yet there was something familiar about them, something vaguely Rokugani about his eyes. As he cast his gaze about the chaos erupting around him, it was drawn to the banners hanging above the dais. When he saw the ancient banner of the Ki-Rin, his expression changed to surprise... and then the hint of a smile. Yet he said nothing, even as the Chancellor demanded the guards apprehend him.

"The Phoenix have disgraced themselves!" the Chancellor shouted. "They have dressed a wild animal like a man and allowed him into the court!"

Amid a sea of confirming nods Isawa Yamiko's smile was unchanged. "It is understandable that you do not recognize him, Chancellor, for it has been a long time since his kin were among us. But the Phoenix have uncovered the truth about him and those who follow him." She turned to the man and bowed low, as if to her equal. "Please, honored lord, tell the court your name."

The man stared directly into the eyes of the Chancellor. When he spoke, it was in an ancient Rokugani dialect, one no samurai had heard in centuries, but the words could be understood all the same.

"I am Shinjo Nishijin," he said. "We are the children of the wind, and at long last we have returned."

The History Behind the Unicorn Clan's Return



The seeds of the conflict that took place after the Unicorn Clan's return to Rokugan were planted early in the Empire's history. Consequently, the timeline presented here has an unusual format compared to other chapters in this book; it begins with Shinjo's trek into the deserts beyond Rokugan and spans the 770 years after that.

The Departure of the Ki-Rin: Year 45

In the aftermath of the first Day of Thunder, Shinjo resolves to search out the hidden dangers beyond the Empire's borders so Rokugan will never be caught unprepared again. After seven months of preparation, she gathers her people to depart. Among her loyal followers are Ide, Iuchi, and Otaku Shiko, the daughter of Otaku. Not all agree to accompany her on her dangerous quest; she charges those left behind to protect her lands and to record the history of Rokugan so the Ki-Rin will know what has happened in their absence.

Before she leaves, Shinjo receives a blessed mirror from her brother Hantei; one of a pair, it allows her to commune with whoever holds its match while the moon is full. She also meets with her sister Lady Doji, who gives her a small sandalwood fan to remind her of her homeland.

Shinjo takes her clan into the world outside, vanishing into the sunrise.



Year 46

- The Ki-Rin encounter the Ujik-Hai people in the northern steppes. The tribe initially attempts to betray the Ki-Rin and take their supplies, but they are thoroughly defeated by Shinjo and her samurai. The remnants of the Ujik-Hai, led by a man named Moto, find the Kami's way of life more worthy and desirable than the nomadic and superstitious banditry of their forebears. Moto and his followers are granted fealty to the Ki-Rin and a family name. Shinjo and her followers will spend nearly a century in the Ujik-hai's encampments before departing onward, taking many of the nomads with them.

Year 89

- In Rokugan, the remaining remnants of the Ki-Rin Clan petition the Emperor for assistance in combating bandits plaguing their lightly-populated lands. The Lion Clan answers the call, but after destroying the threat they refuse to vacate the area.

Year 90

- In Rokugan, the Emperor accedes to the Lion annexation but awards the former Ki-Rin new lands in the south; he proclaims they are now the Fox Clan, the first Minor Clan in the Empire.

Year 151

- The Ki-Rin Clan encounters a city of sorcerers far to the west of the Empire. During a conflict with them, Shinjo's lieutenant Iuchi is able to steal a tome of their magic and later studies it, devising new spells based on its insights and eventually developing the art of *meishodo*. This type of magic proves much more effective than traditional shugenja magic in the gaijin lands.

Year 153

- Shinjo discovers an ethereal oasis in the desert, where she has a vision of a strange creature called a Unicorn. She vanishes into the oasis, returning a week later but appearing to be months pregnant. Later the same year, she gives birth to five children who have with the ability to change their shape into the form of their mysterious father. Ultimately, four of these children choose to remain as unicorns, while the fifth becomes human to continue Shinjo's bloodline.

Year 198

- In Rokugan, the blessed mirror has not conferred the words of Shinjo in decades. The Shining Prince, Hantei Genji, gives the mirror to the Seppun daimyo as a gift for his coronation. The lord of the Seppun swears to guard it with his life.

Year 242

- While crossing a mountain range, the Ki-Rin Clan encounters gaijin who ride on the backs of gigantic birds called 'rocs,' and many samurai are carried off in a vicious attack. In desperation, Iuchi creates a great rock shower in the mountains that kills most of the rocs and their riders, but also claims the lives of many Ki-Rin and blocks the only known route back to the Empire. The Ki-Rin agree to split up into four groups and seek different routes back to Rokugan. Shinjo uses her katana to break the blessed mirror into four pieces, giving one to each group, so they may still communicate with one another.
- In Rokugan, the blessed mirror linked to Shinjo inexplicably goes dark, casting no reflection; in the heavens, the Ki-Rin's star vanishes from the sky. The Seppun daimyo concludes the Ki-Rin have been lost forever in the deserts beyond the Empire. They are considered dead. Hantei Genji declares an annual festival celebrating and remembering the lost Ki-Rin. At the next Winter Court the darkened mirror is given to the Phoenix Clan's Elemental Master of Air. The Isawa will study the artifact for centuries to come.

The Wanderings of the Ki-Rin

Both during the two hundred years of their separation and later after they are re-united, the Ki-Rin (later Unicorn) have many strange adventures. Only a few of these have been described in detail in the official histories of L5R; since Shinjo's followers relied only on oral histories throughout this time, countless incidents were forgotten. GMs wishing to present their players with exotic scenarios can do almost anything in these eras. The following are merely the more notable highlights of these two time periods.

Year 266 – The wandering Ide and Moto briefly encounter a mysterious inhuman race calling itself the Ashalan.

Year 298 – The Otaku re-encounter the city of sorcerers, some of whom now have learned the art of keeping their hearts alive in magical containers. The Otaku are captured and enslaved.

Year 305 – The Iuchi discover and make peace with a race of mysterious elemental spirits called 'jinn.'

Year 340 – The Otaku escape their bondage, bringing with them a herd of powerful warhorses led by a stallion called Vata. Some legends claim these horses are the descendents of Shinjo's other four children, and that this explains their deep affinity for their Otaku riders.

Year 439 – 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 497 – While traveling through a vast kingdom calling itself the "land of Ivory," the Unicorn encounter and thwart a cult of assassins who seek to resurrect Kali-Ma, a deity they call the Destroyer.

Year 543 – The Unicorn do battle with a distant remnant of the ancient troll empire.

Year 442

- After two centuries of wandering, the divided families of the Ki-Rin all receive messages from Shinjo through the shards of the mirror. She and her followers are trapped in a strange dark land near the Shadowlands, assailed by a nameless evil. Abandoning their explorations, the scattered Ki-Rin race to rescue their leader and brethren, battling through hordes of strange animated shadows. The struggle seems hopeless, but finally Shinjo commands them all to flee, then turns and confronts the darkness alone. The Ki-Rin escape the dark lands, watching as their Kami's light slowly fades behind them.
- Shinjo Yonaru, the descendent of Shinjo, becomes the new Clan Champion. Seeing how the Ki-Rin have been forever changed by their travels, he renames them "The Unicorn Clan." The reunited clan resumes its quest for a way home to Rokugan.

Year 592

- The Unicorn Clan reaches the edge of a great sea. While they ponder what to do, the Iuchi fragment of the mirror flashes and delivers a message from Shinjo, urging them to return to Rokugan at once. When Clan Champion Shinjo Sato pleads they do not know the way, she replies, "Through the dark lands, my child. Great troubles are coming. Thunder..." After these words the mirror goes silent, never to speak again.
- The Unicorn begin a concerted effort to find their way back to the dark lands where Shinjo was lost. The search will take many generations.

Year 775

- The Unicorn finally make it back to the edge of the dark lands. Led now by Shinjo Nishijin, they undertake the crossing, knowing the Shadowlands lie on the far side, and they must pass through that realm as well in order to reach the Empire. Arming themselves with stockpiles of jade, the Unicorn prepare for their greatest test...

Events at the Turn of the Ninth Century

Although the return of the Unicorn dominates the Ninth Century and is its most defining event, there were other important events occurring during this time period. This section describes the most notable incidents that shaped the Empire at the time of the Unicorn Clan's arrival. The GM should, of course, feel free to add more events as befitting his personal vision of the Empire the Unicorn are returning to.

Year 782

- The bride of the callous Phoenix lord Shiba Kojiro takes her life within the halls of Morikage Toshi. Her mother, the Oracle of Air, lays a powerful curse on the castle, causing it to be reclaimed by the surrounding forest. It is lost to the Phoenix for centuries.

Year 790

- **The Scorpion become ascendant in the courts, outmaneuvering the Crane and forging alliances with many different families, even those traditionally opposed to them such as the Akodo. The Crane soon find their influence waning and their rivals shielded from courtly manipulations. The clout of the Scorpion rises steadily throughout this period.**

Year 800

- A new star appears in the Celestial Dragon constellation. Astrologists interpret this to mean something new will come to the Empire, an unsettling idea.

Year 805

- Daimyo Mirumoto Matanubo dies with no male heir. His brother, Mirumoto Ujino, claims the position, but is then challenged by his sixteen-year-old niece, Mirumoto Kaijuko; Ujino is slain. In the Imperial Winter Court that year Kaijuko tries to undermine the Scorpion Clan and begins a legendary courtly rivalry with Bayushi Shinoko, wife of Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Ogoe

Year 811

- The Crane Champion, Doji Ryobu, unexpectedly wins the tournament of the Emerald Champion. During the festivities, Emperor Hantei XXII announces his son will marry Ryobu's sister. These combined acts allow the Crane to maintain a strong position in a political climate seemingly dominated by the Scorpion and Lion.

Year 812

- During the Imperial Winter Court, held this year at Kyuden Bayushi, a heated disagreement between the Kuni and Asako families escalates into multiple duels before the Doji can mediate the conflict. Resentments linger, and the Kuni Witch-hunters and Asako Inquisitors begin to undermine each other in the course of their duties. No one seems to realize the entire conflict was orchestrated by the Scorpion.

Year 814

- A massive tsunami strips much of Rokugan's eastern coast of its trade and fishing fleets. The Crane and Phoenix reel from the disaster, and even the Crab are affected. The supply of deepwater staples such as bluefin tuna and mackerel is severely disrupted, creating a new demand and a temporary courtly preference for freshwater fish.

The Unicorn Return

By the summer of the year 815, years of political maneuvering by the Scorpion have come to fruition. Scorpion Champion Bayushi Ogoe has positioned his clan in an unprecedented favorable position. With the Crane perpetually outmaneuvered and the Phoenix and Crab trapped in a blood feud, the Scorpion only face political opposition from the Dragon. Although daimyo Mirumoto Kaijuko opposes every Scorpion endeavor (even if the Dragon do not seem to benefit from the intervention), she is hardly a political mastermind – though she certainly manages to be a persistent thorn in Ogoe's side. His wife Bayushi Shinoko works to counter Kaijuko's political interference, and the two become both respected opponents and bitter rivals.

Meanwhile, however, the Lion are becoming bolder – confident in their own strength, relieved from the more usual pressure of the Crane, and increasingly irritated at the influence of the Scorpion. The Akodo begin building new castles along their borders and assemble an army in their southern provinces, well-positioned to threaten both the Crane and the Scorpion. Crane political efforts to halt the construction of the new Lion castles are obstructed by the Scorpion, who would much prefer the Lion march south on the Crane instead of west against the lands of the Underhand. The Daidoji family, alarmed by the political impotence of their Doji cousins, begin to take a more active role in sabotaging the castles' construction, further enhancing the possibility of war.

More troubles brew in the northern and southern Empire. The Kuni believe the Asako are corrupted from their study of maho-tsukai, and the Asako believe the Kuni have lost themselves in their obsessive study of the Shadowlands. This misperception comes to a head at the Winter Court of 812, and thereafter neither family can step away without losing face. The other families of the Phoenix and Crab struggle to remain out of the conflict, but as the Kuni and Asako begin to undermine one-another, the Phoenix and Crab as a whole find it difficult to remain uninvolved.

Finally, an unusually large and violent tsunami in the midst of a major taifun storm ruins several ports along the coast, disrupting trade and isolating the island territories of the Empire from the mainland. Only the Imperial City is untouched. The Crab, Phoenix, and Crane struggle to restore their ports, aided in part by the Mantis, who are eager to reconnect their sources of trade.

Thus, the Empire in the year 815 is deeply involved with its own conflicts and affairs, completely unprepared when the Unicorn appear on the southwestern horizon. In late summer, a small Crab scouting party surveying the Shadowlands spots a large force of unfamiliar warriors, mounted on huge horses and approaching the Empire from the southwest. Although the unknown force appears to be human and carries banners, the scouts do not recognize them, and the Crab assume the worst.

The Unicorn reach the Kaiu Wall in early autumn. The Crab, believing them to be an army of Tainted gaijin, ask no questions; they attack the unfamiliar force without mercy. The Unicorn are unprepared and forced to retreat from the Wall. All attempts to negotiate are ignored; the Crab will not parlay with Tainted foreigners, and indeed never allow the Unicorn to come close enough for an effective attempt. Undaunted, the Unicorn seek another way into the Empire, and eventually find it at the northern edge of the Wall. There, on open ground, the Unicorn bring the full force of their cavalry upon the defenders. The Crab have never encountered effective cavalry before and they cannot stop the Unicorn, who break through en masse and head immediately toward their ancestral lands. Several Crab generals commit seppuku for their failure. The Champion of the Crab personally rallies an army to follow the Unicorn, defeat this invasion of Rokugan, and restore the Crab Clan's honor.

The Unicorn advance into the Scorpion territories, where scouts inform Bayushi Ogoe that a force of Tainted barbarians are invading from the Shadowlands. He believes they are heading towards the Imperial capital and prepares to oppose them, attempting to secure help from the Lion and Phoenix. To the defenders' shock and surprise, however, the Unicorn fight a moving battle, simply pushing past them and advancing further north. A Phoenix advisor to one of the defending generals, Isawa Kano, notices the odd behavior of the invaders (avoiding villages, refusing combat where possible) and begins to suspect they not as they appear. He sends word to Phoenix lands to search their histories for answers.

As winter approaches, the Unicorn reach the lands of their ancestors, expecting to find farms and villages held by the Ki-Rin remnants Shinjo left behind eight centuries before. Instead they find large numbers of hostile Lion samurai. Confused and disheartened, the Unicorn pull back before any significant warfare can take place. Seeking somewhere, anywhere, to take shelter, they ultimately push on to the mountain foothills near the Shrine of the Ki-Rin, where they make camp around the Shrine and settle in for a harsh and unfamiliar winter.

The commanders of the various pursuing armies meet at Kyuden Bayushi to discuss how to rid the Empire of these strange invaders. The Phoenix and Scorpion, alarmed by the invaders' prowess and uncertain of their true goals, convince the Crab to fortify the Imperial City instead of pursuing an immediate battle. The Lion concur.

In the midst of winter, the Unicorn are approached by a lone Phoenix shugenja named Isawa Yamiko. She offers to parlay and is taken immediately to Clan Champion Shinjo Nishijin. Over the course of the evening, she learns the Unicorn Clan's true identity. Within days a large group of Phoenix arrive, including the Elemental Master of Air. The Elemental Master brings the blessed mirror, which by now



is unknown to the rest of the Empire. Nishijin recognizes the nemuranai and produces his own shard. The Master of Air accepts this as proof of their claims, and he gives the Unicorn his blessing to remain in the lands surrounding the Ki-Rin's Shrine. Moved by their plight, Isawa Yamiko urges the Council to grant Nishijin passage to the Winter Court of the Emperor as soon as the snows will allow.

During the final month of Winter Court, Shinjo Nishijin and a small honor guard arrive in Otosan Uchi, accompanied by Isawa Yamiko and bearing official travel papers endorsed by the Elemental Master of Air. The Seppun guards, startled and confused, escort them into the Forbidden City and present them to a shocked Imperial Court. The Emperor is oddly silent as Nishijin tells his tale, and one by one the Great Clans reject the Unicorn Champion's story. But when the tale is finished, Nishijin approaches Doji Ryobu and produces the sandalwood fan given to Shinjo by Doji over seven centuries ago. Ryobu recognizes it; before a surprised court, the Crane Champion emotionally welcomes Nishijin back to Rokugan.

The exchange between Ryobu and Nishijin sways the hearts of many within the Imperial City, becoming an iconic image of the Unicorn Clan's return. The Phoenix and Crane enthusiastically champion the rights of the returned Great Clan. The Crab, realizing this revelation absolves them of their shame, offer quiet support as well, and their army returns to the Wall with the spring thaw. The Lion and Scorpion, however, refuse to acknowledge the Unicorn as the returned Ki-Rin Clan. The Scorpion are especially ruthless in their denouncement, unwilling to allow a new player into the political landscape they have so painstakingly shaped. The Emperor himself, however, defers judgment on the matter, preferring to see what course the Unicorn take in the coming months.

Shinjo Nishijin sends word to the Unicorn at the Ki-Rin Shrine. He grants temporary control of the clan to his daughter Shinjo Kochamon while he and the Ide diplomats continue to lobby for recognition.

Year 816

As spring arrives, the Unicorn break camp and begin moving back to their ancestral lands. They find their borders heavily guarded by Lion and Scorpion forces, denying them entry. Violent skirmishes and several small battles take place over the next few months.

At Kyuden Doji, Shinjo Nishijin gifts the Crane Champion with a small herd of breeding horses. In thanks, Crane diplomats arrange for Nishijin to meet with the Fox Clan Champion, who greets him as a long-lost cousin. He presents Nishijin with a cache of ancient scrolls containing the histories of the Empire as recorded by the Fox, fulfilling the promise his family made to Shinjo so many years ago. These prove to be indispensable to the Unicorn in the years ahead. The Miya, longtime allies of the Fox, are convinced by their endorsement and carry the word of the Unicorn's return across the Empire, winning the new clan much popular support.

The Winter Court of 815

Due to the presence of the invaders, the Winter Court in 825 is held in Otosan Uchi rather than with one of the Great Clans. The seppuku of the Crab generals placated the Emperor for their failure to hold the border, but the Crab have otherwise fallen out of the Imperial favor, and redemption is foremost on the minds of every Crab samurai, in court or out. All of the courts are dominated by gossip and speculation as to the nature and origin of the invaders. The various conflicts between the clans are for the moment forgotten in favor of unified action against the threat. Many trespasses are forgiven and rivalries abandoned, including the conflict between the Kuni and Asako. From the Scorpion viewpoint this is a catastrophe, especially since it removes the distractions which prevented the other clans from recognizing the scope of Scorpion power. They attempt to salvage their position by encouraging a political struggle between the Crab and Lion over the honor of ridding the lands of the invading *gaijin*.

After a long and difficult season of political maneuvering, the combined efforts of the Phoenix, Fox, Crane, and Miya convince the Emperor to grant the Unicorn a place within the Imperial Court. The Ide diplomats swiftly begin accumulating allies. However, only days after this development, the Lion launch a full-scale military campaign against the Unicorn. Bolstered by Scorpion intelligence, the Lion escalate the fighting relentlessly. Despite the huge tactical advantage of their cavalry, the Unicorn lack a secure base of supply, and this puts them at a major strategic disadvantage; they begin to steadily lose ground to the Lion, despite several impressive battlefield victories.

A Unicorn diplomat named Ide Suari is granted a personal audience with the Son of Heaven. It lasts for several days; at the end, Suari presents the Emperor with a breeding pair of the legendary Otaku warhorses. The next day, the Emperor commands the Lion to end their war against the Unicorn. The ancestral lands of the Unicorn are occupied by the Imperial Legions, who in turn make the Unicorn their stewards. The Lion obey the Emperor's commands, but promise never to forget this slight.

During the Winter Court of 816, the Son of Heaven officially recognizes the Unicorn as the scions of Shinjo and as a Great Clan equal to the other six. Although this seemingly ends the clan's isolation from the rest of Rokugan, in fact it is already apparent that Shinjo's descendents have acquired many strange, eccentric ways that do not mesh



well with the
Empire at large. The coming years will be a difficult time for them, marked by intense culture-shock, as they try to adapt to their new home and maintain their new allies.

Year 817

With the coming of spring, the Crab and Crane are among the first to send ambassadors to the Unicorn, and the clans forge friendships which will last for generations.

Bayushi Ogoe calls upon his trusted general Bayushi Tozasu and gives him a surprising order: make war on the Unicorn. Scorpion courtiers produce new testimonies for the Imperial Court, accusing the Unicorn of usurping the Ki-Rin name as imposters. They openly provoke and belittle the Unicorn, claiming they do not the have the mettle of true followers of Shinjo. Recognizing an affront to their honor, the Unicorn ambassadors lobby for the right to settle this matter on the battlefield and prove their lineage. The Emperor grants their request and condones a military conflict, ordering the Lion Clan to oversee and mediate the fighting. This leads to a series of skirmishes that eventually culminate in the Battle of White Shore Plain.

Unknown to the Empire, the Scorpion Champion has ordered Tozasu to lose to the Unicorn forces. In the wake of their great victory at White Shore Plain, the Unicorn feel more secure in their new home. They begin construction of Shiro Ide, a mighty castle which will host diplomats from other clans.

The Battle of White Shore Plain

The Battle of White Shore Plain was the largest inter-clan battle between the time of the Gozoku (four centuries earlier) and the Clan Wars (four centuries later). In keeping with his lord's secret orders, Scorpion General Bayushi Tozasu fought well but deliberately avoided adopting certain countermeasures to the Unicorn cavalry that he might otherwise have employed. The battle was hard-fought but the Scorpion ultimately lost, outmatched by the superior mobility and horse-archery of the Unicorn armies. Tozasu committed seppuku on the field, cleansing the shame of his defeat.

When word of Tozasu's defeat reached Bayushi Ogoe, he immediately dispatched a herald to the Unicorn to apologize and grovel for peace. The Scorpion formally recognized the Unicorn as the descendants of the Ki-Rin, and the Unicorn declared their honor was satisfied.

The Unicorn consider White Shore Plain to be one of their greatest victories. It proved their rightful place in the Empire to everyone, even the Lion. In some ways, by challenging their birthright, the Scorpion did them a great favor. Of course, the Unicorn unknowingly did the Scorpion a favor in return. The other Great Clans, having witnessed the colossal failure of the Scorpion armies, no longer considered them a threat... which was exactly what the Scorpion Champion wanted them to believe.

The Clans and Factions at the Dawn of the Ninth Century

When the Unicorn returned to the Empire after 800 years, they throw the precarious balance between the other six Great Clans into chaos. Alliances crumbled, new enmities arose, and new friendships formed, changing the Empire forever. The following sections outline the status and reactions of the major Rokugani factions in that era.

The Crab Clan

Before the return of the Unicorn, the Crab were on the verge of war with the Phoenix. The Kuni were furious with the Asako and believed the Phoenix were succumbing to the lure of maho. They were also still struggling with the aftermath of losing the Hiruma lands to the Maw's attack a few decades earlier (see Chapter Six: *The Eighth Century Crises* for details), and during this era the Hiruma family made several unsuccessful attempts to reclaim their ancestral castle.

The arrival of the Unicorn through the Shadowlands is the first major threat from the south in a generation, and the Crab believe the new Kaiu Wall will surely repel the danger with ease. When the swift-moving Unicorn forces outflank the Wall and enter Rokugan, the Crab are shaken to their core. They have failed in their duty, and many generals commit seppuku to atone for their shame. Rivals in the courts make use of this failure to diminish them in the eyes of the Emperor and the entire clan falls heavily out of favor. Thus, when word spreads that the "invaders" are actually the returned Ki-Rin, the Crab breathe a sigh of relief. True, they were bested by another clan, but that is not the same as failing their duty. The Crab support recognition of the Unicorn as much to salvage their own honor as out of belief that the Unicorn are truly the Ki-Rin.

After the Unicorn are recognized by the Emperor, relations between the Unicorn and Crab quickly improve. The Shinjo family, hearing of the tragedy that has befallen the Hiruma, offer to house and train Hiruma bushi in their lands, thus leading to the creation of the Hiruma Scout School. The provocative Kuni almost ruin this new friendship, however, when they demand every Unicorn be tested for Taint due to their exposure to the Shadowlands. The Unicorn find this demand galling and insulting, but ultimately agree, earning the respect of the Kuni. Ironically, the only Unicorn to test positive for the Taint is the Clan Champion, Shinjo Nishijin, and the Kuni promise to keep his secret. From this point forward, the Crab-Unicorn friendship takes deep root and lasts for centuries. Even the fall of the Moto family to the Shadowlands a generation later does not break the relationship.

The Crane Clan

In the years immediately before the return of the Unicorn, the Crane are at a serious disadvantage. Although Doji Ryobu was the Emerald Champion, the Lion Clan's military aggression and the Scorpion Clan's ascendant political power threatened to overwhelm the Left Hand of the Emperor. The Lion menaced their northern border, building castles and speaking boldly of invasion. The Scorpion held overwhelming power at court, limiting the Crane's ability to forestall attacks by the Lion. To compound their woes, the tsunami and storms of 814 wreck a large swath of the Crane coastal lands, weakening their trade and devastating the fishing harvest. The Crane are desperate to rebuild, but their only real ally at this time is the small Mantis Clan.

The arrival of the Unicorn changes everything – and from the Crane viewpoint, nearly all of the changes are for the better. The Unicorn force the Lion to redeploy their armies into their western provinces, giving the Crane some much-needed breathing room. When Shinjo Nishijin presents his fan to Doji Ryobu, the Emerald Champion sees a golden opportunity. By recognizing the Unicorn as the returned Ki-Rin, he ensures this new Great Clan will carve its territory out of the Lion Clan's western flank, both weakening the Lion and creating a long-term militaristic rival for the Right Hand. The Crane focus all their courtly influence on the goal of getting the Unicorn officially recognized by the Emperor. They are assisted by the Phoenix, the Crab, and even somewhat by the Dragon, but bitterly opposed by the Lion and the Scorpion. This effort is ultimately successful, and not only supplies the Crane with a valuable ally but



also places that ally into Crane debt – which Ryobu expects to produce many future benefits for the Clan of Doji.

However, the foreign-influenced Unicorn do not take the same view of politics as the Crane. When Doji Ryobu recognizes Doji's Fan and endorses the Unicorn before the Imperial Court, the Unicorn believe he is simply acting as an honest and honorable samurai. When the Crane Clan fights for the Unicorn's acceptance, the Unicorn believe they are doing so out of compassion and honor, not for political gain. This fundamental difference in world-views causes a great many misunderstandings between the two clans in the years that follow, and while relations between the Crane and Unicorn are generally good, the return of Shinjo's people never quite pays the dividends expected.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon Clan, traditionally removed from the affairs of the larger Empire, is unusually politically active in this era. Mirumoto Kaijuko, the young daimyo of the Mirumoto, seeks to undermine the influence of the Scorpion at every opportunity. Whether she is acting on her own or at the behest of the reclusive Dragon Clan Champion, the level of intensity she puts into countering the Scorpion seems almost personal. Although the Dragon have no formally trained courtiers in this era (since at this point the founding of the Kitsuki family still lies in the immediate future), they do their best to carry out Kaijuko's orders, and the swordsmen of the Mirumoto can back their labors with lethal duels. The combination makes them a significant threat to Scorpion interests.

When the Unicorn first return, the Dragon are neutral. They watch the followers of Shinjo ride through the lands of the Scorpion and Lion without sending aid to their fellow Rokugani. Later, they do support the Crane efforts to have the Emperor recognize the Unicorn, although it is possible Kaijuko does so solely to thwart the Scorpion. Once the Emperor does recognize the Unicorn, the Dragon have little interaction with the newcomers. The crushing defeat of the Scorpion at the Battle of White Shore Plain convinces many Dragon the power of the Scorpion has been broken, and although Kaijuko carries on her personal rivalry with the Scorpion Champion's wife, the overall pace of Dragon activity in the courts declines sharply. (An additional factor for the Dragon is the controversy surrounding Agasha Kitsuki which erupts just three years later, in 820. This is a major internal affair which divides the Dragon and spills over into the Empire at large. Although it is officially settled when Kitsuki is granted his own family name, the peculiar techniques he pioneers remain a source of controversy for centuries.)

The Lion Clan

At the beginning of this era the Lion are among the stronger Great Clans, with a huge army and the largest territory of any clan. They have the favor of the Emperor due to their new vassal family, the Shimizu, who foiled a maho-tsukai's plot to marry the Emperor in the year 743. The Scorpion support them indirectly, using them as a weapon against the other clans, and the armies of the Right Hand of the Emperor are able to win victories without the usual political repercussions from the Crane. In effect, there is a covert Lion-Scorpion alliance (although the Lion would be offended at the very idea), and the two clans dominate the courts, the battlefields, and the Empire. The Lion take particular advantage of the unaccustomed weakness of their Crane rivals, who they pressure at every opportunity, notable by building several new fortresses on their border. By the year 815, Crane political influence has declined to the point where they are forced to use Daidoji scouts to harry the border; war seems likely to erupt any day, a result which would naturally please the Lion greatly.

The Unicorn's return changes all of this. The Lion Clan is forced to shift its attention to the west, away from the weakened Crane. The Lion react ferociously to the initial "gaijin invasion," deploying their troops to protect their territories and, later, to block the Unicorn from approaching Otosan Uchi. Winter sets in before they are able to confront the barbarians, but they plan to do so with the spring thaws. Thus, when the Crane



accept the Unicorn in open court, the Lion refuse to follow suit. Clan Champion Akodo Ikasu has no intention of recognizing these filthy gaijin barbarians as the followers of noble Shinjo. He orders his armies to block the Unicorn from returning to their ancestral lands, which the Lion have controlled for centuries. When the Unicorn are granted a place in the Imperial Court that spring, Ikasu unleashes a full-fledged military campaign against them, determined to drive them out of the Empire before they can delude anyone else with their lies.

Helped covertly by the Scorpion, Ikasu's armies push the Unicorn north and west. These strategic gains are not without heavy cost, however. The Unicorn Clan's strange gaijin cavalry tactics cause heavy casualties and the Lion lose several battles outright. Ikoma Shabiku, the Ikoma daimyo, writes letters to the Imperial courts claiming the Unicorn are using dishonorable methods and tactics. Among other things, he points to an incident in which a defeated Lion general attempted to commit seppuku on the field, but was run through by the Unicorn commander, killing him where he knelt. He also claims the Unicorn do not offer captured Lion soldiers the chance to commit seppuku, instead releasing them and thereby disgracing their families with their failure.

The Imperial command to cease the war against the Unicorn is a bitter pill for the Lion to swallow. Ikasu considers committing kanshi (protesting seppuku) in response, but ultimately decides that as a loyal servant of the Emperor he must obey. When Imperial forces claim the ancestral lands of the Ki-Rin and turn them over to the Unicorn, the Lion obey. When Hantei XXII officially recognizes the Unicorn as the scions of Shinjo, the Lion obey. But they do not forgive, nor do they forget. Lion disdain for the Crane pales in comparison to the boiling rage they feel when they see the filthy, smelly, bow-legged, near-gaijin Unicorn with their insulting mannerisms, disgusting customs, and barbaric traditions. The Lion swear to never forget the slights done to them by the returning Unicorn, and several Matsu lords add their own oaths to drive the Unicorn from their provinces and burn their castles – and their dreams of acceptance – to the ground.

The Phoenix Clan

The years leading up to the return of the Unicorn are for the most part peaceful ones for the Phoenix Clan. However, this harmony is disrupted by the conflict between the Inquisitors and the Kuni family of the Crab. The Isawa and the Shiba desire to stay out of the fight, but the feud continues to escalate regardless of the wishes of the more peaceful members of the clan. After a major confrontation at the Imperial Winter Court of 812, the Shiba fear nothing can stop the slow and steady descent into a war they do not want. As if that were not enough, the tsunami and storms of 814 do extensive damage to their coastal lands – although they are able to recover more quickly than the Crane, since they do not have the Lion threatening them.

Fortunately, the threat of war with the Crab is averted by the return of the Unicorn. In the face of such a major event, the feud with the Kuni is all but forgotten.

Alternate Paths: Driven from the Empire

Ultimately, the Unicorn Clan is saved from the Lion by Hantei XXII's intervention. This diplomatic victory for the Unicorn is in fact a very close thing; it takes the pressure brought by numerous Great Clans and the Imperial families (as well as the gift of a breeding pair of Otaku warhorses) to ultimately sway the Emperor's decision. Loss of support from any of these entities would have delayed the Emperor's approval by a year or more. Moreover, the Otaku are hesitant to part with any of their prized steeds, which they consider gifts from the Heavens.

Without an Imperial command, the Lion would probably have driven the Unicorn from the Empire and into the Burning Sands within a year. The price of their victory would have been gruesomely high, of course, for the Lion suffered numerous tactical reverses from the Unicorn cavalry, but their overall superiority of numbers and supplies would ultimately have prevailed.

While the Unicorn had learned much from the Moto about the ways of desert survival, this would nonetheless have been a period of bitter hardship and deprivation for the descendants of Shinjo. The empty wastes beyond the Empire's borders were short of food and the Lion would doubtless have continued to run sorties across the borders to try to drive the "gaijin invaders" farther away; after the perceived indignities the Unicorn heaped upon the Lion during their earlier battles and victories, the Lion would mercilessly hunt them down. The pressure on Shinjo Nishijin and the Ide to win Imperial acceptance would have been even greater, but their task would have become much harder without the physical presence of their clan inside the Empire.

These would be dark days for the Unicorn, days which might end in their final extermination unless they managed to ultimately win recognition by the Emperor.

The Phoenix are the first clan to suspect the Unicorn are something other than mere gaijin invaders. Alerted by Isawa Kano, their historians pore through their tomes to find clues to the origin and purpose of the strange horse-riders. Phoenix scouts shadow the Unicorn, looking for clues, but keep their distance in case the early reports that the riders are Tainted prove to be true. Eventually, the Elemental Council sends Isawa Yamiko to parley with the foreign riders while they are camped at the Shrine of Ki-Rin. When she discovers their true heritage, word quickly spreads and the Elemental Master of Air approaches the Unicorn personally.



Once the Elemental Masters accept the Unicorn, the Phoenix support them unreservedly. It is through the authority of the Elemental Master of Air that Shinjo Nishijin is able to enter Otosan Uchi and gain an audience with the Emperor. After the exchange between Doji Ryobu and Shinjo Nishijin, the Phoenix join with the Crane to support the full acceptance of the Unicorn. The high reputation of the Asako historians bolsters the arguments of the clan's courtiers, although they face opposition from Scorpion courtiers who spread doubts about the veracity of their documents or question their interpretation.

Once the Unicorn are accepted into the Empire, however, the Phoenix soon withdraw from extensive contract with the followers of Shinjo. The gaijin customs of the Unicorn become more and more apparent the longer they are in Rokugan, and the traditonalist Phoenix find these strange behaviors highly uncomfortable. Even the way the Iuchi perform their prayers is strange and alien to the Isawa shugenja. As the years pass, the Phoenix distance themselves more and more from the Unicorn, making encounters in court into awkward affairs, like meetings between friends who have grown apart.

The Scorpion Clan

On the eve of the Unicorn Clan's return the Scorpion are one of the strongest clans in the Empire – indeed perhaps the strongest clan, period. Their courtiers dominate the Imperial Court, and their manipulation of the Lion allows them to threaten other clans militarily. However, such strength is a double-edged sword for the Clan of Secrets. They are feared and hated by many of the other clans, and the Crab, Crane, Dragon, Phoenix, and even the Otomo family consider them to be their prime threat. Keeping all these potential enemies off balance and preventing them from uniting is increasingly difficult. Scorpion agents manufacture a feud between the Asako and the Kuni, embroiling their clans in conflict, and the Scorpion do their best to disrupt the Crane responses to Lion military aggression. Scorpion Champion Bayushi Ogoe finds himself trying to balance more and more rivals and enemies, and faces a further distraction from the court conflict with Mirumoto Kaijuko and the Dragon.

The return of the Unicorn undoes decades of work, but also relieves some of the pressures created by Scorpion success. The followers of Shinjo force the Great Clans to unite to face the new threat. Such common cause in the face of adversity is a disaster for the Scorpion, who do their best to undermine it by trying to provoke a political battle between the Crab and the Lion for the honor of destroying the invaders.

When Shinjo Nishijin arrives at Otosan Uchi in the company of the Isawa, the Scorpion immediately recognize the full political ramifications of allowing the Unicorn into the Empire. A new Great Clan will forever alter the balance of power the Scorpion have so meticulously built over the years, so they join with the Lion in refusing to recognize the Unicorn. The Scorpion assist the Lion in every way possible, providing them with extensive intelligence on the movements of the "gaijin invaders" and sabotaging the Unicorn wherever possible. Meanwhile, their courtiers are ruthless in their denouncement of the Unicorn Clan. They work to undermine the testimony of the Isawa and limit the impact of the Emerald Champion's embrace of Nishijin.

Ultimately, however, the Scorpion's efforts to block Imperial acceptance of the Unicorn come to naught. Bayushi Ogoe concludes if the Unicorn are here to stay, the Scorpion must incorporate them into their plotting. He also realizes that the power of the Scorpion has become more apparent to the Empire at large; after all, they successfully held off recognition of the returned Ki-Rin for a year after the Emerald Champion's acceptance of them. The Emperor's Underhand never does well when its

power is obvious, and Ogoe notes ominously that even the Lion seem willing to attack his clan as readily as they do the Unicorn. He concludes the only choice is to project an image of weakness.

The Scorpion produce new testimony, accusing the Unicorn of usurping the Ki-Rin as impostors. Their courtiers ruthlessly insult the Unicorn in open court, questioning their lineage, their honor, and their valor. The Ide smile and accept the insults as best they can, but eventually even they realize something must be done. The Unicorn ask the Emperor for the right to answer the Scorpion's allegations on the battlefield, and Hantei XXII grants an exception to the Imperial decree banning full-scale war between the clans. The resulting Battle of White Shore Plain is a stunning loss for the Scorpion; their armies are clearly outmatched by the superior cavalry of the Unicorn. After the defeat, Bayushi Ogoe apologizes to the Unicorn and recognizes them as the rightful descendants of Shinjo. To Ogoe this is hardly important, since the Emperor already decreed that months before. What matters to him is that the Scorpion armies are revealed to be vastly overrated, while the humiliation of having to apologize in court seriously degrades their political reputation. The other clans and the Otomo consider the Scorpion suitably humbled and turn their attention elsewhere... exactly as Ogoe planned.

The Unicorn Clan

The Unicorn Clan's return to the Empire is a harrowing journey through dark and dangerous lands, culminating in a crossing of the Shadowlands itself. The clan accumulates massive supplies of food, water, and precious jade for the effort. The Iuchi teach everyone about the dangers of the darkness and of Jigoku. The crossing begins in 790, led by Clan Champion Shinjo Nishijin and family daimyo Otaku Sekigako, Iuchi Shino, and Ide Tadan.

The Unicorn spend years riding through the blighted landscape they know simply as the dark lands, fighting off more than one attack from the minions of the Lying Darkness. Many samurai and horses go mad, corrupted by the darkness. The Unicorn strike down their own kin and even slaughter the horses when the corruption takes them. Finally they reach the Shadowlands, where they must advance as swiftly as possible lest their jade become exhausted. Their horses allow them to outrun many of the threats, and the Shinjo scouts allow them to avoid other dangers, but the Shadowlands nonetheless claims its price from the clan. When they can, the Unicorn burn the bodies so they will not rise again, but always they press onward. When they finally see the Kaiu Wall in the distance, the Unicorn cheer with joy; they have at last come home.

The homecoming, however, was not what they hoped or imagined. They found themselves attacked by the Crab, who made no effort to parley with these gaijin-looking riders from the Shadowlands. Although the Unicorn were able to outflank the Kaiu Wall and enter Rokugan, the rest of the Empire was scarcely more welcoming, and their initial efforts at diplomacy were utterly rejected. It took the bravery of Isawa Yamiko to finally give the Unicorn an opportunity to reach out to the people of the Empire. Shinjo Nishijin and the Ide made the most of the opportunity, winning the support of first the Phoenix then the Crane, the Crab, and finally the Dragon.

Nonetheless, the Unicorn faced many harsh challenges throughout their first years in the Empire. They were forced to fight wars against both the Lion and the Scorpion, and had to give the Emperor a pair of their prized Otaku warhorses before he would finally recognize their clan. Otaku Sekigako bitterly resisted gifting any of her family's precious mounts, but the increasingly dire position of the Unicorn finally convinced her to do so.

In the years following the Emperor's recognition, the Unicorn faced enormous challenges. They had to resettle their provinces, build castles, and find a place within the Empire's political and social structure. Unsurprisingly, the Ide were the fastest and most enthusiastic to accept these challenges. They began construction of Shiro Ide in the year 817 and finished it three years later; the castle was deliberately designed to mimic Rokugani architecture in order to make it more welcoming to the rest of the Empire. The castles of the other families followed more slowly.

In spite of the Emperor's edict, the Lion continued to menace the Unicorn's southeastern borders, looking for an excuse to bring war, and the clan had to maintain its military readiness throughout the following decades. Court was also a particular challenge for the Unicorn during this era, since eight centuries of separation had not only burdened the Unicorn with strange customs but had even imposed linguistic shifts between them and the Empire. Other clans constantly twisted words to their advantage and undermined the Unicorn, citing "commonly understood meanings." The Crane believed the Unicorn were deeply in their debt over accepting them as the returned Ki-Rin and expected complete support in return; the Crane stance greatly confused the Unicorn, since they believed an honorable action created no obligation. This difference in understanding plagued the relations between these clans for the rest of this era.

After the forced "retirement" of Shinjo Nishijin in 820, his daughter Shinjo Kochamon became the Clan Champion. Trained as a courtier by the Ide, Kochamon guided the clan skillfully through this problematic period of reintegrating into Rokugan. She was the one who suggested the Unicorn offer the landless Hiruma a dojo to train their scouts, and it was she who convinced her father to accept the Kuni demand for Taint testing. These choices earned the Crab Clan's respect and forged an important alliance. Kochamon later married a Crane, Kakita Tadashi, to improve the shaky relations with the Emperor's Left Hand. Tadashi supported her efforts and provided valuable insight into the other clans, but the marriage further provoked the Lion, who perceived a strong alliance forming between clans on either side of them. The Lion Clan's resolve to punish the Unicorn for their insults prove beyond Kochamon's ability to ameliorate.

Alternate Paths: The Kitsune Rejoin the Unicorn

It is by no means inevitable that the Fox will remain a separate clan from the Unicorn. Indeed, when the Unicorn first arrive in Rokugan, many of them assume the Kitsune will rejoin their clan, and only after lengthy negotiations do the two agree to remain separate.

What if those negotiations had gone differently? What if, instead of remaining a minor clan, the Kitsune had rejoined the Unicorn as the Kitsune family? This would give the Unicorn two shugenja families, one of them well-versed in "proper" Rokugani magic, as well as a powerful spiritual connection to Chikushudo. Furthermore, the Kitsune were and are renowned for their knowledge of the wilderness and their skills at tracking and hunting, traits strongly admired by the Shinjo. While the Fox lands are not well-suited for horses, reunification would let the Fox share the power of the Realm of Animals with the rest of the Unicorn, making their powerful cavalry even more formidable. And of course the Kitsune – who never left the Empire and held closely to most Rokugani customs – would make it far easier for the Unicorn to re-assimilate into Rokugan. Indeed, they might have become a "face" of the clan in the courts, working alongside the Ide for the betterment of all.

Of course, this changed history would produce challenges as well. The Fox Clan is not wealthy (though not so poor as the Sparrow), and the Unicorn would have to commit wealth to support their new family. Also, once the Kitsune became part of the Unicorn, the Emperor's prohibition against attacking minor clans would no longer apply to them. The distance between Kyuden Kitsune and the Unicorn lands would make defense difficult, especially since the Scorpion lie in between. And of course the Kitsune are traditional Rokugani; the strong *gaijin* influences in the other families of the Unicorn would be difficult for them to accept.

In the year 825, another tragedy struck the Unicorn. Moto Tsume, daimyo of the Moto family, had been unimpressed by the dangers of the Shadowlands when the Unicorn passed through that dark realm. He publicly declared his family alone would destroy the enemies of the Empire forever. No one is sure whether this idea is his own or it was whispered to him by others, but whatever the case, Tsume led the vast majority of the Moto cavalry into the Shadowlands. Only a handful returned, while thousands of others – including Tsume himself – became Lost. The so-called Dark Moto would menace the Empire for centuries to come. This disaster deeply shamed the Moto family and damaged the Unicorn Clan's overall position in the Empire; the Moto created the White Guard and adopted a new mon to reflect their determination to atone for their failure and eradicate their fallen brethren.

The Minor Clans

Only two minor clans play a prominent role in the era of the Return of the Unicorn. First, the Mantis have become a rising economic power, building wealth and influence from their control of the sea trade. However, the tsunami and storms of 814 cause extensive damage to their interests. For most of a year, the Mantis are largely cut off from the rest of Rokugan by the destruction of so many ports and ships. They are forced to commit significant resources to helping the mainland rebuild the ports, if for no other reason than because their own prosperity depends on the existence of sea-borne trade.

The second minor clan of significance in this time is the Fox. The Kitsune are of course the descendants of the followers Shinjo left behind, pledged to keep the history of the Empire while the Ki-Rin are away. When the Unicorn return, the Fox present the Shinjo with a vast mountain of notes, writings, and histories describing the intervening 800 years. These prove invaluable to the Unicorn, especially the Ide.

After the Emperor officially recognizes the Unicorn as the scions of Shinjo, the Fox and Unicorn enter into intense negotiations at the Imperial Winter Court of 816. The Fox are hesitant to relinquish their independence, and the Unicorn are equally hesitant to undermine an Imperial edict by re-absorbing the Minor Clan, especially so soon after gaining recognition by the Emperor. After months of deliberation, the two agree they are now too different to be considered part of the same clan, and the Unicorn make no effort to reabsorb the Kitsune.

The Imperial Families

In this era – both before and after the Unicorn return – the Otomo are concerned above all with the tacit "alliance" between the Lion and the Scorpion, creating an effective partnership that covers each clan's weaknesses and could conceivably challenge the might of the Emperor



himself. Even the arrival of the Unicorn does not alter the Otomo's primary goal of breaking this alliance. In fact, they view the returned followers of Shinjo as an opportunity. When the Emperor calls on the Lion and Scorpion to halt their attacks on the Unicorn, it is the Otomo who suggest the Imperial Legions immediately seize the ancestral lands of the Ki-Rin and give them into Unicorn stewardship, even though the Unicorn have not yet been officially recognized as the clan which can claim those lands as its own. The Otomo likewise work hard to counter the Scorpion political campaigns against the Unicorn, and it is partly through their unrelenting support that the Unicorn ultimately gain the Emperor's official recognition.

After the Unicorn are established, the Otomo deliberately draw attention to the Scorpion Clan's strength, and subtly encourage the Lion to turn on their former allies. They finally relax their campaign after the Battle of White Shore Plain, at which time they deem the Scorpion sufficiently weakened and turn their attention elsewhere.

The Seppun spend much of this era worrying about the threat of a Unicorn attack on Otosan Uchi, an attack which never materializes. Once the Unicorn are accepted, however, the Seppun have no further quarrel with them. The Miya, for their part, are quick to embrace the returned children of Shinjo – especially the peaceful Ide, with whom they have much in common.

The Kolat

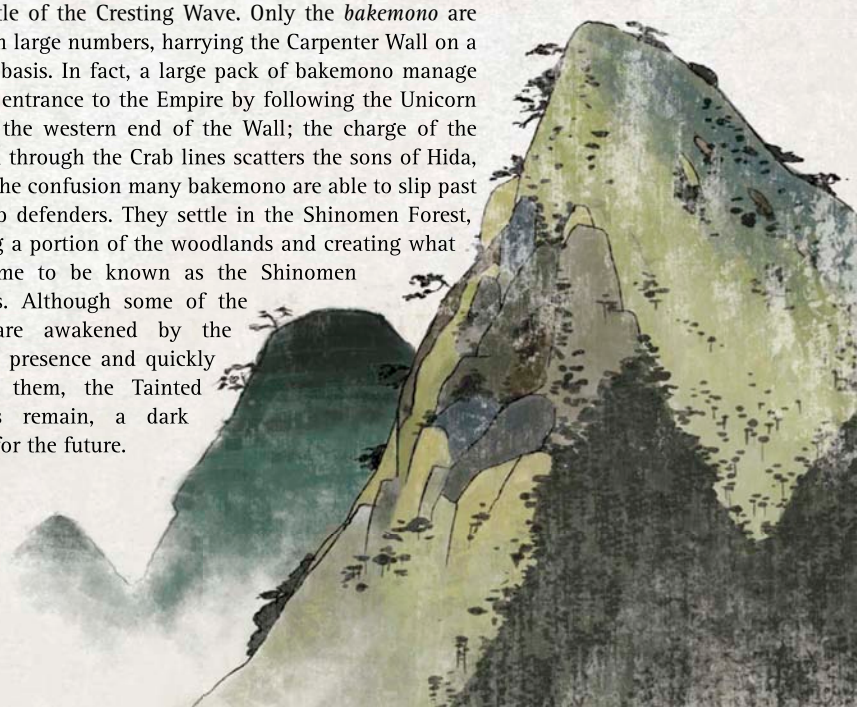
The Kolat have lurked within the Unicorn ever since Shinjo accepted the Ujik-Hai into her clan in the Dawn of the Empire. After the Kami's final disappearance, the Kolat moved aggressively to expand their numbers and influence within the Unicorn Clan, and by the time they return to Rokugan many important Unicorn are part of the conspiracy, especially in the Shinjo family. The Kolat purposefully do not bring Shinjo Nishijin or his daughter Kochamon into the conspiracy, fearful that the Emperor or other powerful Rokugani may have ways of detecting their influence. Only after the Unicorn are well-established in the Empire, several decades later, do the Kolat conclude it is safe to secure their gains and bring Shinjo Karuma, daughter of Kochamon, into the conspiracy. When Karuma becomes Clan Champion, the Kolat are firmly in control of the Unicorn Clan, and remain so for the next 300 years.

The Kolat find fertile recruiting ground among Unicorn samurai during the era of the Return. Many Unicorn are dissatisfied with how they are treated upon their arrival in Rokugan. The descendants of the Kami who rule the Empire and the other Great Clans show no special divine powers and are a fallible as any mortal. In particular, many Unicorn believe the Emperor should have immediately recognized them as the returning Ki-Rin; instead, he let the clan suffer at the hands of the Lion and the Scorpion and had to be bribed with Otaku steeds before granting his acceptance. This leaves a sour taste in the mouth of many Unicorn, which the Kolat exploit to great effect.

Shinjo Karuma considers the Emperor's implicit demand for gifts in return for recognition as a guide on how to interact with rest of the Empire throughout her rule. She concludes the key to ensuring the clan's place in the Empire is to buy it, and she is not shy about doing so. Unicorn emissaries travel throughout the Empire during her reign, and their lavish gifts grant them access to even the most traditional courts... which, in turn, lets the Kolat spread its influence farther and wider with each passing year.

The Shadowlands

Throughout this era the Shadowlands are relatively quiet – not surprising, given that it has only been a few decades since the vast army of the Maw was defeated at the Battle of the Cresting Wave. Only the *bakemono* are active in large numbers, harrying the Carpenter Wall on a regular basis. In fact, a large pack of bakemono manage to gain entrance to the Empire by following the Unicorn around the western end of the Wall; the charge of the Unicorn through the Crab lines scatters the sons of Hida, and in the confusion many bakemono are able to slip past the Crab defenders. They settle in the Shinomen Forest, Tainting a portion of the woodlands and creating what will come to be known as the Shinomen Marshes. Although some of the Naga are awakened by the goblins' presence and quickly destroy them, the Tainted marshes remain, a dark legacy for the future.



Presenting the Return of the Unicorn as a Campaign Setting

Like all the chapters in this book and its predecessor (the first *Imperial Histories* supplement), the Return of the Unicorn is intended to be used as a setting for an L5R RPG campaign. However, due to the drastic events taking place during this particular time period, such a campaign will be difficult to run for a group of characters that includes both Unicorn and non-Unicorn. Thus campaigns in this era – regardless of their structure or "hook" – will generally fit into one of two categories, defined by perspective. Either the game will adopt the viewpoint of the returning Unicorn, or the viewpoint of the defenders of the Empire.

The Unicorn Perspective

This can be a very interesting (and challenging) approach, though it will require that all the PCs be returning Unicorn samurai. This approach has good potential for human drama, and puts even veteran L5R players into an unfamiliar and compelling position: the misunderstood outsiders.

To present this perspective effectively, the GM should bring the players face-to-face with the plight of the returning Unicorn. There are many obstacles preventing Unicorn PCs form claiming their birthright, cultural as well as martial or political. The GM's narrative should try to ensure the PCs can truly appreciate everything the Unicorn went through to get to this point in their history and all the difficulties they are about to face.

For new players who are unfamiliar with the setting, this approach can work quite well since they only need to learn about one clan and the GM can present Rokugan as a mystery that keeps them guessing. L5R veterans, however, will likely already know the historical circumstances surrounding the return of the Unicorn. The GM can mitigate this in a couple of ways. One is to put the PCs in position to alter the "canon" history of the setting, demonstrating early on that he is not afraid to deviate from the established timeline. The death of an important figure (and his or her subsequent replacement by a PC) is an easy way to do this while plunging the party into the thick of the Unicorn Clan's challenges and difficulties. What if the future of the entire clan depends on the actions of the PCs? Another method is to carefully frame the setting through the trials the PCs are bound to face. When the Unicorn return, they are confronted with many obstacles: some political, others cultural, and many battles with defending samurai. The party will not be equipped to handle them all; the Unicorn must adapt to each new challenge as it comes. By carefully selecting which of these obstacles to confront the players (and which to mercifully spare them from), the GM can determine the nature and tone of the game and keep the players guessing. Perhaps there is a dormant complication that went unearthed in the original history, but the actions of the PCs bring it to pass in this re-telling?

For any GM running a game in this setting, it is important to understand exactly what the returning Unicorn are facing. By the time they reach the Empire, generations of breeding with outsiders have made them almost unrecognizable as Rokugani. They no longer carry the Ki-Rin mon, their skins are dark, and they ride steeds the Empire has never seen. They wear dead flesh and carry gaijin weapons. They do not even really speak the same language anymore; their dialect is foreign and their vocabulary is archaic. To all but a handful of scholars, they are either foreign barbarians or Shadowlands abominations. It never occurs to anyone they might be the Ki-Rin... who, after all, were pronounced dead centuries before.

Conversely, consider the same situation from the Unicorn perspective. They have been in exile for nearly eight centuries, traveling untold miles through alien lands. As children, they are told of the fabled lands of their birth, a place where their people hope one day to return. Stories of pristine fields, towering monuments, and legions of loyal warriors fill every Unicorn's heart and dreams. Every Unicorn's grandfather wanted nothing more than to see again those lands of his ancestors and claim his family's birthright. The entire clan has risked death (and undeath!) countless times to reach this land, the land they have remained loyal to in spite of having never even laid eyes on it. They know the people of their homeland await them and will welcome them back as conquering heroes. Every Unicorn who reaches the Empire is proud to be among this fortunate generation... and proud to be a Unicorn.

But their first glimpse of their homeland is a massive wall that does not appear on any maps or in any stories. Immediately they are attacked by the very warriors they were brought up to venerate. Comrades who wanted only to return to their ancestral lands die in the onslaught, never to see their dream realized. And once the clan pushes through into the Empire proper, they are met only with further hostility. Their ancestral lands have been seized by the Lion; the palaces and fields they expected





are not there. No Rokugani will speak to them. Messages go unanswered; many of the kanji the Ide diplomats use to communicate no longer exist in this new Empire. They are attacked without provocation, shown not even a shred of human mercy.

And this is the key to making a successful Unicorn campaign in this setting: make it human. Present this scenario to the players and let them see it with their eyes. Give them the promise of their homelands, tell them it is theirs, and then take it away. Show them they are the same as the Rokugani, call them their cousins, then run them into the wall that will forever separate them. By making this a personal conflict, the GM truly casts the spotlight on the players and gives them the opportunity to define their characters through human drama. There are no supernatural forces here, no external villain everyone can agree to hate. Only the eternal enemies of tragic circumstance and human misunderstanding.

Remind the PCs that their actions will shape the future of the Unicorn Clan for centuries to come. Will the PCs rise to the challenge? Do they breach the gap and establish peace with their distant kin? Or do they resent the Empire and regard it as an enemy? Do they even wish to remain here at all?

The challenges facing the Unicorn upon their return may seem nearly insurmountable, and some players may feel overwhelmed to have an entire clan's fate riding on their shoulders. It is therefore important to keep the party from being completely discouraged as new complications arise on every side. It can also be challenging to portray the native Rokugani such that they are not hand-wringing villains, but merely loyal (if xenophobic) defenders of their lands. However, if the GM can present this story in a compelling light, players who finally overcome the odds and claim their birthrights as a Great Clan of the Emerald Empire will have won a truly satisfying victory.

The Defenders of the Empire

It is easy to see the Unicorn Clan's story solely through sympathetic eyes, but this can be turned on its head in a campaign that focuses on the defenders of the Empire. And handled correctly, this approach can be just as compelling as the Unicorn side.

Again, the key is to make the conflict as human as possible. When they invade, the Unicorn's origins and nature are completely unknown; they are simply a massive force of cavalry warriors coming from the Shadowlands. They outmaneuver the Carpenter Wall, a disaster especially terrifying coming so soon after the crisis of the Maw's attack. Moreover, these barbarians represent something more than a mere horde of enemies rampaging throughout the Empire. They also represent political and social upheaval. Even after they are revealed as the returned Unicorn, they are a new, drastic factor in an Empire that left them behind long ago.

To invest PCs in this conflict, the GM should give them something important to them... and then have the Unicorn destroy it. Consider how each character's life will be imbalanced by the Unicorn's return. Virtually every clan is affected: the Crab are dishonored when they fail to stop the Unicorn's charge, the Lion suffer dishonorable defeats on the field of battle, the Scorpion are politically threatened by a new factor they cannot control, and the Crane must contend with a new military force rampaging around the Empire at a time when they can ill afford any new challenge. From there, make the stakes personal. Ancestral lands trampled by rampaging horses, family members perishing in the path of the barbarians, or even some personal disgrace suffered if the Emperor recognizes the Unicorn for who they really are.

For new players in the L5R setting, this scenario can be especially compelling. Without prior knowledge of Rokugan's history, these players can react genuinely and organically to each event as it unfolds. To maximize this effect, the GM should not mention the Unicorn ahead of time, preferably not even during character creation. If a player asks, the GM can simply say the Unicorn are not in this version of Rokugan. Have the campaign run "normally" for a while, introducing the players to the ways of Rokugani samurai and allowing them to form an attachment to the normal order of the Empire. Then, tell them the Empire is under siege from invading barbarians. Put them on the front lines. Describe the enemy's savage weaponry, their huge horses, the disgusting leather and fur (dead flesh!) on their bodies, their strange yet familiar language. Draw the PCs into the conflict; these barbarians are trampling on the lands of the PCs ancestors, seemingly headed for the capital itself! They've killed countless Rokugani samurai, they've dishonored the Crab, and no one knows what they want.

But as the game goes on, the GM can leave the odd clue here and there. Rice fields left unburned. Heimin left unharmed. Lives spared on the battlefield. Advantages left unpressed, villages untaken. And then the abrupt

bypassing of the Imperial Capital altogether as the horde moves to Phoenix lands. Let these events snowball and slowly reveal the humanity of these invaders. Lead the PCs into an accidental parlay. Give them a glimpse of a familiar ritual, a relic of a practice from their ancestor's time. What will the PCs do when they finally realize the truth, that the invaders are actually Rokugan's lost clan, descended from a Kami of Heaven? Can they forgive the trespasses of these gaijin barbarians? Or can there be no such understanding through the tinted lens of Honor? Such PCs are in a prime position to re-write the canon of L5R history and truly make the setting their own.

It is also possible to accommodate PCs who are sympathetic to the Unicorn Clan's plight. In fact, any clan samurai can take on this role with just a little tweaking. Perhaps a Phoenix scholar or a Lion historian pieces together the evidence and realizes who the invaders really are, but to spare the honor of his clan he must be utterly certain before announcing it to the Empire. Perhaps a Crab general becomes impressed by the martial spirit of the invaders and begins to seek out a greater understanding of them. Perhaps a Scorpion infiltrator attempts to learn more about these barbarians and stumbles upon the truth. Perhaps a Crane or Dragon duelist on musha shugyo aids or is aided by a returning Unicorn during a skirmish, acquiring an unusual ally. If handled cleverly, these sorts of gambits make it possible for Unicorn and non-Unicorn PCs to form one cohesive party with a common goal: to end the conflict and restore the descendents of the Ki-Rin to their rightful place. It also introduces a theme of clan loyalty, one that can especially challenge Lion and Scorpion players.

For an unexpected twist and a campaign drastically different from canon, consider this: what if the Scorpion accusations are right, and the Unicorn really are imposters! What if the Emperor officially recognized their birthright to the Empire, only for the PCs to discover they were never who they said they were? The question then would be whether or not to expose the imposters, in the process inflicting a terrible loss of face on the Emperor himself. If the PCs are the Unicorn's enemies, they have failed to protect the Emperor from this outcome. This realization can lead to a difficult choice between loyalty and duty, between honor and personal pride, or between social order and the good of the Empire. If the PCs became allies of the Unicorn, the consequences of this realization are no easier: an honorable samurai cannot possibly look away while charlatans inhabit the lands of the Ki-Rin, and such deception cannot be forgiven. What if the Heavens withdraw their blessing from the Empire in the wake of the "Unicorn Clan" being appointed a Great Clan? Can the PCs find a way to set things right again, and if so, at what cost?

And what if the real Unicorn return only months later?

New Mechanics

New Basic School: The Utaku Mounted Infantry

Although the Unicorn Clan is known for its cavalry, the tactics of Shinjo's children also require infantry to serve as a base of maneuver and to "fix" enemy infantry in place. The need for such tactics became clear during the clan's years of wandering in gaijin lands, most notably during the 200 years after Shinjo disappeared in battle against the Lying Darkness. During those two centuries the clan fought a variety of opponents, many of whom could not be defeated with a simple cavalry charge. To deal with this problem, the Unicorn developed a force of mounted infantry – soldiers who rode horses while the army maneuvered, but then dismounted and fought on foot. From the beginning, this force attracted a disproportionate number of men from the Otaku family, who were forbidden by family tradition from fighting on horseback alongside the Otaku women. In fact, it was one such man, Otaku Buki, who devised the first specific Techniques for the mounted infantry, drawing inspiration from the gaijin fighting techniques he had seen.

Over time, the School which developed from Buki's techniques came to be known as the Otaku Mounted Infantry School (in modern times, the Utaku Mounted Infantry); although it drew recruits from all of the families, the Otaku men always predominated. However, it remained a distinctly secondary choice for most Unicorn, since the cavalry schools were considered the premier symbols of Unicorn might, and enrollment in the school was never as high as its sensei (or the Unicorn generals) would have liked. That finally changed, however, after the disgrace of the Shinjo family during the Hidden Emperor era. The Shinjo Bushi School had always been the preferred choice of Otaku/Utaku men who wished to serve in battle, but after the revelation that many of the Shinjo had served the Kolat, a rift opened between the families and the bulk of the Utaku males began training in the Mounted Infantry School instead. This resulted in a sharp expansion in the overall size and strength of the Unicorn infantry forces, and many samurai in the other clans finally began to take note of the school and its students.

New Basic School: Utaku Mounted Infantry [Bushi]

- **Benefit:** +1 Agility
- **Skills:** Athletics, Battle, Defense, Kenjutsu, Polearms, Spears, any one Bugei or High Skill
- **Honor:** 5.5
- **Outfit:** Normal clothing, daisho, any one spear or polearm, light armor, steed (Unicorn riding horse), traveling pack, 5 koku

Techniques

Rank 1: Choose Your Weapon

The Utaku infantry are trained to fight with sword, spear, and polearm, but each student of the School is expected to choose one such weapon on which to focus his training. You may choose either the Kenjutsu Skill, the Polearms Skill, or the Spears Skill – you gain a free Emphasis of your choice in that skill. You are trained to use that weapon for both attack and defense. You add a +1k0 bonus when attacking with that Skill. If your chosen Skill is Spears or Polearms, when you are in the Defense or Full Defense stance while wielding a weapon using that Skill, you may add your Skill Ranks to your Armor TN. If your chosen Skill is Kenjutsu, you add half your Skill Rank (rounded down) instead.

Rank 2: Speed of My Sisters

The Utaku Infantryman is taught to move swiftly in order to support the Unicorn cavalry on rapidly-evolving battlefields. On foot you move as though your Water Ring is 1 Rank higher and add a +1k0 bonus to your Initiative rolls.

Rank 3: All-Fronts Attack

The Utaku Infantryman's mastery of his chosen weapon has now reached the point of allowing him to strike in all directions with blinding speed. When using your chosen weapon Skill, you may attack as a Simple Action instead of a Complex Action.

Rank 4: Utaku's Thunder

Like the women of the Utaku family, the men of the Utaku Infantry are taught to call upon their Honor to strengthen their purpose and their blows. Once per Skirmish while wielding your chosen weapon, you may spend a Void Point to add your Honor Rank in unkept dice to your attack roll. In addition, your movement bonus (from your Rank 2 Technique) now lets you move as though your Water Rank is 2 higher (instead of 1).

Rank 5: Epic of My Name

The fully trained Utaku Infantryman is an unpredictable whirlwind on the battlefield, striking and dodging with equal skill. The Armor TN bonus from your Rank One technique now also applies while you are in the Attack Stance. Once per skirmish while in the Full Attack Stance you may add a +4k2 bonus to your damage roll with your chosen weapon; if your chosen weapon is Spears or Polearms, you may do this in the Attack Stance as well.





Chapter Eight

The Shattered Empire

Otomo Banu allowed himself a small inner smile as the Crane delegation entered the main audience chamber of the Otomo palace. The Crane were decked out in full court regalia, the elaborate multi-layered kimono which had been standard in the time of the Hantei. Standards had declined so much in the last few years, but the Crane still knew what was proper.

Kakita Yoshi glided forward and bowed deeply, a picture of serenity and dignified subservience. "It is an honor to visit the palace of the noble Otomo family once again, my lord. Please, accept these modest gifts as a gesture of our respect, though to our regret they are not truly sufficient to the occasion." He held out a fan in his left hand, making an elegant and precise gesture toward the servants carrying chests and crates into the chamber.

Banu let his eyes scan over the array of gifts as he went through the automatic ritual of two refusals. The opened chests glittered with gold and silver. He felt a mild relaxing of the tension that constantly simmered in his belly. There was enough there to pay for months of food and supplies, enough to ensure the Otomo family would not starve in the coming winter.

The rituals completed, Kakita Yoshi sat back on his heels, the other Crane ranging themselves behind him. Banu remembered Yoshi from the old days, and he could not help but notice the lines of age and strain that now creased the former Chancellor's face. Still, his manners remained as impeccable as ever. "As always, Otomo Banu-sama, it is a joy to us to serve the Imperial house. While many of the other clans have lost their devotion to tradition, we of the Crane strive to maintain the duties we have followed since the First Hantei named us the Left Hand."

Banu nodded, smiling blandly, speaking the expected responses. He had long since given up on trying to make his visitors give him his proper title, but at least the Crane were showing decent respect.

And now, *he thought,* now we learn what the Crane want in return.

"...the unfortunate recent decision of the Phoenix to close their school to outside students. Surely the word of the Imperial house could be expected to draw a response from the Phoenix, who yet claim to believe in our Empire's honored traditions."

Ah, *Banu thought,* of course. *The Forbidden City had been buzzing for weeks with rumors the Isawa would no longer accept students from the other clans. Frankly, Banu was surprised the Phoenix had waited as long as they had. With the latest round of seemingly endless war rippling across the Empire, and shugenja everywhere turning their skills to the battlefield, the Isawa could hardly be expected to train their potential enemies. And the Crane had been without a shugenja school of their own since the Crab razed Shinden Asahina.*

"It will be an honor to share your concerns with the Phoenix," Banu smiled. "And I am sure the clan of Shiba will not reject the guidance of the Imperial house." In truth, he had no such confidence – if the Phoenix had finally ceased to accept outside students, they might be joining so many of the other clans in forsaking the traditions of the Hantei dynasty.

"We are grateful for the consideration." Yoshi's fan moved almost lazily, just enough to hold the late-summer heat at bay. "And of course the Crane will continue to serve as the Left Hand, as we have always done, even in these trying times." The fan slid shut and became a pointer, gesturing at a scroll in the hands of one of the younger Crane. The junior courtier knelt and held the scroll forward, cradled in the palms of his hands. "We present here, for your august consideration, the proposal that an Imperial Winter Court be held in Kyuden Doji this season. The house of the Doji has been host to the Divine Hantei more times than can be counted, and unlike certain... others... we have not allowed the beauty of our court to wane."

So, *Banu thought,* a message to the Phoenix will not be sufficient repayment for this gift. *He suppressed a sigh. It had been too much to hope for, really, that the Crane would expect only a single favor in return for such an impressive donative. He decided to switch to the offensive. It would not do for the Crane to see him as overly passive or weak.*

"We of the Otomo shall certainly give this suggestion all the consideration it merits," he said; then, before Yoshi could begin another speech, he continued, "Since you have been able to bestow such generous consideration on our house, I would presume your efforts to claim the former Scorpion lands have met with success?"

Yoshi was shaken and angry; a thousand tiny signs showed it, though the Crane lord's face remained blandly impassive. "Matters of war are in the hands of my cousins in the Daidoji, Otomo-sama. I would not presume to speak on their behalf."

Of course not, *Banu thought with a mental smirk.* Particularly since we both know your southern army has come to grief in the valleys of the Kitsune Mori. *Bayushi Goshiu had told him about the battle last week, and while Banu was certainly not fool enough to take the old Scorpion at his word, confirmation had since come in from both a Crab merchant caravan and a Mantis ship captain.*

"Naturally," he said aloud. "I apologize, Kakita-sama. Now, let us speak further of this proposal you make... a Winter Court, you said?".

An Alternate Rokugan

Shattered Empire is an alternate-timeline version of Rokugan's history in the early twelfth century, in the aftermath of the Second Day of Thunder. Like other alternate-timeline campaign settings, such as *Heroes of Rokugan* and *A Thousand Years of Darkness* in the first *Imperial Histories* book and *Iron Rokugan*, *The Togashi Dynasty*, and *Shadowed Throne* in this book, it is intended to present an "open" setting where there is a great deal of freedom for players and GMs to take the storyline in whatever direction they choose. This also means the timelines presented in most chapters of this sort do not have a "plot arc" (beginning, middle, end) in the same manner as, say, the chapters on the *Clan War* or the *Great Famine* in the first *Imperial Histories*, or the chapters on the *Steel Chrysanthemum* and the *Four Winds* in this book. Instead, these settings generally present an open-ended situation in which the fate of the Empire is in the hands of the player-characters.

A Changed History

The history of the Shattered Empire diverges from the "canon" history of Rokugan at a very specific point: the Second Day of Thunder, in the year 1128. In the official timeline, the Thunders win a triumphant victory, slaying Fu Leng and saving the Empire. Only two of the Thunders die in the battle: Isawa Tadaka and Doji Hoturi. The rest go on to play huge roles in the subsequent history of Rokugan – none more so than Toturi, who becomes Emperor. By ascending to the throne, an action endorsed by the Celestial Heavens themselves, Toturi ensures the Empire remains united under a single ruler, which proves vital when Rokugan comes under threat in the subsequent War Against the Darkness.

In this timeline, however, the Second Day of Thunder turns out very much like the First Day of Thunder nearly 1100 years earlier. Fu Leng is still defeated, but all but one of the Thunders perish in the fight. And just as the survivor of the First Day was Shosuro, the Thunder touched by the Lying Darkness, at the Second Day the survivor is Mirumoto Hitomi, the bearer of the Obsidian Hand, likewise touched by the Darkness.

Hitomi, of course, has neither the desire nor the mental stability to claim the vacant throne, and thus the Empire is left without an Emperor. In the aftermath of the terrible battles, plagues, and general chaos of the Clan Wars, none of the Clan Champions are willing to lay a claim on the Throne either, for all the clans are desperately weak and exhausted, their armies depleted and their people threatened by starvation. By a sort of mutual silent agreement, the armies of Rokugan return to their homelands and set about the work of rebuilding the damage from two years of all-



out war and Shadowlands invasion. Hitomi, for her part, travels back to the Dragon mountains and uses the combination of her prestige as the Dragon Thunder and the power of Togashi's soul to assume the position of Dragon Clan Champion.

Thus, for the first few years after the Day of Thunder, the Empire enjoys a time of (relative) peace. Each of the clans, Great and Minor, keeps to itself and focuses on rebuilding its strength. The Imperial families take control of the half-ruined city of Otosan Uchi and work to rebuild it, even going so far as to try to claim authority as regents of the Throne, but they lack the military, political, and economic strength to make such claims stick. Trade across Rokugan slowly recovers as the worst of the banditry and Shadowlands infiltration is suppressed, but the lack of a central authority means border territories and unclaimed lands are no longer policed, and thus it becomes impossible to wholly stamp out such threats.

And all the while, the leaders of the clans watch each other, balancing strength and weakness, and casting covetous eyes on the empty throne in Otosan Uchi's Forbidden City. As their strength recovers, they begin to make plans, and diplomats scurry from one court to another, laying the groundwork of the war to come.

A war that may have no ending...

Timeline of the Shattered Empire

The following section outlines the primary events of the Shattered Empire alternate timeline. However, it should be noted the GM is under no obligation to precisely follow the events depicted here; the Shattered Empire is essentially a wide-open storyline with a suggested but undetermined ending, and the actions of Player Characters can potentially influence the story at almost any point.

Year 1128

- **The Second Day of Thunder.** As battle rages throughout Otosan Uchi, the Hooded Ronin leads Togashi and the seven Thunders in to the Imperial Palace to do battle with Fu Leng, who has possessed the body of the last Hantei Emperor. In the opening moments of the conflict, Togashi is fatally wounded, and calls on Mirumoto Hitomi to take his life – thereby revealing the Twelfth Black Scroll, sealed within Togashi's own heart. Opening the Scroll restores the last of Fu Leng's power, but also makes him mortal. A desperate struggle ensues, with the Thunders falling one by one, while the dazed Hitomi wanders out of the room. Finally, only Doji Hoturi and Toturi the Black remain, both wounded. The two friends hurl themselves on the Dark Kami and take off his head, then die together from their dreadful injuries.
- The Hooded Ronin brings forth the news of Fu Leng's defeat. The death of the dark god leaves his Shadowlands army confused and disunited, and the forces of the Empire are able to gain the upper hand and cleanse the streets of the capital.
- Hitomi leaves the Imperial Palace alone, wrestling with the maddening combination of Togashi's soul and the Obsidian Hand, which contains the power of the Lying Darkness. She spends several months meandering across the Empire before finally gaining enough self-control to return to her own lands.

Year 1129

- Hitomi arrives in the Dragon lands. She proclaims herself Clan Champion and demands the entire tattooed order swear fealty to her and take her name. Many of the Togashi monks, led by Togashi Mitsu, refuse; Hitomi and her new follower Kokujin kill Mitsu and many others, while the rest flee into exile. Her brother Mirumoto Daini also flees after Hitomi kills his Naga lover, the Mara.
- Hatsuko, the geisha who was Akodo Toturi's lover years before, reappears in the Empire. The Celestial Dragons have held her outside of time, and thus she is still pregnant with Toturi's son despite the passage of several years. She takes refuge in a small hut on the edge of the Shinomen Forest, living in obscurity.
- Yoritomo, lord of the Mantis, dispatches couriers to the other clans, announcing that Toturi and Hida Yakamo accepted the Mantis as a Great Clan. Unfortunately, with both Toturi and Yakamo both dead, there is no one to confirm Yoritomo's claim. Most of the clans simply ignore the messages; even the moderately sympathetic Unicorn and Crab are unwilling to grant such status based

solely on Yoritomo's word. The Crane, Phoenix, and Lion are actively hostile; the messenger to the Phoenix is sent away without an audience, but the messenger to the Crane is slain in a duel, while Ikoma Tsanuri, the Lion Clan regent, simply orders her Mantis visitor executed for insulting the Lion with his presumption.

- The Scorpion, now led by Bayushi Shoju's younger brother Aramoro, begin covertly returning to their lands and re-establishing control. Since they are still officially disbanded by the decree of the last Hantei, they avoid any public action that might alert the rest of the Empire to their presence.
- The ronin force known as Toturi's Army, shorn of its leader and without its former sponsorship by the Dragon Clan, largely dissolves. A small remnant remains, adopting the name "Legion of the Wolf"; it is led by the young hero Toku. The Legion dedicates itself to maintaining order and protecting the common folk against the banditry and Shadowlands creatures which remain rife throughout much of the Empire.

Year 1130

- Hatsuko gives birth to a boy, who she names Kaneka.
- With the Day of Thunder well past and the forces of the Shadowlands largely driven back into their own realm, the Naga recoil in distaste from the disunited and fractious human Empire. They consider the death of the Mara as proof that humans are not worthy of further effort. The snake-men return to the Shinomen Forest, where many of them resume the Great Sleep rather than continue living in a world they do not understand.
- Yoritomo begins an active campaign of piracy against the shipping of the other clans, hoping to somehow force them into accepting his claim to Great Clan status. The move alienates the Fox Clan, which withdraws from the Yoritomo Alliance.

Year 1131

- Hida Kisada dies, passing the rule of the Crab Clan to his one remaining heir, his daughter O-Ushi. In response to her father's dying request that she preserve the Hida bloodline, O-Ushi marries Shinjo Yasamura, the youngest son of the Unicorn Clan



Champion. She also begins building up the Crab Clan's naval defenses and further strengthening the fortifications of the Kaiu Wall.

Year 1132

- Acting on her late father's final instructions, Hida O-Ushi sets out to secure a greater territory for the Crab Clan. She annexes portions of southern Crane territory, along with the minor clan of the Falcon (already weakened by the attack of an evil spirit called a Shuten Doji), the territory of the former Hare Clan, and the lands of the Sparrow. The Falcon welcome the Crab; the Sparrow are much less happy about the situation, but see little alternative now that the Three-Man Alliance is no longer active. O-Ushi permits both former clans to retain their family names.
- The Crane protest the Crab territorial encroachments in the courts, but lack the military strength to oppose them directly. They seek alliances with other clans in response, notably their traditional friends, the Unicorn and Phoenix, as well as the Fox Clan.
- Otomo Banu, one of the few surviving Otomo of high social rank, undertakes a political campaign to prove himself a cousin (and thus a legitimate heir) to the Hantei line. Initially his efforts are largely confined to within the Otomo family itself.

Year 1133

- The Unicorn occupy the city of Ryoko Owari in the former Scorpion lands, attempting to restore order in the wake of the near-devastation of the city by the Imperial Legions at the beginning of the Clan Wars. The city's recovery is somewhat retarded, however, when the Unicorn firmly clamp down on the formerly prosperous opium trade.
- The Unicorn move greatly reduces the distance between their territory and that of the expanded Crab, and some border skirmishes take place, but despite covert urging from the Crane the Unicorn refuse to enter a direct war with the Clan of Hida. Shinjo Yokatsu and his fellow Kolat Masters fear that weakening the Crab too much in this unstable environment may hand victory to the Shadowlands.

Year 1134

- The fallen shugenja Kuni Yori emerges from the Shadowlands at the head of an army of undead. He assails the Kaiu Wall, but thanks to Kisada's preparations the attack is completely repulsed. Hiruma Kage, aging daimyo of the Hiruma, confronts and kills Yori, but is badly Tainted in the process; he commits seppuku soon after rather than allow the Taint to consume him.
- As Yoritomo's piracy begins to take a serious toll on the Empire's shipping, the Crab and Phoenix form a temporary alliance to further strengthen their navies.

Kisada's Last Document

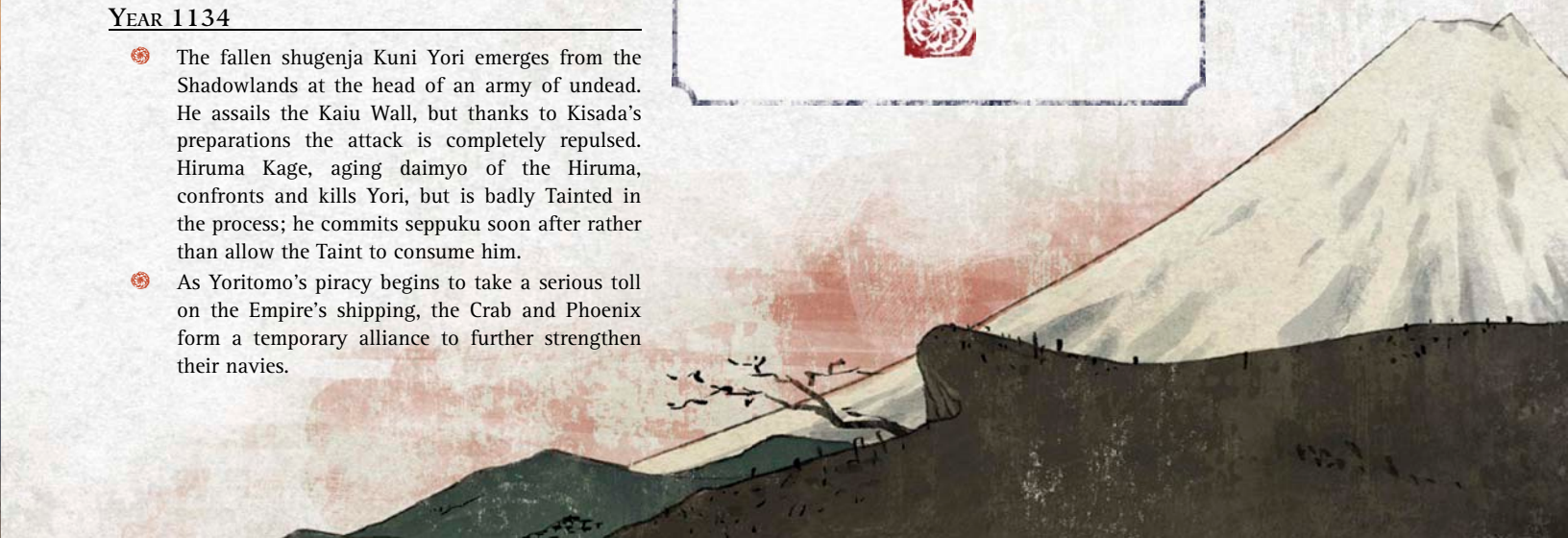
Mortally wounded during the Crab assault on Otosan Uchi in 1128, then heart-broken by the death of his son Hida Yakamo on the Second Day of Thunder, Hida Kisada lingers for almost three years, ruling the clan from his sick-bed.

The Great Bear has always been a harshly pragmatic man (hence his willingness to ally with the Shadowlands). In the aftermath of the Second Day of Thunder, Kisada recognizes the peace which the Empire enjoys is at best a temporary respite. With no single figure to claim the Throne and re-unite the Empire, the clans will inevitably go back to war with each sooner or later, no matter how much they may seem to embrace peace in the short term. Meanwhile, the Shadowlands remain – leaderless for the moment, but unlikely to remain so. If the Crab are to survive, indeed if humanity is to survive, they must prepare for the future.

In his final months of life, Kisada writes a lengthy document outlining the plans and preparations the Crab must undertake in order to prevail. Since trade with other clans will no longer be guaranteed, he plans for the Crab to quickly occupy as much neighboring territory as possible in order to increase their food production. Likewise, since the Mantis cannot be relied on to remain friendly, he plans for the Crab to expand their navy to protect their fishing waters. And since the Shadowlands is likely to recover from its recent defeats all too soon, he plans to strengthen both the Crab armies and the fortifications of the Kaiu Wall.

As Kisada's wound slowly gets the better of him, he finds himself physically unable to write anymore, and instead dictates his ideas to a scribe. He finishes the last pages just a few hours before his death, having lived nearly three years beyond the day he was run through by the Ancestral Sword of the Hantei. At this funeral, his daughter O-Ushi calls on the Heavens to recognize her father's courage and perseverance, and many Crab soon begin venerating Kisada as a Fortune. (The rest of the Empire refuses to do so.)

Kisada's final writings become the guide for clan policy for the next two generations, first under his daughter Hida O-Ushi and later under her son, Hida Kuroda.





- Emerald Champion Kakita Toshimoko dies in a kharmic strike during a duel with a ronin named Dairya. Although the Otomo and the Crane Clan float the idea of holding another Emerald Tournament, the only other clan to express real interest is the Unicorn. Ultimately, Otomo Banu's political conflict with the other leading Otomo makes it impossible to hold the Tournament, and the office languishes unfilled. The number of Emerald Magistrates in the Empire steadily declines as some are killed in the line of duty and others simply drift away from a duty that seems increasingly futile.

Year 1136

- As the Lying Darkness slowly tightens its grip on the Dragon lands, daimyo Kitsuki Yasu recognizes many signs of the strange evil described in the fabled journal of Kitsuki Kaagi. He dispatches a series of messengers to the High House of Light, asking Lady Hitomi to confront the danger which seems to be slowly consuming the clan. Many of the messengers fail to return; those who do are changed in sinister ways.

Year 1137

- Facing an ongoing food shortfall, the Lion Clan moves troops through Beiden Pass and seizes control of much of the central Scorpion lands. The Scorpion, who have been quietly ruling much of their territory without officially revealing themselves, undertake a campaign of sabotage and assassination against the Lion forces, and initiate covert contacts with the Unicorn, the Dragon, and the Crab, seeking alliance against the Lion.
- The Crane Clan negotiates a non-aggression pact with the Lion in exchange for shipments of food and other trade goods. Crane Clan Champion Doji Kuwanan hopes this will buy time for his clan to rebuild its armies and reclaim its southern territories from the Crab.

Year 1138

- After over a year of agonizing debate, Kitsuki Yasu and his followers conclude they have no choice but to leave the Dragon Clan, lest they be consumed by the Shadow. The Kitsuki flee the Dragon mountains, eventually passing into the Phoenix territories, where Yasu requests sanctuary and attempts to warn the Elemental Council of the threat. Although the Phoenix do not refuse help, they are suspicious of Yasu's improbable tale of a subtle alien evil.
- Hitomi launches a full-scale invasion of the Phoenix lands to destroy the Kitsuki and to punish the Phoenix for sheltering them. The Phoenix, still struggling to recover from their gruesome losses in the Clan Wars, are caught off-guard and their outlying mountain territories – including the Shrine of the Ki-Rin and the Shrine of Jurojin – are overrun.

Year 1139

- Those of the Naga remaining awake sense the growing power of the Lying Darkness. They travel across the Empire (leading to a number of incidental clashes with local Rokugani forces) and assail the Dragon lands. Although they lack the numbers to overcome the Dragon defenses, their assault forces Hitomi to re-allocate many of her troops from the Phoenix lands to defend her southern border. The Naga attack cuts off the Dragon from the Dragonfly Clan and closes the main passes into the Dragon mountains, threatening the Dragon lands with starvation. This allows the Phoenix to rally and even to retake some of their lost territory.
- The growing scale of anti-Lion sabotage in the occupied Scorpion lands leads to a series of vicious reprisals from frustrated local Lion commanders. The Miya family, whose lands are adjacent to the violence-torn Scorpion territories, tries to intervene and mitigate the violence; although the Lion still offer respect to the Miya, they prove increasingly unwilling to defer to their authority.

Year 1140

- Lion Champion Ikoma Tsanuri proclaims the time has come for the Lion to resolve their long-standing grudge against the Dragonfly Clan. Despite protests from the Miya and the Crane, the Lion armies invade the Dragonfly territory in full strength, completely overrunning them and razing their settlements to the ground. Most of the Dragonfly are killed, with only a few score managing to escape and scatter across the Empire.

- The Dragon, still under siege by the Naga, are unable to assist the Dragonfly; a few Dragonfly samurai do manage to flee into the Dragon mountains, where they are swiftly consumed by the Lying Darkness.

Year 1141

- The Naga, heavily outnumbered and without allies, are finally defeated and driven away by the increasingly Shadow-corrupted Dragon forces. They flee back to the Shinomen Forest, abandoning all remaining contact with the world of mortal men.
- The Legion of the Wolf, based out of Nanashi Mura, is forced to flee to Phoenix lands when Lion troops arrive and burn the village to the ground.
- The non-stop aggression of the Lion prompts increasing pressure within the Crane Clan to abrogate their treaty with the Lion. Doji Kuwanan resists such urging, arguing the Crane armies have not yet properly recovered from the Clan Wars.

Year 1142

- The Crane-Phoenix naval coalition wins a major naval battle against the Mantis fleet off the coast from Mura Sabishii Toshi. In response, Yoritomo persuades the Wasp and Centipede Clans to officially merge with the Mantis, thereby gaining a solid foothold on the Empire's mainland. The Fox Clan refuses a similar offer and remains outside of Yoritomo's Alliance.
- Yoritomo marries Moshi Wakiza, the former daimyo of the Centipede. Their daughter Kumiko is born the following year.

Year 1143

- After several years of planning, Shinjo Yokatsu, the lord of the Unicorn Clan, decides the time has come to make a play for the Throne. The Unicorn suffered the least damage of any of the Great Clans during the Clan Wars, their armies are nearly at full strength, and Yokatsu's comrades in the Kolat believe they finally have the chance to take full control of Rokugan and impose their vision of perfection on humanity. The Unicorn armies march on Otosan Uchi, advancing up the south bank of the Drowned Merchant River into Lion territories, and Yokatsu officially proclaims his intention to become Emperor. The Crab and Mantis offer Yokatsu political and economic support, as do the covert Scorpion (in return for a promise to drive the Lion out of their lands and return Ryoko Owari to Scorpion rule).
- Ikoma Tsanuri, determined not to let a "barbarian" take the Throne, marches the Lion armies to confront the Unicorn. The two clans wage a lengthy campaign with several large battles. The Lion receive modest non-military support from the Crane and Phoenix. For a time it appears the Unicorn will win through, but the Lion finally pin down their main force at the Battle of Three Hills. The battle inflicts grievous casualties on both sides, and Tsanuri is killed, but afterward the Unicorn are too weak to advance further and have no choice but to withdraw.
- Kitsu Motso becomes the Lion Clan Champion until Matsu Nimuro, the heir to Matsu Tsuko, can come fully of age. Motso declares the Lion will not rest until the Unicorn and all their supporters are punished for Yokatsu's "treachery."

Year 1145

- Renewed warfare erupts on the Dragon-Phoenix border. The Phoenix, acting on the advice of the Kitsuki refugees, have begun to research the powers of crystal, developing new magic to defeat the influence of the Lying Darkness. They drive back the Dragon troops and re-capture the Shrine of the Ki-Rin.
- An increasing number of individual Dragon samurai begin fleeing their lands, seeking escape from the dark power of Shadow which is engulfing their clan. Some of them take shelter with the Phoenix; others scatter to diverse corners of the Empire.
- Unicorn emissaries visit the Dragon, seeking alliance against the Lion, and work to persuade the Crane to abandon their non-aggression pact.



Year 1146

- After three years of preparation, the Lion launch a full-scale invasion of the Unicorn. Shadow-corrupted Dragon join the fight on the Unicorn side. The Lion overrun the City of the Rich Frog and push on into Unicorn lands, but then bog down in an extended siege of Toshi no Aida ni Kawa (the City Between the Rivers). Unicorn cavalry raiders harass the Lion supply lines and make further advances impossible. With winter approaching the Lion finally take the city and castle by storm, and the war settles into a reluctant pause with both sides immobilized by the weather.

Year 1148

- After a long campaign of political infighting, blackmail, and assassination, Otomo Banu finally succeeds in suppressing his political rivals and taking control of the Otomo family. He proclaims himself Emperor and issues decrees calling on the clans to offer him fealty, but these are all but ignored. Only the Crane, the Scorpion, and some of the Minor Clans send emissaries to Banu, and they approach with an attitude of political bargaining rather than homage.
- Renewed fighting in the western Unicorn territories is bloody but inconclusive, with the front shifting back and forth several times. As autumn approaches, Otomo Banu attempts to mediate the war, bringing all of the Imperial Families' remaining political and economic strength to bear. The Crane assist Banu, hoping that strengthening him will bring a restoration of their traditional political power, and their covert threat of a trade embargo persuades the two clans to listen. While neither the Lion nor the Unicorn acknowledge Banu's claim to the throne, they ultimately agree to a three-year truce.
- Otomo Banu hosts the first of several self-proclaimed "Imperial Winter Courts," this one at Kyuden Seppun. The Crane, Phoenix, Mantis, and several Minor Clans attend. The Mantis aggressively lobby Banu to support their claim to Great Clan status, but their efforts are largely stymied by the Crane and Phoenix.

Year 1149

- Hida O-Ushi recognizes the Mantis as a Great Clan in exchange for a long-term trade agreement with Yoritomo's clan. In return, Yoritomo forsakes all claim to the Fox Clan, and the Crab issue an ultimatum to the Fox: accept a Crab "protectorate" or be destroyed. The aging Fox daimyo Kitsune Ryosei reluctantly agrees rather than let her people be crushed.
- The Tsuruchi and Moshi families become increasingly concerned that their unification with the Mantis Clan has exposed them to the threat of annihilation by one or another of the land-bound Great Clans. They pressure Yoritomo for greater support, and urge him to abandon his naval feud with the Crane and Phoenix.

Year 1150

- With the coming of spring, Kitsu Motso vengefully attacks the Crane in retaliation for their support of Otomo Banu's interference. The Crane armies have recovered enough to fight the Lion to a standstill, but the cost is high, and substantial border territories are ravaged or lost.
- The Crane do their best to politically exploit the Lion abrogation of their peace treaty. Their efforts meet with only mixed success at best: the Phoenix cut off relations with the Lion, but the Unicorn do noy yet seek a renewed war with the Lion Clan, and the Crab and Mantis remain hostile to the Crane. Otomo Banu condemns the Lion aggression, but the only result of his words is for Kitsu Motso to publicly proclaim that Banu is not the Emperor.
- Mirumoto Hitomi, now fully under the control of the Lying Darkness, frees Shosuro from the crystal prison beneath the High House of Light. Shosuro travels the Empire, taking control of many Scorpion (especially in the ranks of the shinobi) who have been touched by the Darkness.





Year 1151

- Sensing opportunity in the continued weakness of the Crane Clan, the Crab overrun all of the remaining southern Crane lands, seizing the coastal ports and inland agricultural areas all the way to the Spine of the World Mountains. Shinden Asahina is razed to the ground, the sacred temples burned and destroyed; only a handful of the Asahina family manage to flee to the north.
- Skirmishing resumes on the Lion-Unicorn border, with several Unicorn cavalry forces launching deep raids into Lion lands.
- Several of the larger Yobanjin tribes band together to cross the Great Wall of the North and raid the Phoenix and Unicorn territories. The Badger Clan, isolated and weak, is effectively wiped out trying to resist these raids, and the Unicorn are weakened by the need to guard their northern borders.
- During Otomo Banu's third "winter court," the Crane make secret arrangements with the Fox Clan, promising independence to the Fox in return for their assistance against the Crab.

Year 1152

- The Crane launch a counter-offensive into their southern territories, catching the Crab armies over-extended. They re-take Mura Sabishii Toshi and several other settlements, but as the Crab fall back their defensive skills come to the fore, and the Crane drive comes up far short of their goal of reclaiming the ruins of Shinden Asahina.
- The Fox Clan takes advantage of the opportunity and rebels against the Crab. The spirits of the forest support the small Fox army, driving out the Crab garrison.

Year 1153

- After three years, the Lion resume full-scale war with the Unicorn by advancing troops from their bases in the Scorpion lands. They hope to move past the southern edge of the Spine of the World Mountains and outflank the main Unicorn defenses. The advance is heavily sabotaged by covert Scorpion troops, but nonetheless reaches the edge of Ide territory by mid-summer; the Unicorn forces in Ryoko Owari are cut off and forced into a deadly retreat across the Plains of Thunder.
- Hida Kuon, the aggressive younger son of Hida O-Ushi, opportunistically invades and seizes the Scorpion lands, cutting off the main supply line for the Lion. Kuon hopes to overrun the fertile Scorpion farmlands and use them as a base for retaking the Fox lands. Expectations of a quick victory are curtailed, however, when the Lion commander – a brilliant tactician named Ikoma Ken'no – manages to secure a secondary supply route through the formerly impassible Seikitsu Pass. Vicious warfare ensues all across the northern Scorpion lands and southern Unicorn lands, with major battles at Ryoko Owari and Toshi Aitate. The Miya lands are caught in the middle of the campaign, overrun, and largely destroyed, with Kuon razing the modest Kyuden Miya itself when daimyo Miya Yumi refuses to supply him with food.
- By autumn, logistic shortfalls force the Crab to pull back to the southern Scorpion territories near Shimomura. With the Lion and Unicorn likewise pulling back, the main Scorpion territory is left effectively unoccupied, and Scorpion samurai once again begin to quietly assert control of their homes. Unfortunately, this also places large portions of the Scorpion lands under the rule of the Lying Darkness.

Year 1154

- A young ronin named Kaneka approaches the Legion of the Wolf – now a small ronin band in Imperial territory, led by the grizzled veteran Toku – and identifies himself as Akodo Toturi's illegitimate son. Toku recognizes his old friend's features in the young man's face and instantly pledges allegiance.

- With the Lion Clan's flanking move having come to nothing, the focus of the Lion-Unicorn war shifts back to the main front on the Sleeping River and near White Shore Lake. Bloody fighting continues throughout the summer, exhausting both sides; unknown to the generals, much of the carnage is due to the Lying Darkness, which deliberately confuses orders and sabotages maneuvers in order to maximize the bloodshed.
- The Phoenix, appalled by the ongoing wars and increasingly convinced that the rest of the Empire is falling under the influence of the Lying Darkness, announce they will no longer accept apprentices to the Isawa School from outside their own clan.

Year 1155

- Hida O-Ushi, alarmed by scout reports of a powerful new force rising within the Shadowlands, orders her armies pulled back from the Scorpion lands. She seeks a covert peace with the Scorpion.
- The Crane attempt to take advantage of the Crab withdrawal by occupying the southern Scorpion lands. Their force is ambushed and largely wiped out by Scorpion troops empowered by the Lying Darkness.
- The tide of war in the Lion-Unicorn conflict begins to swing slowly but inevitably against the Unicorn as the weight of Lion numbers and tactical acumen gains the edge.
- After ten years of preparation, the Phoenix Elemental Council mounts a full-scale invasion of the Dragon Mountains to root out the threat of the Lying Darkness. Their effort is supported by the remnants of the Dragonfly Clan and by hundreds of Dragon samurai who have fled the nightmare of their homeland; Kaneka and the Legion of the Wolf also serve in the Phoenix ranks. However, the attack is largely ignored by the rest of Rokugan.
- After making strong initial gains, the Phoenix forces become bogged down in bitter fighting within the mountains; the Elemental Legions discover their powers work poorly in lands which have become deeply corrupted by the Shadow. As autumn approaches, Shadow-corrupted Dragon samurai and Goju shapeshifters launch a large-scale counterattack that devastates the Phoenix army. The attack is spearheaded by the magical power of daimyo Agasha Tamori, who is enslaved to Hitomi's will by mystical tattoos. The Elemental Master of Earth, Isawa Taeruko, sacrifices herself to kill Tamori and buy time for the rest of the Phoenix to retreat.
- A small force that includes the Legion of the Wolf and the Master of Water, Isawa Riake, is cut off in the Shrine to Jurojin and endures a siege throughout the winter.
- Otomo Banu holds his latest (and as it turns out, his last) "Imperial Winter Court" in Kyuden Doji. The Crane make an all-out effort to support Banu, hoping against hope that a recognized Emperor may grant them the strength they lack. However, the only other clans to send representatives to the court are the Mantis and the Phoenix. The Mantis are there mainly to demand more support for their claim to Great Clan status, while the Phoenix are there to urge unity against the threat of the Lying Darkness. The Mantis and Phoenix delegates quarrel bitterly throughout the winter. Near the end of the season, an increasingly frustrated Banu finally breaks down and loses face, launching a tirade against the 'traitors' who make up the rest of Rokugan. The Crane, furious at the political damage from their association with this unstable figure, unceremoniously end the Winter Court and expel Banu from their lands.

Year 1156

- The Legion of the Wolf breaks out of Jurojin Seido and makes a heroic march through the mountains to reach Phoenix lands.
- The Kolat, alarmed by the declining military fortunes of the Unicorn and the rapidly growing power of the Lying Darkness, attempt to make a peace between the Unicorn and the Lion in order to join forces with the Phoenix against the greater threat. Unfortunately, Lion Champion Kitsu Motso is thoroughly unwilling to accept a peace with the "treacherous barbarians" of the Unicorn. Fighting between the two clans continues, with the Lion besieging and capturing Shiro Otaku Shojo and putting the famed Otaku Stables to the torch.
- Yoritomo, angry over the Winter Court's outcome and manipulated by agents of the Lying Darkness, launches a surprise attack on the Phoenix lands. With much of the Phoenix Clan's strength committed to the fighting against the Dragon, their fleet is weakened and the Mantis Storms easily crush it – especially since it is isolated from its Crane allies. Mantis soldiers mount a full-scale invasion of the Phoenix coast, capturing the City of Remembrance and Shiro Shiba. The Moshi family, outraged at this attack on their ancient kin in the Isawa, refuses to participate in the invasion.
- The Crane, hoping to forge a stronger alliance with the Phoenix, send much of their remaining strength north and join with the surviving members of the Elemental Council to confront Yoritomo's forces near Kyuden Isawa. The Council overwhelms the more numerous but weaker Mantis shugenja, and the joint Phoenix/Crane army (which also includes the Legion of the Wolf) devastates the smaller Mantis army; Yoritomo dies trying to lead a final charge against the Phoenix, though he claims the lives of both of the enemy commanders (Doji



Kuwanan and Shiba Tsukune). His adopted son Yoritomo Aramasu takes command of the Mantis forces and retreats to the clan's bridgehead at the City of Remembrance. There he faces a surprise attack from the Legion of the Wolf; Kaneka defeats the Mantis but then agrees to spare their lives if they will immediately evacuate the Phoenix lands. Aramasu is impressed by Kaneka's skill and compassion, and offers to hire his services if the Phoenix no longer have need of him.

- Doji Kuwanan's death places the leadership of the Crane in the hands of his son, Doji Kurohito, a skilled young man but one whose mind is warped by the curse on his sword, Chukandomo. Already a proven warrior on the Empire's conflicts, Kurohito is driven to self-destructive ambition by Chukandomo's ancient curse.

Year 1158

- The self-titled Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, Daigotsu, attacks the Kaiu Wall with a massive army of Lost, Dark Moto, and Shadowlands beasts. The Crab, having strengthened themselves for many years, manage to repel the attack at a heavy cost. The aging Hida O-Ushi perishes in the battle, and her older son Hida Kuroda becomes Clan Champion. The Crab send warnings to the rest of the Empire about the resurgent Shadowlands threat, but are largely ignored; in some cases their messages are actively intercepted by the minions of the Lying Darkness.
- The Mantis Clan finds itself plunged into conflict as Yoritomo Aramasu's leadership is challenged by the Daughter of Storms, Yoritomo Kumiko, the true-born daughter of Yoritomo and Wakiza. Aramasu insists that as the older of Yoritiomo's two heirs he should rule the clan, despite his being adopted. The rivalry quickly spins into bloodshed, with fleets and daimyo choosing sides. The Tsuruchi and Moshi, appalled at the conflict, effectively withdraw from the rest of the clan.
- The Lion Clan remains focused on its war against the Unicorn, which is rapidly coming to a climax. Shiro Shinjo falls in late summer as the Unicorn defenses at last give way. Shinjo Yokatsu dies in battle, and the leadership of the clan goes to his only surviving son, Shinjo Shono. Lacking the numbers to continue fighting the Lion directly, Shono switches to hit-and-run tactics, operating out of the clan's remaining strongholds in Oshindoka Toshi and Shiro Ide. Shono also sends messengers into the Burning Sands to seek out the Desert Moto tribes.

Chukandomo & Other Side-Stories in the Shattered Empire

In the official history of Rokugan, Doji Kurohito is saved from the curse on Chukandomo, a story described in Chapter Nine: The Four Winds. His rescue, and the purification of the sword, are both accomplished by the selfless and honorable heroism of Kurohito's cousin Doji Yasuyo, who undergoes training by one of the legendary kenku swordmasters and later goes on to marry the Shogun Kaneka. In the Shattered Empire, however, Yasuyo never gets the chance to undertake her quest; she dies in combat during the Crane Clan's attempt to conquer the Scorpion lands. Without her aid, the curse on Chukandomo cannot be lifted, and it drives Kurohito to his fatal assault on the Imperial Capital.

This is just one of the more prominent examples of the many "side-story" elements in the official L5R timeline that are changed by the radically different history of the Shattered Empire. The storyline of Rokugan, as recounted over the years in numerous on-line fictions, is replete with these sorts of side-stories. Examples from the Shattered Empire era include Kakita Toshimoko's tragic relationship with his two sons (the legitimate but dishonorable Kakita Ichiro and the illegitimate but admirable Seppun Toshiken), the enlightened madness of the tattooed man Kokujin, and Shiba Aikune's efforts to become a hero by claiming Isawa's Last Wish. All of these stories will at the very least be significantly changed by the altered history around them, and perhaps even wiped out completely.

Creative GMs can develop all manner of adventures within the Shattered Empire timeline by re-working these "canon" stories to reflect the changes wrought by a different history.

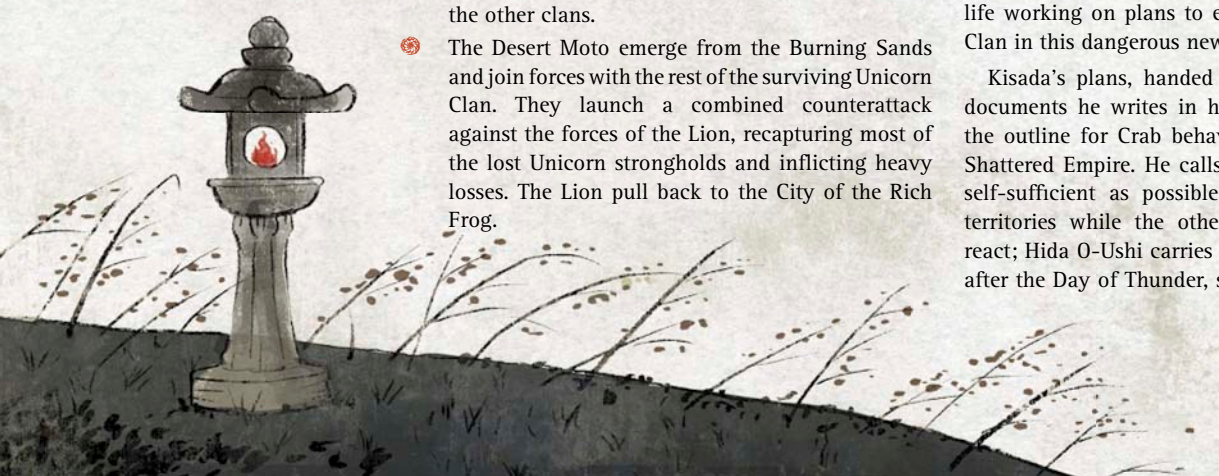
- As winter comes to an end, Mirumoto Hitomi advances out of the Dragon mountains at the head of an army of corrupted samurai and Goju shadowspawn. Her objective is the ancient and forgotten city of Volturnum deep in the Shadowlands, where the Lying Darkness hopes to invade the Spirit Realms and unmake reality itself.

Year 1159

- Hitomi's army moves through the Seikitsu Pass, easily overwhelming the Lion army posted there, and advances into the Scorpion lands, linking up with thousands of Shadow-corrupted Scorpion. Crab scouts bring back alarming reports of Hitomi's mysterious army and its strange powers; Hida Kuroda grimly prepares his clan to fight on two fronts.
- The Dark Lord Daigotsu sends emissaries to Hida Kuroda, proposing an alliance of convenience against Hitomi. Kuroda rejects an idea that seems far too much like his grandfather's misguided alliance with the Shadowlands.
- Doji Kurohito, driven by the curse on his sword Chukandomo, launches an all-out attack on Otosan Uchi. He believes he can claim the Throne and make himself Emperor, saving the Crane from destruction at the hands of the stronger clans. The surprise attack initially catches the city only lightly defended, and Kurohito easily breaches the outer walls, but he is unable to capture the Forbidden City. Otomo Banu dispatches desperate appeals to the other clans for aid, but few are available to answer; ultimately, only the Legion of the Wolf and a few hundred Lion, Mantis, and Phoenix samurai join with the Tortoise Clan and what remains of the Imperial families to fight the Crane invasion.
- After two weeks of inconclusive fighting, Kurohito and his most dedicated followers manage to scale the enchanted walls of the Forbidden City and storm the Imperial Palace. Kurohito slays Otomo Banu and his "court," only to be confronted by Kaneka, the leader of the Legion of the Wolf, who kills him in a duel. The Forbidden City has caught fire in the fighting and the flames soon spread to the rest of Otosan Uchi, forcing the remaining troops on all sides to flee. With Kurohito dead, the rule of the Crane Clan passes to his teenage daughter, Sakura, who quickly seeks peace with the other clans.
- The Desert Moto emerge from the Burning Sands and join forces with the rest of the surviving Unicorn Clan. They launch a combined counterattack against the forces of the Lion, recapturing most of the lost Unicorn strongholds and inflicting heavy losses. The Lion pull back to the City of the Rich Frog.
- As winter forces the Empire's various conflicts into truce, rumors leak out of the Scorpion lands of dark shadows lying across the land, shapeless monsters stalking the night, and an alliance between Hitomi's army and the formerly hidden Scorpion. The Phoenix Elemental Council attempts to rally the other clans to act against Hitomi, as does Kaneka, but few are willing to listen.

Year 1160

- As spring dries the roads, Hitomi and her massive army move south, toward the Crab, the Shadowlands, and her goal of Volturnum's Gate....



The Clans and Factions in the Shattered Empire

The Shattered Empire era forces each of the clans to govern itself without the aid (or supervision) of the Emperor, and as one might expect this leads to considerable divergence in their policies. Some factions, such as the Crab and the corrupted Dragon, quickly abandon any loyalty to the idea of a unified Rokugan, while others try to maintain at least the image of devotion to the Throne in hopes of eventually putting one of their own on it.

The Crab Clan

In the aftermath of the Day of Thunder, rule of the Crab Clan remains initially in the hands of the crippled Great Bear, Hida Kisada; lethally wounded by the Ancestral Sword of the Hantei, Kisada's almost inhuman resilience nonetheless allows him to live for nearly three years afterward. His skills as a strategist let him easily see the consequences of the Second Day of Thunder: the Empire will not be able to endure as a single entity so long as the Imperial Throne remains empty. Kisada feels no small measure of responsibility and guilt over this – after all, it was his own misguided alliance with the Shadowlands that allowed the Empire to come to such a pass, and it is only a small comfort that his son Yakamo became the Crab Thunder and defeated Fu Leng before he died. True to his Crab heritage, however, Kisada does not seek redemption through seppuku; instead, he spends the last years of his life working on plans to ensure the survival of the Crab Clan in this dangerous new era.

Kisada's plans, handed on to his daughter O-Ushi in documents he writes in his last months of life, provide the outline for Crab behavior throughout the era of the Shattered Empire. He calls for the clan to make itself as self-sufficient as possible by grabbing useful adjacent territories while the other clans are still too weak to react; Hida O-Ushi carries out this plan in the early years after the Day of Thunder, seizing the lands of the Falcon,

Hare, and Sparrow as well as a considerable amount of the Crane Clan's southern territory. This early aggressive action causes the Crab to become diplomatically isolated from much of the rest of the Empire, since most of the other clans are not yet ready to fully embrace a world without the constraint of an Emperor; the Kolat, however, approve, and for a time the Crab enjoy good relations with the Kolat-controlled Unicorn Clan. O-Ushi's actions also succeed in strengthening the Crab enough to withstand the assault by Kuni Yori and his undead legions.

Most Crab samurai, pragmatic by nature, recognize early on that the Empire is unlikely to re-unite without a heroic figure to bring all the clans together. Nonetheless, they continue to carry out their thankless duty of protecting Rokugan from the Shadowlands, for they recognize full well that neither they nor anyone else can survive if the forces of Jigoku are given free reign. Although their greater military and economic strength makes it easier for them to perform the direct portion of this duty – both of the Shadowlands assaults on the Wall are decisively repulsed – the chaos and hostility of the era makes it much harder for the Kuni Witch-Hunters to operate in the rest of Rokugan. The Crane, in fact, refuse to cooperate with them at all.

As the Empire slowly spirals down into full-scale civil war in the late 1140's, the Crab Clan initially enjoys a considerable edge over its rivals. O-Ushi's early aggression has made the clan nearly self-sufficient in food, and its fleet is strong enough to stand off the Mantis so long as it remains on the defensive. The Shadowlands remains relatively quiescent after the defeat of Kuni Yori, allowing the clan to commit much more of its strength on its inland borders. The Crab are able to occupy the Fox lands after cutting a deal with the Mantis Clan, and when the Crane are weakened by clashes with the Lion, the Crab opportunistically overrun nearly the entire Crane territory south of the Seikitsu Mountains. However, the Crab – like petty much every other clan in the Shattered Empire era – ultimately over-extend themselves and suffer a series of reverses. Hida Kuon's aggressive move into the Scorpion lands leads to defeat, and the Crane are able to recover some of their own lands and drive the Crab out of the Fox territory. Their heavy losses during these battles force them back onto a defensive stance thereafter.

In many ways the Crab are simultaneously the most successful and the most constrained faction in the Shattered Empire. Their early territorial expansion allows them to survive and even somewhat thrive despite political and economic isolation, but this very strength leads them to later over-extend themselves more than almost any other clan, resulting in a succession of defeats. And the necessity of constantly fighting on two fronts – one toward the Shadowlands, the other toward the Empire – makes it impossible for them to achieve a decisive victory.

The Crab and Duty

The baseline Shattered Empire storyline assumes the Crab Clan, having learned a harsh lesson from Kisada's alliance with the Shadowlands, makes sure to strengthen its border with Jigoku's realm and keeps a large portion of its strength there at all times. This certainly makes sense, given the clan's historic mission and its deeply-ingrained sense of duty.

However, the Shattered Empire era is one in which many clans lose their connection to their normal duties as the effects of ambition, lack of unity, and economic hardship wear away at custom and tradition. Thus, it is entirely possible the Crab could have reduced or even ultimately abandoned their devotion to fighting the Shadowlands in order to try to conquer Rokugan. In particular, once Hida O-Ushi died her sons Kuroda and Kuon – who grew up in the world of the Shattered Empire – might well have decided they were tired of fighting the Shadowlands on behalf of other clans who were their enemies.

Much would depend on how much of a threat the Dark Lord Daigotsu presented. In the "official" Shattered Empire timeline, Daigotsu is still a serious danger, albeit less so than in the original canonical history. However, there is nothing inevitable about this or indeed about Daigotsu appearing in this timeline at all. Without the Dark Lord, the Shadowlands would be unlikely to pose a serious threat to Rokugan for several generations.



The Crane Clan

The Crane find themselves in a very difficult position in the aftermath of the Day of Thunder. Of all the Great Clans, only the Phoenix have suffered more damage. The Crane lands have been ravaged, many of their greatest castles sacked and burned, and their armies greatly reduced in numbers. Their traditional economic advantage has been greatly eroded by the damage to their lands, with countless farms burned and rice-paddies destroyed. Moreover, their other traditional advantage – their mastery of the courts and of the ways of art and diplomacy – is suddenly far less valuable in a Rokugan without an Emperor. Even more than the Phoenix, the Crane desperately hope for an era of peace and prosperity in which their strength can be rebuilt.

The Clan Champion (and the clan's greatest hero), Doji Hoturi, dies at the Day of Thunder, leaving the leadership of the clan in the hands of his younger brother Doji Kuwanan. Primarily a soldier rather than a politician, Kuwanan recognizes his clan is in no position to survive if it is forced immediately back into war. With the help of Kakita Yoshi, who previously served as Imperial Chancellor under Hantei the 38th, Kuwanan tries to pursue a policy of alliance and peaceful coexistence with the other clans, enduring the Crab attack on the Crane Clan's southern lands with only moderate protest, and even going so far as to forge a non-aggression pact with the hated Lion. The Crane also do their best to prop up the authority and position of the Imperial families, hoping thereby to rebuild the political structures and constraints shattered by the Clan War. They are ultimately the only clan to offer large-scale support to Otomo Banu in his attempt to claim the Imperial Throne, including attendance at all of his self-proclaimed "Winter Courts." However, despite their best efforts the influence of the Imperial families steadily declines, as does the clan's own ability to exercise the "soft power" which has always been its emblematic method.

The notable exception to the clan's initial policy of non-aggression is toward the Mantis Clan. All of the Crane regard the Mantis as ill-mannered upstarts and refuse to dignify Yoritomo's claims to Great Clan status. Kuwanan pours considerable clan resources into building up the Crane navy and forges an alliance with the Phoenix to oppose Mantis piracy and nautical raids. Unfortunately, this policy ultimately draws the Crane into a later war in Phoenix lands when the Mantis invade them.

For many Crane, the era of the Shattered Empire seems to be not merely tearing apart the greater world of Rokugan but also their own clan. As the wars and violence sundering the Empire become steadily more common and more destructive, more and more young Crane samurai train as bushi, while fewer and fewer pursue their clan's traditional ways of court and artistry. Enrollment at the Kakita Artisan Academy drops precipitously throughout this era, and even the Kakita Dueling Academy sees a significant decline as the practical requirements of war drive more Crane samurai into the dojo of the Daidoji schools.

As the wars in the 1150's escalate, the Crane find themselves targeted by both the Lion and the Crab, suffering even more territorial losses and, most painful of



all, the destruction of Shinden Asahina. The loss of their peaceful shugenja family is not only a severe blow to the Crane Clan's spirituality (and its magical capabilities) but also effectively cripples the clan's remaining interest in dealing with the rest of the Empire in a peaceful manner. Younger Crane samurai who have grown up in an age of relentless violence see the destruction of the Asahina as proof that war is the only answer to the challenges facing their clan. After Doji Kuwanan dies in combat in the Phoenix lands, his son Doji Kurohito – influence by the cursed sword Chukandomo – embraces this new intensely martial attitude. Eventually, the sword's malignant influence drives Kurohito to forsake his clan's earlier attempt to prop up Otomo Banu and instead attack Otosan Uchi itself, seeking to claim the Throne for himself. This disaster fulfills the curse of Chukandomo and effectively destroys the Crane Clan's military capacity.

The future of the Crane Clan after the fulfillment of Chukandomo's curse is difficult to predict. The heavy casualties and leadership losses resulting from the Battle of Otosan Uchi leave the clan in a severely weakened position, vulnerable to renewed attack from other clans; however, many of the other Great Clans are also badly weakened by years of warfare, making it difficult for them to exploit the Crane Clan's vulnerability. And Hitomi's march on Volturnum may offer a final opportunity for all the clans, including the Crane, to draw back together in the face of lethal danger.

The Dragon Clan

Hitomi is the only Thunder to survive the Second Day of Thunder, for the simple reason that she does not participate in the fight; having used the Obsidian Hand to kill Togashi and absorb some of the Kami's power, she is left mentally disturbed and emotionally shattered. After the battle, she wanders slowly back to the Dragon lands, battling her own madness and the growing influence of the Obsidian Hand – which is suffused with the power of the Lying Darkness. As both the Mirumoto daimyo and the bearer of at least some of Togashi's power, she is easily able to assert control over the Dragon Clan.

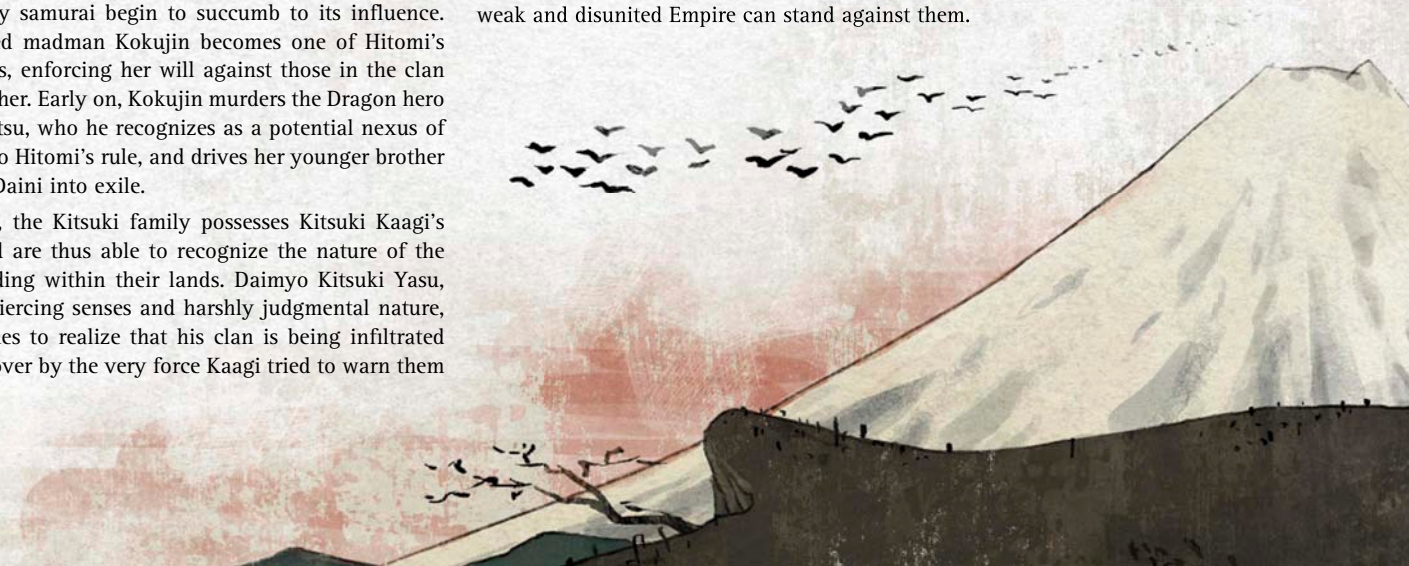
With no Emperor to corrupt, the Lying Darkness chooses to focus its power on Hitomi as its agent in Rokugan, slowly but steadily wearing away at her already damaged psyche. As its power spreads through the Dragon lands, many samurai begin to succumb to its influence. The tattooed madman Kokujin becomes one of Hitomi's chief agents, enforcing her will against those in the clan who doubt her. Early on, Kokujin murders the Dragon hero Togashi Mitsu, who he recognizes as a potential nexus of resistance to Hitomi's rule, and drives her younger brother Mirumoto Daini into exile.

However, the Kitsuki family possesses Kitsuki Kaagi's journal and are thus able to recognize the nature of the threat building within their lands. Daimyo Kitsuki Yasu, a man of piercing senses and harshly judgmental nature, slowly comes to realize that his clan is being infiltrated and taken over by the very force Kaagi tried to warn them about. In contrast to the canonical history, where the bulk of the Agasha leave the clan in an act of moral protest, here it is the Kitsuki who depart. Yasu's decision to lead his family out of the clan is not a protest but a matter of simple survival – he knows the Kitsuki will be consumed if they remain within Hitomi's reach, and he knows the rest of the Empire must be warned about the threat.

In contrast to the canon history in which the Agasha defection did not trigger an immediate military conflict, in the Shattered Empire the departure of the Kitsuki leads almost immediately to a full-scale war between Dragon and Phoenix. By then, Hitomi is almost completely controlled by the Lying Darkness, and the Darkness has no intention of allowing the Kitsuki to find safe-haven in the Phoenix Clan. Her initial attacks threaten to overwhelm the Phoenix completely, but intervention by the Naga forces the Dragon to fight on two fronts and buys time for the Phoenix to recover. The result is years of recurrent bitter war between the two clans, slowly wearing down both of them – a conflict which only makes it easier for the Darkness to tighten its grip on the Dragon Clan. Although the later Phoenix counter-offensives do cause some damage to the Darkness' forces, the Phoenix Clan alone cannot prevail against the corrupted Dragon, and the rest of the Empire is too war-torn to become involved. To that end, Hitomi intervenes in other conflicts such as the Unicorn-Lion war in order to maximize the amount of destruction and chaos throughout Rokugan; these interventions also provide a convenient way to dispose of samurai who are resisting the Darkness' power.

Ultimately, Hitomi becomes the avatar of the Lying Darkness in this timeline (the equivalent of Goju Adorai's role in the canonical histories), and the Dragon Clan is all but consumed by the Darkness, reduced to nothing more than an army of dazed, half-corrupted samurai and nameless Shadowspawn. Several thousand individual Dragon samurai do manage to escape the clan before they can be consumed; some of them join the Phoenix war against their former clan, while the rest scatter across Rokugan.

The Darkness in this timeline has the same final goal as the Darkness in the canonical history, although it approaches it more slowly: take control of Volturnum's Gate, invade the Spirit Realms, and thereby unmake all of reality. Hitomi and the Dragon Clan becomes its chief agents in pursuing this goal, and it seems doubtful the weak and disunited Empire can stand against them.



Gaming the Fall of the Dragon

For individual Dragon samurai, the Shattered Empire is a time of slowly-building fear and darkness. Family and friends become strangers one by one, the night is filled with faceless shapes, and no one in authority seems to recognize what is happening. (Needless to say, the Darkness strikes at the clan's leadership first, then works its way down through the ranks.) After the Kitsuki flee the clan, Hitomi uses their 'treason' to rally the rest of the Dragon and to justify savage reactions to any other samurai whose loyalty seems in question. Torture and execution on mere suspicion become the norm. Some Dragon do emulate the Kitsuki and flee their clan, but even for the Dragon (with their somewhat more individualistic traditions) this is a difficult decision to make – and due to the presence of the Lying Darkness, far too many samurai are corrupted and lose their will to escape before they can reach a final decision.

GMs who wish to run a campaign set in the Dragon lands of the Shattered Empire, or even a more general Shattered Empire campaign that visits those lands, will be able to develop powerful horror-story themes of paranoia and isolation – a Rokugani version of *Attack of the Body-Snatchers*. Remember that aside from the leadership of the Kitsuki family and a few samurai among the Scorpion and Unicorn, no one in the Empire really knows anything about the Lying Darkness at this point in history, so it will be nearly impossible for individual PCs to understand what is happening. This allows the GM to play on the growing isolation and fear which individual samurai experience as friends become strangers. Is your old sparring partner's insouciance the result of mere naïvete, or has he been touched by the Darkness? Are the sounds you hear at night merely your imagination? Are those people you pass on a night-darkened village street just peasants, or will their faces slide into blankness if you look at them?

It should also be noted that while the 'default' form of the Shattered Empire timeline sees the Dragon Clan succumb to the power of the Darkness, this does not have to be true in your campaign. A group of sufficiently heroic and dedicated samurai could potentially turn back the advance of the Shadow and rescue the clan from its fate; this would be a campaign that blended horror and paranoia with more heroic themes, in the manner of the novels of Dan Simmons or Tim Powers. Sufficiently brave PCs might perhaps save Togashi Mitsu or even Hitomi herself from their dark fates. The whole point of an alternate timeline, after all, is to explore the possibilities of a Rokugan where things turn out differently – that should apply to its own history as well as to the canon!.



The Lion Clan

For the Lion, the lack of an Emperor is keenly felt; their traditional role as the Right Hand, defender of the Throne against all threats, becomes uncertain in a world where the Throne stands vacant. Moreover, they suffered grievous casualties and deep internal divisions during the Clan Wars, and the appointment of Ikoma Tsanuri as a regent Clan Champion is seen as a sort of awkward compromise to try to paper over those divisions and restore a sense of unity to the clan. With the clan's armies at a low ebb after the slaughter of the Clan War's final year, most Lion are also willing to refrain from any immediate violence and work on rebuilding their strength; there are also many traditionalists who hope the Otomo family will be able to present an undisputed heir to the Throne and thus restore Rokugan's unity and their own clan's purpose. (Unfortunately, the only potential heir who emerges is Otomo Banu, whose claim is disputed by much of his own family as well as the Ikoma historians.)

Despite her initial unpopularity Tsunari proves a true heir to her late patron Matsu Tsuko, and as soon as her clan recovers its strength she follows a path of bold aggression. Not only does she occupy much of the seemingly vacant Scorpion territory, but she realizes the continued absence of a universally accepted Emperor opens the door for the Lion to finally win their wars and resolve their many grudges, without fear of seeing their gains rolled back in the courts. It is this realization that leads to the Lion to make war on the Dragonfly, utterly crushing them and finally avenging the humiliation of Akodo Yokutsu so many years earlier.

However, the defining aspect of the Lion Clan's history in the era of the Shattered Empire is their conflict with the Unicorn Clan. The Unicorn attempt to seize the Throne in the year 1143 earns the permanent and unflinching enmity of the Lion, and the next two decades are largely defined by the series of wars between the two clans. These clashes between the two strongest clans in Rokugan produce high casualties on both sides and often lead to periods of mutual exhaustion and resource depletion. An entire generation of Lion samurai grow up during the protracted Unicorn conflict, which becomes the focus of the clan's entire existence. Eventually, the Lion combination of superior numbers and better tactics prevails and the major Unicorn strongholds are burned to the ground, but outright victory proves elusive, especially once the Unicorn are able to call the Desert Moto back from the Burning Sands.

By the time Hitomi launches her march on Volturnum, the Lion Clan has been worn down to near-impotence by its apocalyptic struggle with the clan of Shinjo. Although its armies remain large, they are over-stretched and exhausted, their fighting spirit sorely diminished. Moreover, the Lion remain largely ignorant of the threat from the Shadow; from their viewpoint, if Hitomi wants to suicidally march her army into the Shadowlands, they should wish her all speed on her way.

The Mantis Clan

At the Day of Thunder, Toturi and Hida Yakamo promise Yoritomo, the lord of the Mantis Clan, they will grant him and his followers Great Clan status. Unfortunately, both of these men die a few hours later in their final battle with Fu Leng. When Yoritomo demands the rest of the Empire abide by Toturi and Yakamo's promise, the general response is one of contemptuous rejection, with the Lion, Crane, and Phoenix Clans chief among those who dismiss Yoritomo as a lying upstart.

Needless to say, the Son of Storms does not take this well, nor do his followers. The Mantis spend the next three decades in a state of more-or-less perpetual war with the Crane and Phoenix, albeit a war fought mainly on the seas. Initially the Mantis dominate this struggle, but the greater resources of the opposing Great Clans eventually allow them to become strong enough to rebuff the Mantis fleets and even inflict a significant defeat on them in the year 1142.

Much as in the actual history of the Empire, Yoritomo makes a major effort to hold together the Alliance he has forged among the Minor Clans, and ultimately convinces the Tsuruchi and the Moshi to join the Mantis Clan directly. However, these efforts are far more difficult than in the canonical timeline; the Mantis alliances with most of the other Minor Clans collapse quickly, as some of them are absorbed and others destroyed by the various Great Clans. Moreover, as the Seikitsu Mountains become a war-torn barrier between the Crane and the Crab, the Tsuruchi and Moshi territories become more endangered liabilities than sources of strength. Yoritomo's decision to "sell out" the Fox Clan to the Crab in exchange for their recognition and alliance also angers both families, as well as alienating the remaining independent Minor Clans.

Both Yoritomo and his followers become increasingly consumed with envy and anger over the other clans' rejection of their claims, favoring ever more violent action against the clans which they see as their enemies. This anger and bitterness opens the door for the Lying Darkness to infiltrate the clan, eventually driving the Mantis into a misguided and disastrous invasion of the Phoenix lands. Yoritomo himself dies there, by then an aging and bitter man whose greatest strength has left him, and his death leads to a catastrophic power struggle within the clan. His adopted son Aramasu, himself an adult with a wife and children, claims the leadership of the clan but is immediately challenged by Yoritomo Kumiko, the self-titled "Daughter of Storms," Yoritomo's daughter by his wife Wakiza. With the Lying Darkness sowing discord and confusion throughout the clan's ranks, the conflict swiftly escalates, with ambitious daimyo and fleet commanders lining up behind one leader or the other, or in some cases striking out on their own. And as the army of Hitomi marches across Rokugan toward Volturnum and destiny, leaders in the Tsuruchi and Moshi families increasingly question whether they should remain within the Mantis at all.

The Outcome of the Mantis Civil War

The Shattered Empire timeline leaves the outcome of the Mantis Clan's internal conflict unresolved. The GM is free to decide which side wins, or whether either side wins at all – given the centrifugal forces tearing the Empire apart, it is entirely possible the Mantis Clan fissures into pieces, with the Tsuruchi and Moshi going their own way. If the PCs are heavily involved in Mantis affairs, the GM can of course put them into a starring role, allowing them to pick a side and determine the outcome of the conflict, or even to broker a peace that reunifies the clan successfully. (Needless to say, such efforts will be opposed by the agents of the Lying Darkness.)

It may be noted that Yoritomo Aramasu is a close friend of Kaneka, and if he is defeated in the Mantis conflict he will most likely join the Legion of the Wolf. Thus the Mantis Civil War could result in Aramasu becoming a hero who dies fighting the forces of Shadow at Volturnum's Gate, much like his adopted father in the canonical histories.

The Phoenix Clan

Of all the Great Clans, the Phoenix are left the weakest by the outcome of the Clan Wars. The new Clan Champion, Shiba Tsukune, inherits a clan whose numbers have been drastically reduced by the Taint and the ravages of Shadowlands monsters. Of the five members of the Elemental Council, only Isawa Kaede survives, and she soon departs her mortal life to accept a higher station as the Oracle of Void. The Isawa family's numbers and strength have been so drastically reduced that they





initially do not have any shugenja of sufficient experience to restore the Council, and thus for the first time since its founding the clan is truly led by the Clan Champion. This state of affairs lasts for over half a decade; the first of the new Council, Isawa Taeruko, does not assume her station until the year 1133, and the Council remains short a Master of Air as late as 1135.

For the most part, the Phoenix try to avoid contact with the rest of the Empire and tend to their own affairs, working to restore their strength. Their only clash with other clans is at sea, where Yoritomo's campaign of piracy forces them to strengthen their own modest fleet and even sometimes post shugenja on the more valuable ships.

The clan's period of isolation comes to an abrupt end, however, when the Kitsuki family flees the Dragon lands and takes refuge with the Phoenix. Shiba Tsukune is initially deeply reluctant to give shelter to samurai who are betraying their oaths of fealty, but after daimyo Kitsuki Yasu shares his dire tales of the Lying Darkness, the Elemental Council overrides Tsukune – their first reassertion of authority since the Day of Thunder – and grants shelter to the Kitsuki. The decision proves a critical one, for in consequence the Phoenix Clan spends most of the next two decades waging war against the increasingly Shadow-corrupted Dragon Clan. Initially, the Dragon attacks inflict severe defeats on the Phoenix, who are not only outnumbered but also lack the knowledge required to defeat the powers of the Shadow. However, the intervention of the Naga distracts the Dragon Clan and allows the Phoenix to stabilize their borders and even launch a counterattack in the year 1155.

The Elemental Council becomes convinced that Hitomi and the Lying Darkness are a lethal threat to the Empire, and focus all their energy on learning ways to oppose the Shadow – in particular, studying the powers of crystal and its ability to repel the Shadowspawn. Master of Earth Isawa Taeruko soon becomes a master of crystal magic, and she leads the clan's effort to build up its strength for a final showdown with Hitomi and the corrupted Dragon. Unfortunately, the Shadow is able to lure the Mantis into an invasion of the Phoenix lands, and this disrupts the Phoenix Clan's efforts enough for Hitomi to launch her final march toward Volturnum. The Phoenix are determined to stop her, but without the help of the rest of the Empire, their efforts may prove to be in vain.

The Scorpion Clan

In the timeline of the Shattered Empire, there is no new Emperor after the Day of Thunder and thus no one to restore the Scorpion Clan to its position. The clan remains officially disbanded, its members hiding in secret strongholds or operating in public under the guise of ronin. With Kachiko dead, leadership of the clan falls to her late husband's younger brother, Bayushi Aramoro, and he does his best to keep the clan alive and to maintain control of their lands. One of his early stratagems is to send his son Aramasu to live with the Mantis in exchange for covert aid and support from the clan of Yoritomo. Unfortunately, this ends up somewhat backfiring as Aramasu is eventually adopted by Yoritomo and forsakes his Scorpion heritage; although Aramoro would greatly like to have his treacherous son assassinated, the weakened and concealed Scorpion lack the resources to do so.

Because the Scorpion officially no longer exist, they have no chance to assemble a large army or confront their enemies directly – were they to do so, they would instantly face a full-scale invasion from all directions. As a result, their lands effectively become a prize to be quarreled over by the other clans. This in turn forces the Scorpion to wage a series of guerilla wars against various invaders – the Unicorn in Ryoko Owari, the Lion in the northern half of their provinces, and late a full-scale attack by the Crab. Although the Scorpion are able to make life miserable for each of these invading groups, they cannot actually defeat any of them, and this becomes a source of bitter frustration for many Scorpion samurai. Since leadership of the clan is (by necessity) decentralized, individual Scorpion often pursue their own efforts against the invaders without reference to anyone else, and as the years go on many Scorpion begin to drift away from their clan and focus more on simply protecting themselves and their families.

Lurking beneath all of this, of course, is the presence of the Lying Darkness. The Shadow has been quietly infiltrating the Scorpion Clan since the Dawn of the Empire, and with the clan now scattered, disunited, and assailed by constant invasions, more and more Scorpion samurai fall victim to its influence. As the Shadow gets stronger, commoners also become targets for its power, and the Scorpion provinces increasingly become places of subtle terror and lurking evil. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Scorpion Clan has little idea this is happening – like their samurai, the leaders are isolated and scattered between many different hideouts, often out

of communication for weeks or months at a time. Thus the Shadow is able to worm its way slowly through their ranks, subverting one leader at a time, making one hidden stronghold after another into its own. By the time Hitomi marches her army out of the Dragon mountains and into the Scorpion provinces, the vast majority of the Scorpion have fallen to the Shadow, providing a huge draft of reinforcements for her final advance toward Volturnum

The Unicorn Clan

At the beginning of the Shattered Empire era, the Unicorn Clan is in a stronger position than almost any other clan. They suffered only modest damage during the Clan Wars, mostly raiding by bandits and Shadowlands forces, and their only major leader to perish in the conflict is Otaku Kamoko, the Unicorn Thunder. However, the clan's situation is complicated by the fact that it is secretly controlled and dominated by the Kolat conspiracy; in fact, Clan Champion Shinjo Yokatsu is one of the ten Kolat Masters. The Kolat believes the destruction of the Hantei Dynasty and the defeat of Fu Leng together open the door for a new era of Rokugan's history, an era dominated by man, in which the conspiracy can finally begin to make real progress toward its dream of a perfected, mortal-dominated universe. The Kolat deliberately chooses to help provoke conflict between the other clans, weakening the Empire and creating an opportunity for the Unicorn to seize the Throne directly.

Unfortunately, the Kolat reckon without the fanatical opposition of the Lion Clan. They believe their influence within the Lion – especially through the revered sensei Akodo Kage and the cavalry leader Matsu Agetoki – will allow them to weaken and divert the Lion resistance to the Unicorn advance. However, Lion leader Ikoma Tsanuri proves highly resistant to manipulation, and the initial Unicorn assault on Otosan Uchi is narrowly repulsed by Lion armies. Thereafter, the Unicorn find themselves locked in a perpetual conflict with the Lion, unable to do anything other than man their defenses and wage a long, draining, debilitating series of campaigns against successive Lion invasions. As the years go on, a palpable aura of gloom descends on the formerly cheerful and outgoing Unicorn; even the leaders of the vibrant and ferocious Otaku family become increasingly grim as losses increase and one stronghold after another falls to the relentless Lion. An alliance with the Dragon buys time and slows the Lion advance, but cannot ultimately stop it – and more than a few Unicorn notice the disturbing signs of the Lying Darkness in the ranks of their Dragon allies.

The Kolat, of course, cannot help but notice the mounting power of the Lying Darkness. However, with the Unicorn Clan trapped into perpetual conflict with the Lion, there is little the conspiracy can do to resist the Shadow's spread; ultimately, they are reduced to funneling anti-Shadow information and secrets to the Phoenix Clan, hoping the Isawa will make good use of it.

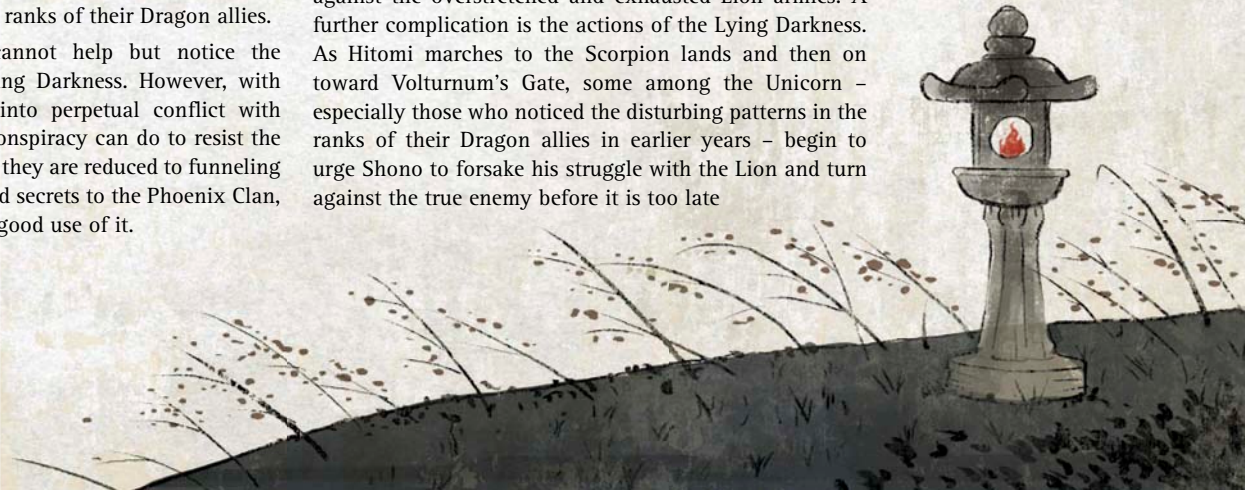
Saving the Scorpion

Although the Shattered Empire timeline depicts the Scorpion as being largely consumed by the Lying Darkness, this is no more inevitable than any other aspect of this era. Much like the Dragon Clan, the Scorpion Clan can become the setting for a horror/heroic storyline in which the PCs slowly ferret out the true nature of the Darkness, learn how to resist it, and ultimately drive it out of their home.

In this regard, the Unicorn Clan's occupation of Ryoko Owari and its clashes with the Lion in the northern Scorpion provinces can actually become a source of help to Scorpion PCs. The Unicorn know more about the Lying Darkness than almost anyone else save the Kitsuki, and they also have access to pieces of crystal, the most effective weapon against the minions of Shadow. Of course, allying with the "gaijin barbarians" who are occupying their lands may be a difficult pill for many Scorpion to swallow – but then again, the Scorpion are famed for using whatever weapons they need to win.

The near-total defeat of the Unicorn in the year 1158 forces the survivors to scatter and rely on hit-and-run tactics against the Lion occupiers. This has many effects – not least of which is the effective destruction of Kolat influence over the clan. The deaths of so much of the clan's leadership cadre wipes out almost all of the Kolat agents in positions of power, and leads to the elevation of Shinjo Shono to Clan Champion. Shono has never been inducted into the conspiracy, and his response to the clan's disastrous defeat – summoning the Desert Moto home to support their brethren – introduces a powerful new force into the clan which is wholly outside the Kolat's control. Thus, ironically, the clan's greatest military defeat also liberates it from the Kolat.

It remains to be seen whether the clan's modest resurgence under Shono will be enough to prevail, even against the overstretched and exhausted Lion armies. A further complication is the actions of the Lying Darkness. As Hitomi marches to the Scorpion lands and then on toward Volturnum's Gate, some among the Unicorn – especially those who noticed the disturbing patterns in the ranks of their Dragon allies in earlier years – begin to urge Shono to forsake his struggle with the Lion and turn against the true enemy before it is too late



What About Shinjo's Return?

In the canonical history of Rokugan, the confrontation with the Lying Darkness in the years 1130-31 takes place simultaneously with a similar supernatural battle in the Burning Sands, in which the Ashalan and other champions of purity do battle with the deadly corrupted jinn known as the Kaleel. During this cascade of supernatural events, the Kami Shinjo is freed from her imprisonment beneath the city of Medinaat al-Salaam by a quartet of heroes known as the Four Avatars – one of whom is a Scorpion, Shosuro Tage. Shinjo leads the Desert Moto and the exiled Scorpion back to Rokugan, and once there she purges the Kolat conspiracy from the ranks of her clan and appoints the Moto as the new rulers of the Unicorn.

In the Shattered Empire timeline, however, the Scorpion are never exiled to the Burning Sands and thus the Four Avatars cannot awaken Shinjo. The battle with the Kaleel may still take place, or it may be delayed – there are strong suggestions that the Kaleel is corrupted by the Lying Darkness and acts in coordination with the Darkness' attack on Rokugan, so a timeline where the Shadow moves more slowly might result in the Kaleel remaining dormant as well.

Does Shinjo eventually awaken on her own? Does she remain asleep beneath Medinaat al-Salaam, waiting for a suitable groups of heroes to find her? And can a group of PCs perhaps be those heroes?

The Imperial Families

In the immediate aftermath of the Second Day of Thunder, the main focus of the Imperial Families is to restore the capital of Otosan Uchi to something resembling good order. The city has suffered heavily from the multiple battles fought there over the last two years, and many Shadowlands creatures still lurk in its darker corners. Greatly reduced in numbers and lacking much in the way of resources, the Seppun and Otomo are hard-put to make even basic repairs and restore order in the streets. Immediate salvation comes not from the Great Clans – even the normally-wealthy Crane have nothing to spare – but from the Miya family and the Mantis Clan. The relative isolation of the Miya holdings has allowed them to make it through the Clan Wars with little damage, and the Mantis Clan's island holdings have been spared completely. Yoritomo initially expects the Imperials to honor Toturi and Yakamo's promise of Great Clan status, and thus is happy to provide them with the food, resources, and monies to restore the worst of Otosan Uchi's damage.

In the relatively peaceful years that come immediately after the Day of Thunder, Otosan Uchi is able to survive and even somewhat recover. Although the Imperial Families lack the strength to establish any real control over the rest of Rokugan, in the early years their requests for Imperial taxes are for the most part fulfilled – only the Crab (under the ruthless Kisada and later his daughter O-Ushi) and the isolated Dragon (now led by the maddened Hitomi) refuse. However, as the years pass and the clans begin to eye each other and the vacant Throne with increasing desire, the flow of tax payments to the Imperial City gradually diminishes, despite repeated requests from Otomo couriers. By the year 1138, nearly all requests for Imperial taxes are either ignored or politely rebuffed (depending on the clans in question).

The Otomo are not left entirely without resources. They are able to eke out some income from tariffs on trade through the Imperial City, which is still the mainland Empire's largest port and a major trade hub. And for a time most of Rokugan still pays lip-service to the idea that the Imperials represent central authority in the Empire. The Miya family continues to send forth its Blessing every year, trying to repair the worst of the damage from the Clan Wars and thereby earning considerable goodwill for the Imperials as a whole.

During these years, as the Imperial Families' position slowly but steadily weakens, one particular Imperial believes he scents opportunity. Otomo Banu, a minor scion of the Otomo, publicly claims status as a cousin of the Hantei and thus, at least in theory, a legitimate heir to the Hantei Dynasty. Unfortunately, his initial support within the Otomo ranks is far from unanimous, with many of his fellows believing he is a fraud and that supporting him can only hurt their position within the Empire. Banu is embittered by this lack of support, and later insists that if the rest of the Imperial lines had supported him firmly from the beginning he would have been able to make his claim stick. (Whether this is true or not, of course, is a matter of debate.)

Once large-scale open conflict erupts in the 1140's, the Imperials' situation begins to worsen rapidly. Even the limited tax payments dry up and the rapidly expanding war results in a decline in trade, with a corresponding decline in tariffs. The Miya, meanwhile, find their formerly safe lands now caught in the midst of a series of vicious military campaigns between the Unicorn, the Lion, and the Crab, with the covert Scorpion pitching in as well. Daimyo Miya Yumi does her best to negotiate with the various clans to preserve her family's modest territory, but the warring lords soon realize she has more value as a captive than as an independent agent. Ultimately the Miya lands are overrun and put to the torch, and Yumi commits seppuku rather than serve as a mouthpiece for the Lion.

Otomo Banu wages a bitter struggle against his opponents within the Otomo family, at first relying on political weapons such as shame and exile, but later resorting to more direct methods. Ultimately, Banu uses a mixture of political maneuver and outright assassination to eliminate his rivals and assert his claim. By then,

however, only a few clans are interested in paying lip service to Banu by attending his ostentatious "Winter Courts." Most of the Empire sees him as nothing more than another player in the power-struggle that has consumed Rokugan, and a minor player at that. When Crane Clan Champion Doji Kurohito attacks Otosan Uchi (due to the influence of the cursed sword Chukandomo), Banu perishes, the Imperial city burns, and the power of the Imperial Families effectively comes to an end.

The Shadowlands

At the start of the Shattered Empire era, the Shadowlands' position is much as it was in Rokugan's canon history: greatly weakened by the recent losses at the Second Day of Thunder, its leadership split between the Oni Lords and the undead monster that was once Kuni Yori. However, in this timeline Yori is not handed the "gift" of the Crab attacking Shiro Hiruma and then being left stranded by their Naga allies. When he assaults the Kaiu Wall in the year 1134, his forces are decisively repulsed and he perishes in combat with the Hiruma daimyo. This leaves the Shadowlands quiescent for over a generation.

The Shadowlands threat revives two decades later with the emergence of the self-titled "Dark Lord of the Shadowlands," Daigotsu. However, in the Shattered Empire chronology the Dark Lord is not in nearly as strong a position as he is in Rokugan's canonical history. Since there was no Battle of Oblivion's Gate, there is no mass surge in the population of the Lost, no huge mass of Tainted samurai for Daigotsu to rally and unify under his rule. Moreover, the Crab Clan is stronger and better-prepared for conflict than in the canon timeline. As a result, Daigotsu's initial assault on the Wall is strongly repulsed and he is unable to seriously threaten Rokugan.

Although the Dark Lord is frustrated at his lack of military success, he is even more alarmed when he begins to grasp the threat posed by the Lying Darkness – which could potentially unmake all of reality, including Jigoku itself. Daigotsu even goes so far as to offer a truce to the Crab Clan, hoping to join forces against Hitomi and her Shadow-corrupted army. Hida Kuroda rejects the proposal, but as Hitomi pushes on toward Volturnum's Gate the Dark Lord may be forced to act in concert with the Crab regardless.

Prominent Figures in the Shattered Empire

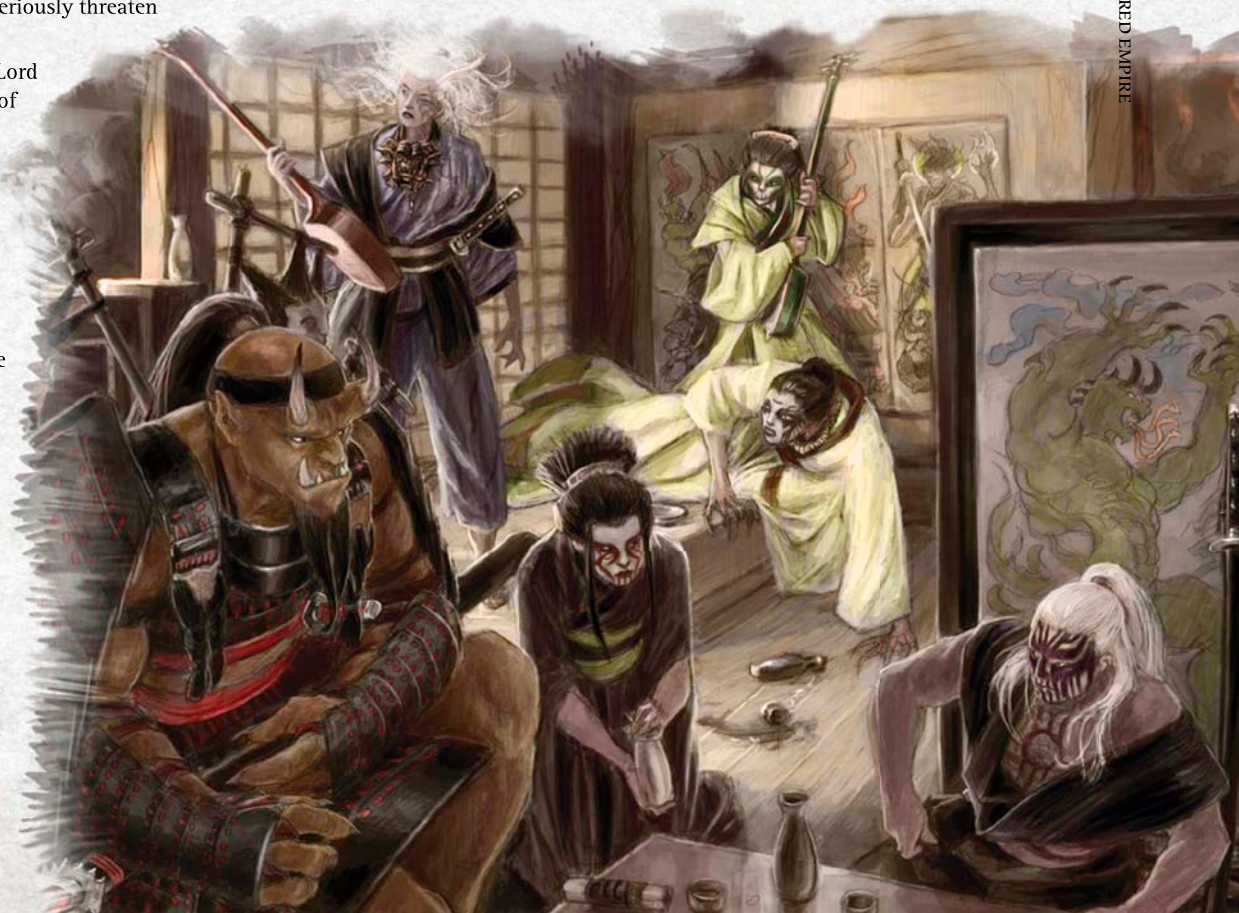
The Shattered Empire era is a radical change to the history of Rokugan, and many figures who were prominent and influential in the canonical history are far less so in this timeline. A comprehensive listing of all the NPCs whose history is significantly changed would take an entire book, but the following section does offer three figures whose fate is notably different as examples for the GM to use in exploring this world..

Hitomi the Dark

Avatar of Shadow

"Truth's path is a sword
The blade cuts my palms and heels
Still I will not fall"

The woman who would become the Avatar of Shadow spent her youth consumed with hatred and bitterness. The death of her beloved older brother Satsu at the hands of Hida Yakamo drove Hitomi on a relentless quest for vengeance, forsaking all else. This quest eventually led to her acquisition of the Obsidian Hand, the severed hand of Lord Moon. Although Hitomi was strong-willed enough to resist the madness of Lord Moon which suffused the Hand, she could not resist the slow corruption of the Lying Darkness which it contained.



On the Second Day of Thunder, Hitomi joined the other Thunders to face Fu Leng. However, her only role in the battle was to kill her Clan Champion, Togashi, and thereby release the last Black Scroll which he had concealed inside his heart. The power of the Obsidian Hand took Togashi's life and stole a portion of his spiritual essence, granting Hitomi near-divine insight. Unfortunately, it could not extinguish the power of the Lying Darkness within her soul, and in the years that followed she became more and more a slave of the Shadow's sinister power. Her rule of the Dragon Clan was a reign of terror, aided and abetted by the Tainted madman Kokujin, and opened the door to the slow but relentless corruption of the clan by the Lying Darkness.

As the years passed, Hitomi became more and more a creature of the darkness. The Shadow whispered constantly in her mind, reminding her of her enmities and hatreds, feeding her sins, consuming her identity one piece at a time. Without the shock of external events like the rescue of Toturi and the return of Shinjo, Hitomi never managed to break free of the Shadow's influence, and by the 1150's she had been completely consumed and transformed into an avatar of the Lying Darkness. Assembling the forces of the corrupted Dragon and Scorpion, she prepared to march to Volturnum's Gate and unmake reality once and for all.

Hitomi the Dark, Avatar of Shadow

Air: 5 Earth: 5 Fire: 6 Water: 4
Strength: 5

Attack: Claw 10k6 (Simple) or any sword 10k7 (Simple) *Damage: 5k2 (claw) or by weapon*

Reduction: 10 (0 against crystal)

Honor: 0.0 Status: 8.0 Glory: 10.0 Infamy: 6.1

School/Rank: Mirumoto Bushi 4, Mirumoto Swordmaster 1

Skills: Acting 4, Athletics 6, Craft: Tattooing 3, Defense 7, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu 7, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 6, Kenjutsu (Katana, Wakizashi) 7, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: History 2, Lore: Law 3, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Lying Darkness 6, Lore: Theology 3, Meditation 1, Sincerity (Lying) 5, Stealth 5

Advantages: Inheritance (Obsidian Hand), Quick, Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Dark Fate, Overconfident, Unlucky

Special Abilities:

- *Fear 3 (when revealed as a Shadowspawn).*
- *Swift 1.*
- *Cohesion of Shadow: Hitomi is a Greater Shadowspawn, does not feel pain, and thus does not suffer Wound penalties. She continues to function at full strength until reduced to Dead.*
- *Partial Invulnerability: Hitomi takes half damage (rounded down) from non-crystal attacks and from non-Void spells and other magical effects not specifically intended to target the Nothing and its minions. Crystal weapons and spells and Void spells affect her normally.*
- *Mental Resistance: Hitomi is immune to all Fear effects and to all spells that create illusions or influence the mind or thoughts.*
- *Obsidian Hand: Hitomi wears the Obsidian Hand in place of her right hand, and it has slowly turned more than half her body into Shadow-corrupted obsidian. The powers of the Hand are described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, page 92.*
- *Shadow Powers: Hitomi has all of the powers and drawbacks of Shadow Rank 5 (as shown in the "Nothing" chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement Enemies of the Empire) except for shapeshifting.*
- *Shadowbolt: Hitomi can cast a Shadow Bolt (as per Enemies of the Empire) once per day, at any target in line of sight.*

Hida Kuroda

Crab Clan Champion

Hida Kuroda was the older (by ten minutes) of the twin boys birthed by Hida O-Ushi. From his youth, Kuroda was almost the opposite of the "typical Crab" – he was calm, thoughtful, and methodical, always carefully thinking things through before taking action. In this he was the opposite of his younger sibling Kuon, a brash and temperamental man who lived for the tumult of combat. The brothers discovered early on that they worked best in tandem, where there respective strengths could reinforce each other, and once they came of age O-Ushi assigned them jointly to many of the clan's most important battles and campaigns.

Unfortunately, as the conflicts in the Empire continued to escalate, O-Ushi was forced to split up her sons and give them different assignments. Kuroda was quite anxious about serving as an independent commander, but ultimately performed well, as his even temper and perceptive nature made him an effective field general. His younger brother was less successful, however, and impetuously led the Crab to disaster in the Scorpion lands. After that campaign, Kuroda quietly urged his mother to re-assign Kuon as the commander of the Kaiu Wall, where his ferocious nature would be a better fit.

In the year 1155, Kuroda's aging mother ordered him to marry in order to carry on the Hida bloodline. Kuroda was reluctant to take time away from the front for such matters, and repeatedly delayed meetings with nakado. After O-Ushi perished in Daigotsu's attack, however, Kuroda realized he had been a deficient son and hurriedly married the first woman his nakado offered – a young samurai-ko named Hida Reiha. Unfortunately, Kuroda did not realize that Reiha had already fallen in love with his younger brother Kuon.

As the era of the Shattered Empire comes to a climax, Kuroda finds his clan facing enemies on two fronts. Hitomi advances out of the Scorpion lands at the head of a vast army, her intentions unknown; meanwhile Daigotsu's Shadowlands forces lurk on the far side of the Wall, making sinister offers of truce and alliance. And all the while Kuroda hears whispers in his head at night, asking him why his wife always seems so happy when Kuon comes to visit....

Hida Kuroda, Champion of the Crab

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

Honor: 5.5 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 6.2*

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Battle) 6, Defense 5, Etiquette (Courtesy) 3, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo) 5, Horsemanship 2, Intimidation (Control) 4, Kenjutsu 6, Knives 3, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Lore: Theology 3, Sincerity 3, Spears 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Social Position (Clan Champion), Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Bitter Betrothal (Hida Reiha)

Otomo Banu

Imperial Claimant

Otomo Banu grow up a child of privilege, the son of a married pair of Otomo nobles. His father died when he was five, and his mother was far too busy with politics to pay attention to him, so Banu was largely raised by his sensei, a bitter, domineering, unforgiving old woman named Otomo Gayuko. By the time he passed his gempukku at the age of 13, Banu had become a skilled manipulator and developed a personality that was equal parts cruelty, arrogance, and self-controlled judgment. He often came across as effete and weak, but possessed a sharp intelligence and learned early on to surround himself with loyal followers and servants who would spy for him. He also owned an original copy of *The Subtlety of the Court* and once he entered politics relied on it as a guide to his actions and strategies.

Banu was a moderately influential figure in the Imperial courts prior to the Clan Wars, and made a name for himself as a patron of the arts. In fact, he loved theater so much that he expended considerable influence to protect the Silken Smile Theater after the Scorpion Clan was disbanded. He also had a knack for avoiding danger, surviving both the Scorpion Clan Coup and the later eruption of plague in



the Imperial City. When Hantei XXXIX fell ill during the Clan Wars, Banu began suggesting he might have a claim on the throne, but initially this was mostly dismissed by the court since the official Otomo and Ikoma historians did not list him as a cousin of the Hantei.

After the Day of Thunder, Banu realized he might be in a position to make his claims of Imperial lineage a reality. Unfortunately, his arrogance and presumption caused him to alienate more allies than he could make. In his earlier career he had developed allies with the Unicorn and Phoenix Clans, but the Kolat-influenced Unicorn were now uninterested in putting another Hantei on the throne, while the Phoenix were distracted by their conflict with the Darkness-corrupted Dragon Clan. Ultimately, Banu was never able to do more than pose as the Emperor, and his struggles and dreams came to a bitter end when the Crane – one of the few clans that had shown him any support – attacked the Imperial City. Banu ended his life under the edge of the cursed blade Chukandom.

Otomo Banu, Imperial Claimant

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

Awareness: 4 Willpower Intelligence: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 3.6 *Status: 6.0* *Glory: 4.2*

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 4

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 7, Defense 2, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Horsemanship 3, Intimidation (Control) 5, Investigation 3, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 4, Lore: Theater 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Social Position (claimant to the Throne)

Disadvantages: Cruel, Driven (to become Emperor)

An Unresolved Epic

The ultimate outcome of Hitomi's march on Volturnum is deliberately not defined by the "official" Shattered Empire timeline, so as to leave the conclusion of the story entirely in the hands of the GM and the players.

On the surface, it would appear victory for the Lying Darkness is likely, since only the isolated Crab Clan and the Shadowlands forces of Daigotsu – each hostile to the other – stand between Volturnum and Hitomi's massive army of corrupted samurai and Shadowspawn. Hitomi herself, with the power of both the Lying Darkness and the Obsidian Hand, is a villain of monstrous capability who could easily defeat any number of heroes.

However, there is nothing inevitable about her triumph. The Phoenix Clan is aware of the threat and will do its best to confront it, even to the point of seeking alliance with other clans for the greater good. The Kolat also recognizes the threat from the Lying Darkness and will commit all its remaining resources to opposing it, including the diminished (but not wholly destroyed) armies of the Unicorn Clan. Kaneka, the leader of the Legion of the Wolf, also recognizes the Shadow's threat and can call on friends and allies in the Mantis Clan and elsewhere. Thus, there is the potential for a massive climactic battle between the Lying Darkness and all its foes – a battle whose outcome is very difficult to predict.

Obviously, if Hitomi and the Darkness prevail, the history of Rokugan – and indeed of the universe itself – is at an end. This is not necessarily an undesirable outcome. L5R is a tragic setting even in its canonical history, and in an alternate timeline there is absolutely no requirement for the good guys to win in the end. In fact, many Asian stories (fantasy and otherwise) end with the heroes defeated.

On the other hand, because this is an alternate timeline there is no established set of "official" heroes in charge of the storyline. (No, not even Kaneka – see "A Potential Savior" below.) The PCs are thus free to step in and control the outcome of the story. They can rise as high as their honor and skill can take them – or fall as far as their failures allow. Their fate is in their hands, and so is the fate of the Empire.

Sengoku Jidai Rokugan

The Shattered Empire setting draws heavily on the historical period of Japanese history known as the *sengoku jidai* or "period of the country at war." This era, running roughly from the mid-1400's to 1600 by the Western calendar, saw all of the great lords and clans of Japan battling for the right to claim the title of Shogun and unite the country. War was near-perpetual for much of that time, with only a single major truce near the end of the era when Toyotomi Hideyoshi managed to temporarily unite the country under his dictatorial rule.

In the canonical history of Rokugan, the Empire has never faced a true sengoku-like era. Although the Clan Wars had the potential to go in that direction, they come to an end after only two years when the Day of Thunder arrives and forces the clans to re-unite. The later "Race for the Throne" story that follows the death of the Toturi Dynasty is largely a political struggle, interrupted by a couple of regional wars, rather than an all-out struggle of every clan against every other.

The interest (and from a gaming standpoint, fun) of a story plunging Rokugan into an all-consuming universal war is that it takes off the "safeties" that normally operate in L5R campaigns. There is no longer a higher authority to enforce the social rules, no longer an Imperial constraint on the actions of the clans. If a samurai fights an "illegal"

duel against a rival, he will no longer have to worry about an Emerald Magistrate showing up to arrest him. If a lord decides to murder the diplomats of a rival clan, he will no longer face repercussions in the courts. And without such consequences, the rigid social and cultural order of Rokugan begins to break down, giving way to a world in which samurai rule through strength alone.

In some ways, these changes can be limiting to the players. Courtiers and artisans are no longer able to influence the world as they could under the enforced unity and peace of the Hantei Dynasty. The world of the Shattered Empire is a world dominated by bushi, not diplomats, just as was true of *sengoku jidai* Japan. However, this also means that bushi are able to exercise their skills with far less constraint than in a "standard" L5R campaign. Politics really does become as deadly as the battlefield in this Rokugan, since there's no telling when a rival might draw his sword and try to cut you down. Diplomatic missions become delicate knife-edge exercises in survival. When the PCs know they can be attacked at any time, they are liable to put much more effort into their role-play and guard their words much more carefully, making for a more intense and involving role-playing experience.

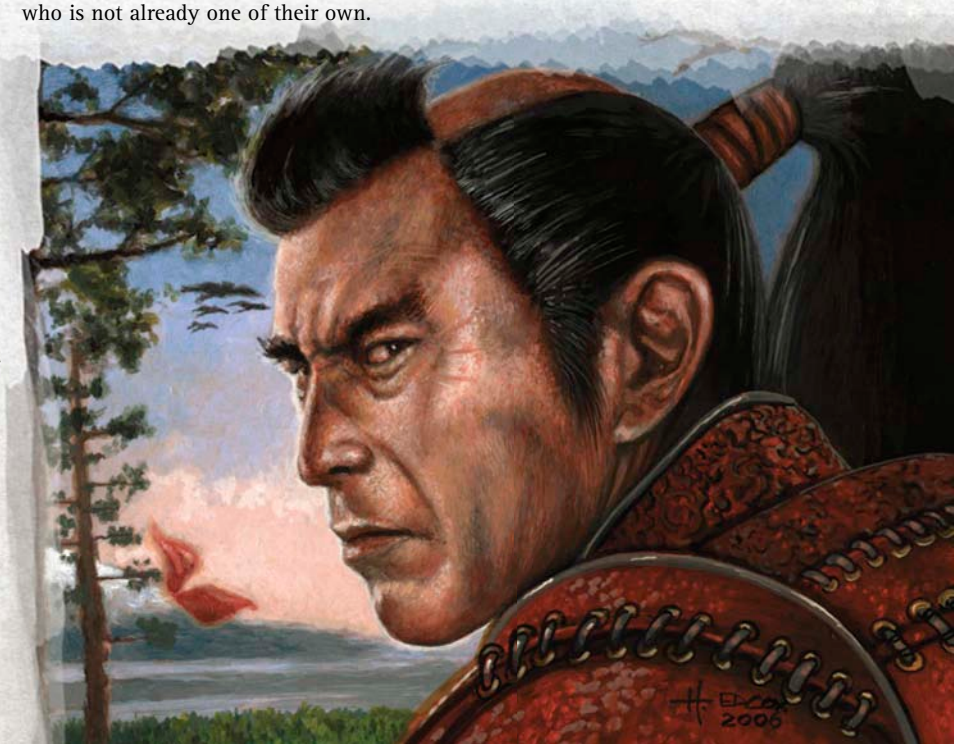
It may be noted that historically, the *sengoku jidai* era was characterized by an often shocking lack of honor or loyalty on the part of the samurai. It was quite common for minor lords or retainers to switch sides, betray their superiors, and otherwise throw Bushido to the wind in the name of ambition and self-preservation. (At the climactic battle of Sekigihara, Tokugawa Ieyasu won in large part because significant portions of Mitsunori Ishida's rival army switched sides.) In the official Shattered Empire timeline presented in this chapter, the conflict lasts only about forty years (as opposed to the 150 years of the *sengoku jidai*) and thus the internal loyalty of the Great Clans and their families remains largely unbroken. However, there is nothing inevitable about this cohesion – once a generation of samurai came of age who had never known anything but the Shattered Empire, loyalty and clan cohesion could easily start to break down. (After all, they have the example of the Kitsuki staring them in the face.) A GM who wants to escalate the stakes in the Shattered Empire, to show how truly apocalyptic the loss of a unifying Emperor could be, can start shaking the players' assumptions by depicting individual daimyo betraying their superiors or their clans. Once such acts of treason begin to happen, they are likely to spread quickly, as every ambitious or pragmatic lord will seek his or her own advantage.

A Potential Savior: Kaneka

The Shattered Empire timeline happens because the slaughter of the heroes at the Second Day of Thunder leaves the Empire without a single unifying hero. In the short term, there is simply no one who can lay claim to the Throne (and with it, the favor of Heaven) and gain the allegiance of even a bare majority of the Empire. Thus it would seem the war between the clans will go on endlessly, or at the least for several generations. Even if Hitomi and the Lying Darkness can be stopped, the Empire will likely still remain at war with itself. But...

There is one notable figure from the canonical history who does emerge in this era and who has the potential to end the great war of all-against-all: Kaneka, the bastard son of Akodo Toturi by the geisha Hatsuko. Kaneka's official history is outlined in Chapter Nine of this book (The Four Winds); in this timeline, much as in that one, the Dragon of Water returns the pregnant Hatsuko to the mortal realm after the Day of Thunder, and Kaneka is born in the year 1130. He grows up with his mother in a remote hut near the Shinomen Forest, then goes out to make his way in the world as a ronin. Exactly when this happens is up to the GM, but it would most likely be somewhere between the years 1145 and 1150. Historically, Kaneka returned to his mother's hut in the year 1154 and learned his true lineage from the Dragon of Water at that time. It does seem likely, given the chaotic mess that Rokugan faces in the Shattered Empire timeline, that one (or more) of the Celestial Dragons will eventually reveal the truth to Kaneka – although they may not do so as early as they did in the canon timeline. Historically the revelation was by the Dragon of Water, the same one who hid Kaneka's mother, but in this war-torn era the Dragon of Thunder – patron of mortal heroes – seems a more likely candidate.

However, in this timeline there is no guarantee these events will play out in the same way. Given that the Empire is riven by constant warfare, a ronin with Kaneka's inherent talent and native skill will likely rise to prominence quickly, either as the leader of a ronin band or as a soldier in the army of one or another of the Great Clans. Historically, after Kaneka lays claim to his lineage he is allowed to swear fealty to the Lion Clan and becomes Akodo Kaneka. The Shattered Empire timeline presented in this chapter depicts him instead joining the Legion of the Wolf and leading it through the wars that shake the Empire. After all, by the time Kaneka is an adult the Empire has become so deeply mired in war and struggle that none of the factions will be eager to embrace a potential Emperor who is not already one of their own.



Regardless, if and when he learns the truth, Kaneka will have the potential to become the hero the Empire needs: an honorable and skilled warrior who can unite many others behind his banner.

If the Legion of the Wolf has survived to this point, they will be the one group certain to rally to Kaneka's banner. Thus the rise of Kaneka could see a repeat of his father's deeds, with Kaneka leading a ronin army that is the sole force trying to restore order to Rokugan. Of course, the Legion of the Wolf will face a much tougher challenge, since they will not (at least initially) have the backing of a Great Clan. How will the various clans react to the appearance of Kaneka and his attempts to re-unite Rokugan? Obviously, in an individual campaign the GM will have the final say, but in the "official" version of the Shattered Empire outlined earlier in this chapter the only clans which show immediate support to Kaneka are the Mantis and the Unicorn.

GM's Toolbox: Using Kaneka in a Shattered Empire Campaign

The GM has a number of different options for depicting Kaneka in his own campaign. The obvious choice is to have Kaneka follow the course of events depicted in this section. If the GM takes this option, there is not even a requirement for the PCs to be initially aware of Kaneka other than as rumors about activity by the Legion of the Wolf. Over time, Kaneka's activities will have more impact on Rokugan's history as he rallies more forces to his side and outmaneuvers or defeats those who stand against him, but the PCs' own storyline can proceed for some time with little or no impact from the Bastard. Indeed, the PCs may even find themselves opposing him, politically or on the battlefield, if they have aligned themselves with one of the other Great Clans.

Alternatively, if the GM wishes the PCs to be more closely entwined with Kaneka's efforts, they can be some of the friends and allies he meets during his years as a ronin and who later become his comrades and allies. This can work especially well in the Shattered Empire setting because there is no requirement for Kaneka to meet his allies on the same "schedule" as in the historical timeline of Rokugan – he could spend a decade or more as a wave-man, meeting friends all across the war-torn Empire. This option allows the PCs to ascend to positions of influence as Kaneka's fortunes rise, eventually becoming major warlords, master diplomats, or similar figures within his forces.

A third and even more radical option is not to use Kaneka at all. Instead, make one of the PCs into Toturi's bastard child. This is obviously a bit tricky, since the other players may feel short-changed if their comrade is the destined savior of Rokugan while they play only supporting roles. On the other hand, no hero ever succeeds on his (or her) own, and the PC's comrades will all be destined to hold prominent and vital positions of their own – much like Toturi's closest comrades later attainted posts such as Imperial Chancellor, Captain of the Imperial Guard, Akodo family daimyo, and founder of the Monkey Clan. From a GM's standpoint, this option does offer the most dramatic potential, especially in a long-term campaign in which the PCs rise from lowly ronin to the (potential) saviors of the Empire. This approach also means there is nothing inevitable about the PCs' success or failure – their fate, and the fate of the Empire, is entirely within their hands

New Mechanics

For the most part, the world of the Shattered Empire is not going to give rise to much in the way of new Techniques. With the whole Empire at war with itself, there will be little opportunity for samurai to develop new techniques of any kind, let alone establish dojo to teach them to others. In fact, given the decline in wealth and the stress and destruction of war, it is much more likely that many dojo are destroyed and the total number of Paths and Schools goes into decline across the Empire.

However, one notable military evolution does take place in this era: the expansion of naval warfare as the Crane, Phoenix, and Crab expand their fleets in order to confront Yoritomo's naval campaign. This sort of event is quite likely to give rise to the emergence of new Techniques as talented samurai try to serve their clan better and share their discoveries with their comrades. Moreover, the Techniques depicted here need not be limited solely to the world of the Shattered Empire. The Mantis and Crane fight a naval war at the end of the Age of Exploration, an event which could easily have given rise to the Doji Marines; similarly, in the wake of the Four Winds era the Phoenix and Mantis fight a conflict of their own (the so-called War of Fire and Thunder) which could easily have inspired a creative Isawa shugenja to invent the Isawa Seaguard. The Kaiu Shipmasters could appear in almost any era, although they would most likely be developed in a time where the Shadowlands was able to present a naval threat to the Empire (such as Garen Hawthorne's activities in the Four Winds era).

New Alternate Path: Doji Marines

During the Shattered Empire era, the Crane Clan conducts a major naval buildup and fights an extended series of naval battles and campaigns against Yoritomo's fleets. This effort is largely organized by Doji Chomei, who had previously served as an ambassador to the Mantis Clan and knew more about them than almost any other Crane alive. He knew the value of training Crane bushi in techniques of naval combat and boarding action, techniques he had seen demonstrated by Yoritomo

himself, and made this a centerpiece of the Crane Clan's naval expansion. Although Chomei is killed in action in the great battle off Mura Sabishii Toshi in the year 1142, the organization he has created lives on and teaches its Technique to the clan's next generation of naval warriors.

New Alternate Path: Doji Marines [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Doji Magistrate 3, Daidoji Iron Warrior 4
- **Requirements:** Sailing 3

Technique: Chomei's Courage

The aquatic soldiers who come to be known as the Doji Marines are trained to fight on the pitching decks of ships and to conduct boarding actions against enemy vessels, using the heave and pitch of a moving ship to their advantage. You do not suffer any TN penalties for fighting on slick, irregular, or moving surfaces/terrain. If you are in the Attack or Full Attack stance in a situation where such a penalty would normally have applied, you add a +Xk0 bonus to your melee attack rolls, where X is equal to your Reflexes.

New Alternate Path: Isawa Seaguard

The Phoenix Clan expands its own fleet in response to Yoritomo's growing campaign of raids and piracy; lacking the numbers to conduct a build-up on the same scale as their Crane allies, the Phoenix instead focus on placing shugenja on all their ships and training those priests to use winds and waves against the Mantis ships – an especially important duty given the number of Yoritomo and Moshi shugenja fielded by the Mantis fleet. The Seaguard, as they come to be called, are often recruited from shugenja who would normally have joined the Elemental Guards, and receive much of their training directly from the clan's new Master of Water, Isawa Riake.

New Alternate Path: Isawa Seaguard [Shugenja]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Isawa Shugenja 3
- **Requirements:** Water 3, Air 3, Sailing 3

Technique: The Ward of the Sea

The Seaguard are taught to call on the power of the wind and waves to protect their ships, allowing them to fight on even terms with the more numerous and skillful ships of the Mantis Clan. While on board a ship on the water, you may expend a Water or Air spell slot as a Complex Action to create a barrier of water and air around the ship. This barrier lasts for three Rounds. While it is in effect, the ship has Reduction of 10 against any physical attacks and Reduction of 25 against any natural or magical fire-based attack. In addition, the barrier obstructs arrows at (and from) anyone on the ship, replicating the mechanical effects of the spell *Summoning the Gale*.

New Alternate Path: Kaiu Shipmasters

The Crab Clan has maintained a fleet of iron-armored "Turtle Ships" for centuries, but during the age of the Shattered Empire the threat of Mantis raids and the lack of any support from the rest of Rokugan forces them to expand the fleet and to arm and reinforce all of their wooden vessels as well. Hida O-Ushi commands that Earthquake Fish Bay be made impregnable against any naval attack, whether mundane or Shadowlands in origin. This task is given to Kaiu Utsu, the family daimyo and a famed Siegemaster. Utsu went to work with classic Crab practicality, adapting his methods to naval warfare. After he dies of heart failure in 1139, the task is taken up by his heir Kaiu Umasu, who regularized the Technique which Utsu had devised and made sure it was taught to later generations.

New Alternate Path: Kaiu Shipmasters [Artisan/Bushi]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Kaiu Engineer 3 or Kaiu Siege Master 1
- **Requirements:** Battle 4, Sailing 5

Technique: Umasu's Steel

The Kaiu Shipmasters learn how to reinforce their clan's ships against any sort of threat, whether it be from the Shadowlands or from the fleets of other clans, using a mixture of physical improvements and defensive tactics. At the beginning of any naval battle in which you are in command of a warship, you may make a Battle / Intelligence Skill Roll at TN 25 to grant your ship a bonus Reduction value equal to your Sailing Skill Rank x2. If the ship is a "Turtle Ship," the bonus is equal to your Skill Rank x4 instead.




THE FOUR WINDS ERA

The Four Winds Era

The Imperial Capital

The ceremony itself would last only an hour, but most of the people in attendance had been up since before dawn, and many would not be going to sleep until very late. There was simply too much to take care for anyone to rest; the funeral of an Emperor was no small affair, even under the best of circumstances. The fact that Toturi I had died at the hands of a mysterious demonic assassin only added more weight and grief to the whole affair.

Thousands had poured into the city to attend the Emperor's rites, and the Jade Magistrates were on full alert, wary of a return attack by the same creature. Every member of the Seppun Guards were on duty, watching every entrance, every hallway, every single corner – even some which most eyes never saw.

Empress Toturi Kaede departed from the ceremony chambers. Though she showed no outward signs of it, she was exhausted... and grief ran beneath her serenity like a raw wound. Thoughts raced through her mind. Did I interfere too much? Is this my doing? She was the Oracle of Void, and she knew her actions in the mortal world always had consequences. But as soon as such doubts came she forcibly pushed them aside. What if she had intervened in the affairs of mortals more than any other Oracle of Light ever before? No, she knew instinctively that Toturi's death was not the Celestial Order seeking to rebalance itself somehow. She knew her own actions had not brought about his murder. No, she knew something – someone – had carefully plotted her husband's murder... and they had succeeded.

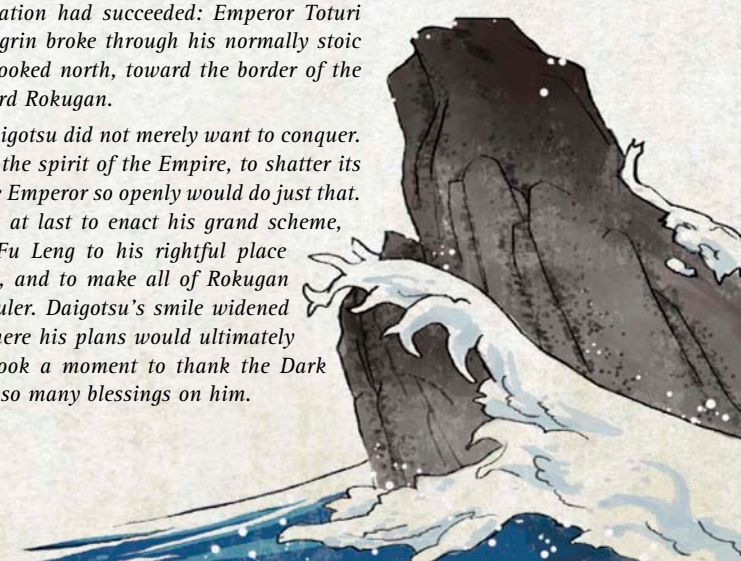
But precisely because she was not responsible, she would not be able to aid the Empire in finding out who or what had committed this evil. The Void had shown her the truth in her meditations after Toturi's death. It was time for her to leave; she had played her part in the affairs of Ningen-do, indeed had done so far longer than she should, and now the Empire's fate would be up to her children. Her children and one other, one who carried Toturi's blood but now her own. Four children, Four Winds to rage across the Empire, to determine the ultimate fate of the Throne... and of Rokugan.

Kaede sighed heavily to herself. She loved her children as much as she had loved her husband. Leaving them would be hard, but neither a samurai nor an Oracle had much choice in such matters.

The City of the Lost, a few days before

A man stood in his tower, looking out over the city laid out below him. He did not need to wait to know the outcome of his plans – he could sense Fushin's whereabouts at every turn, could see what the Onisu of Betrayal saw. And so he knew his creation had succeeded: Emperor Toturi was dead. A slight grin broke through his normally stoic expression and he looked north, toward the border of the Shadowlands. Toward Rokugan.

The Dark Lord Daigotsu did not merely want to conquer. He wanted to break the spirit of the Empire, to shatter its soul, and slaying the Emperor so openly would do just that. Now he could begin at last to enact his grand scheme, to return his lord Fu Leng to his rightful place among the Heavens, and to make all of Rokugan bow before a new ruler. Daigotsu's smile widened as he considered where his plans would ultimately take him, and he took a moment to thank the Dark Kami for bestowing so many blessings on him.



He raised his fist and shouted down to the vast crowd gathered below. "We will soon bring Rokugan to its knees! Our lord, Fu Leng, rightful ruler of the Heavens, will return to his true place! In the name of Fu Leng, forward!"

Thousands of Lost men, women, and children cried out in response, raising their voices in praise – praise of Fu Leng, and praise of the Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, Daigotsu, who had given them power and purpose.

The Time of the Four Winds

The Four Winds era ushers in a new time of chaos and uncertainty for the Empire after the resolution of the Spirit Wars. After the defeat of Hantei XVI's rebellion, most Rokugani hoped for a long period of peace and stability, especially since Emperor Toturi I had fathered three children and thus seemed to have secured the future of his dynasty. Instead, Toturi's death plunged the Empire into an uncertain dynastic struggle between his heirs – whose ranks included not only Tsudao, Sezaru, and Naseru, his three children by Empress Kaede, but also his bastard son Kaneka. Meanwhile, the rise of the Dark Lord Daigotsu marked the emergence of a major new threat to the Empire which would endure for years to come.

The period of time officially known as the Four Winds Era actually lasts only about two years, but an incredible amount of history takes place in that brief time period. Accordingly, the timeline in this chapter is presented in a month-by-month structure rather than the more conventional year-by-year approach. This is a dark and volatile time for the Empire, and many lesser struggles take place in the shadow of the great battles between Toturi's heirs and the Dark Lord.

Year 1158 – Month of the Dog

- The Yasuki daimyo dies without an heir. Emperor Toturi knows the Yasuki have been heavily infiltrated by the Kolat and wishes to paralyze the family for a time by imposing a figurehead ruler. He has his youngest son Naseru research the Yasuki bloodlines and produce (false) evidence that the closest heir to the line is a Crane, a young warrior named Daidoji Hachi.
- The Crane samurai-ko Doji Yasuyo receives a vision from Lady Doji herself. The Kami tells her to seek out a kenku sensei called Kozue, a legendary figure who supposedly instructed many of the Crane Clan's greatest heroes. Yasuyo leaves on her quest immediately.

Year 1158 – Month of the Boar

- While traveling to Ryoko Owari to meet his illegitimate son Kaneka, Emperor Toturi and his contingent of Seppun and Scorpion bodyguards are attacked by Shadowlands forces. Toturi falls dueling a large red demon of a type that has never been seen before. The Scorpion drive off the attackers but the demon escapes.
- Toturi Kaede ascends to the Steel Throne as Empress of Rokugan, but she holds power only briefly. She realizes her status as Oracle of Void is unbalancing the Celestial order, especially after she has already interfered in earthly affairs so much. "Keep the throne empty, for now," she tells the four children of Toturi. "None of you are ready, not until the Will of Heaven becomes clear, not until you save the Empire from fire, and from thunder, and from itself. You are the Four Winds of change, and the Fortunes will preserve you and guide your steps." Having delivered her commands, Kaede disappears, leaving no leader for the Empire.
- Shortly after the death of Toturi, Jade Champion Kuni Utagu is found murdered by unknown assailants (eventually revealed to be Bloodspeakers).
- Within days of Toturi's funeral, the Crab and Crane begin open hostilities over the Yasuki territories, as the Crab firmly reject Yasuki Hachi's claim to the rule of their family. The Crane seize a Yasuki village and the Crab immediately retaliate, beginning the Second Yasuki War.
- Strange volcanic eruptions destroy significant amounts of the Dragon Clan's farmland. The Dragon resettle a large amount of their population to lands on the Phoenix border, provoking an attack from the Phoenix and their allies the Lion.
- Hantei Naseru, youngest of the Four Winds, presides over the Test of the Emerald Champion held to replace the retiring Kakita Toshiken. The most prominent contestant, Shiba Aikune, is injured by a strange young Scorpion named Bayushi Kwanchai during the semi-final match. When Phoenix shugenja rush to Aikune's aid it disqualifies him from the tournament, while Kwanchai is likewise disqualified for his vicious and deliberate strike. This leaves contestant Yasuki Hachi with no final opponent, and he wins by default. Hachi realizes that Naseru has manipulated the result, perhaps hoping for a puppet Emerald Champion, and vows to carry out his new office honorably.

Year 1158 – Month of the Rat

- Within the Shadowlands, the maho-tsukai Iuchi Shahai encounters the Lost creature known as the Dark Daughter of Fu Leng. The Dark Daughter guides Shahai to the newly built City of the Lost and introduces her to the self-proclaimed Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, Daigotsu. When



Daigotsu offers to share his rule with Shahai, she agrees and then kills the Dark Daughter and steals her power with a potent maho spell. Thereafter she proclaims herself the new Dark Daughter.

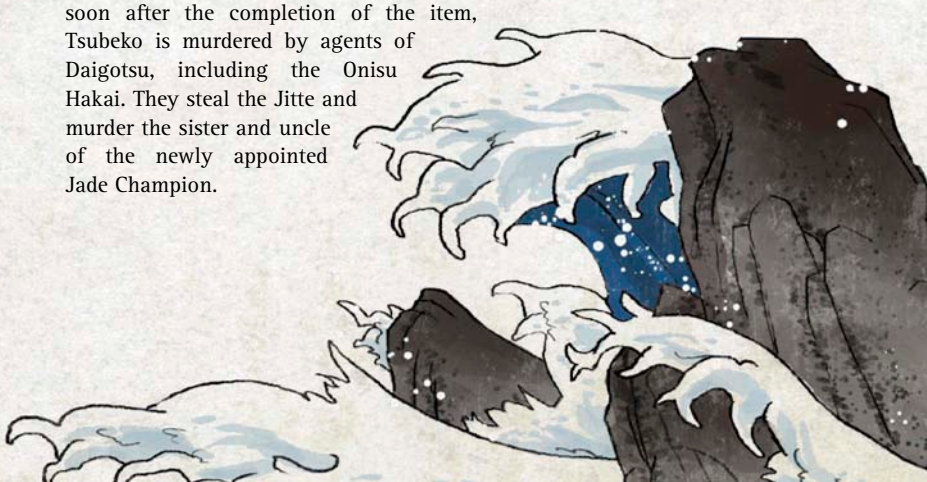
- As the Second Yasuki War escalates, Friendly Traveler Village becomes a major point of contention between the Crab and Crane. Both clans believe they cannot allow the other to possess this valuable holding, but also are reluctant to destroy it lest its value be lost forever.
- Toturi Sezaru sets out to locate his father's killer. He begins by seeking out the Oracle of Air, and learns from her that the oni which killed Toturi was called Fushin. Sezaru also learns it was a man called Daigotsu, the self-titled Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, who summoned Fushin and sent the demon to murder his father.
- The Dragon begin to lose ground in their war with the Phoenix-Lion alliance. A force of Dragon samurai is trapped and besieged at the Shrine of the K-Rin, and only a timely assault by hidden Scorpion forces turns the tide. It becomes clear they have allies in the Scorpion Clan, even if the Clan of Secrets is not open about its support.
- Using their alliance to the Phoenix as an excuse, a Lion force led by Akodo Ijiasu launches a bloody assault on Kyuden Tonbo, home of the Dragonfly. They wreck the Minor Clan and ravage much of its lands in a matter of weeks.

Year 1158 – Month of the Ox

- Yasuki Nokatsu, a minor hero of the Hidden Emperor era who has been tortured by Daigotsu for twenty years, finally gives in to evil and becomes the Dark Oracle of Earth.
- The Armor of the Shadow Warrior appears in the Mantis Isles, adorning a dead Scorpion's body. Yoritomo Aramasu, adopted son of Yoritomo and leader of the Mantis Clan, heads for Otosan Uchi to investigate.
- Shiba Tsukune, Champion of the Phoenix, chooses to give up her life and enter the Heavens as the Fortune of Rebirth so that the Soul of Shiba will not be lost forever to the mortal realm. The Soul of Shiba (and thus the rule of the Phoenix Clan) passes to a warrior named Shiba Mirabu, but the Elemental Council does not immediately locate him. In the interim, Tsukune's son Aikune serves as acting leader of the clan.
- The Lion heroes Ikoma Otemi and Matsu Kenji discover the Island in the Mist, the lost island stronghold of the notorious pirate Yasuki Fumoki. They slay the island's orochi guardian and claim its wealth – as well as Fumoki's legendary ship Deathless – for the Lion Clan.

1158 – Month of the Tiger

- For a brief moment it appears the Empire might be unified when the Four Winds jointly attend the Winter Court being held at Kyuden Miya. They expose a Pekkle no Oni which has infiltrated the event. Although the creature is dispatched quickly, it is able to infuse the Steel Throne with the Shadowlands Taint. Disappointed in the lack of security and constant infighting, the Four Winds soon depart. Not long after, the Steel Throne itself disappears, stolen by Daigotsu's agents.
- The creatures known as Tsuno begin to appear in the Lion lands, attacking many holdings. The Tsuno's tactics, which involve the use of spirit portals to move quickly and unpredictably, are initially almost too much for the Lion to deal with. Toturi Tsudao learns of the trouble and rallies the Imperial Legions, marching to Lion lands to help them hold off the supernatural invasion.
- The Four Winds together sponsor a new Test of the Jade Champion to fill the office left vacant by Kuni Utagu's death. The victor, unexpectedly, is a Crane named Asahina Sekawa.
- Shiba Tsubeko, an apprentice of the newly ascended Fortune of Steel, creates a powerful nemuranai called the Celestial Jitte. Unfortunately, soon after the completion of the item, Tsubeko is murdered by agents of Daigotsu, including the Onisu Hakai. They steal the Jitte and murder the sister and uncle of the newly appointed Jade Champion.



Alternate Paths: A War of Four Winds?

In the canonical history of the Four Winds era, the Winds for the most part avoided direct military conflict with each other – the only partial exception was the final clash between Kaneka and Naseru, and even that was fairly low-key. For the most part, Toturi's children cared about each other and were reluctant to let their political clash turn into open war. However, this was certainly not an inevitable outcome; if one of the Winds had begun a military campaign to claim the Throne, the other three would have felt compelled to respond, and once combat began the rivalries between the siblings would have quickly escalated into hatred and bitterness. (Indeed, few conflicts are more savage than those between formerly affectionate siblings.)

GMs who wish to make the Four Winds era into a more epic-scale and desperate timeline may wish to explore the possibilities of a War of the Four Winds. Once the four siblings began organizing armies, the Great Clans would have been forced to choose sides – which could have led to civil war within their own ranks. (The Lion, for example, would have been deeply split between Kaneka and Tsudao.)

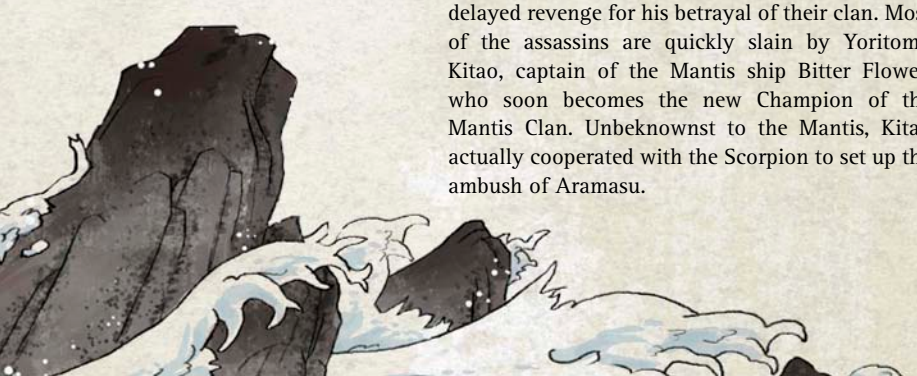
The outcome of such a war is difficult to predict; it is highly debatable, for example, as to whether the Winds could have re-united to face Daigotsu in this situation. Ultimately it is up to the GM how harsh and destructive he wants a War of the Four Winds to be.

Year 1159 – Month of the Hare

- The Second Yasuki War continues to intensify as Hida O-Ushi, the Crab Clan Champion, takes the field to push back the Crane. She wins a major victory, but soon after Crane Clan Champion Doji Kurohito arrives with a force that greatly outnumbers the remaining Crab. Rather than let her forces be overwhelmed, O-Ushi challenges Kurohito to a duel and is quickly struck down. As she hoped, Kurohito allows the Crab to retreat in peace to honor her sacrifice. Her eldest son Hida Kuroda becomes Crab Clan Champion.
- In Otosan Uchi, Yoritomo Aramasu meets with Akodo Kaneka, the Emperor's bastard son, and seeks an alliance. Before they can agree, the Scorpion ambush and kill Aramasu, taking long-delayed revenge for his betrayal of their clan. Most of the assassins are quickly slain by Yoritomo Kitao, captain of the Mantis ship Bitter Flower, who soon becomes the new Champion of the Mantis Clan. Unbeknownst to the Mantis, Kitao actually cooperated with the Scorpion to set up the ambush of Aramasu.
- The Phoenix Elemental Council takes the field against the Dragon, and finds itself in confrontation with Tamori Shaitung, the fierce leader of the Dragon Clan shugenja. The battle between the two sides results in their falling into a deep rift beneath the earth. There they encounter the Dark Oracle of Fire, who is none other than Shaitung's father Agasha Tamori. The Dark Oracle admits he is responsible for the volcanic eruptions which drove the two clans into conflict, then kills the Master of Water, Isawa Riake. Shaitung and Isawa Nakamuro, the Master of Air, manage to flee. The other three Masters are trapped underground and enter a deep slumber.

Year 1159 – Month of the Dragon

- With the help of a small tribe of zokujin, Tamori Shaitung and Isawa Nakamuro finally make it back to Dragon lands. Nakamuro, who has become enamored of Shaitung, chooses to remain there as a hostage.
- Moto Gaheris, Khan of the Unicorn, dies in his sleep of old age. His grandson and heir Moto Chagatai travels to the Realm of Slaughter, accompanied by his kinsman and friend Moto Chen, to rectify an ancient curse placed on the Moto family by the Lords of Death. Chagatai promises the Unicorn will once again worship the Lords of Death in exchange for the curse being broken; they agree and Chagatai is hailed as a hero to the Unicorn Clan.
- Akodo Kaneka comes under attack in court from a Scorpion instigator named Shosuro Higatsuku. Kaneka blackmails the Scorpion with knowledge of his involvement in Yoritomo Aramasu's death, and Higatsuku is forced to secretly swear fealty to Kaneka, becoming his reluctant ally.
- The Lion continue to suffer losses against the Tsuno. They withdraw most of their forces from the Dragon-Phoenix War, leaving behind a token few to honor their alliance with the Phoenix.
- An ambitious and dishonorable Dragon samurai, Mirumoto Junnosuke, leads his army into Lion lands. He is intercepted by Toturi Tsudao and her Imperial Legions. When Junnosuke refuses to withdraw, he and Tsudao fight a kenjutsu duel, and Tsudao easily disarms the Dragon. However, Junnosuke still refuses to submit until a Scorpion Imperial Legionnaire, Bayushi Paneki, arrives with an order from Mirumoto Uso (the family daimyo) condemning Junnosuke's many dishonorable actions. The Dragon samurai becomes a ronin and Paneki becomes a trusted subordinate of Tsudao.
- In the absence of an Emperor, the Otomo family decides to choose a new Imperial Chancellor. The appointment goes to the aging Scorpion courtier Bayushi Kaukatsu.
- The Unicorn Clan discovers the ruins of an ancient pre-human crystal city within the Great Crater in the Seikitsu Pass. Moto Chagatai assigns one of the clan's priests, Moto Vordu, to investigate the ruins.





Year 1159 – Month of the Serpent

- One of Hantei Naseru's supporters produces a scroll (of questionable provenance) suggesting Akodo Kaneka is actually more closely related to the Yasuki ruling line than Yasuki Hachi. After deliberation, Kaneka decides to march to Yasuki Yashiki and claim it as his own. With Kaneka's forces sitting between them, the Crab and Crane cease open hostilities for the time being. Kaneka remains skeptical of the scroll, however, and chooses to not take the Yasuki name.
- Toturi Sezaru finds the Oracle of Earth, Hiruma Osuno. Sezaru asks where he can find Daigotsu, but before he can get an answer he is ambushed by Yokubo, the Onisu of Desire. Sezaru is forced to flee, in the process losing the famous white kabuki mask he normally wears. Yokubo claims the mask as a prize.
- Shiba Aikune, the son of Shiba Tsukune, discovers Isawa's Last Wish, an immensely powerful but incomplete magical artifact from the Dawn of the Empire. He successfully bonds with the artifact and is able to access its power.
- The Tsuno sack the Kitsu Tombs, destroying much of the knowledge stored there.

Year 1159 – Month of the Horse

- Akodo Kaneka confronts Yasuki Hachi at Friendly Traveler Village. The two men argue over who has the truly legitimate claim to the Yasuki line, and Kaneka challenges Hachi to a duel. Rather than simply lose to a superior opponent, Hachi asks Kaneka to show him his stance, then deliberately shows a clumsier stance in return and declares himself defeated. Hachi withdraws, having avoided both his own death and the possibility of killing a son of Toturi, and seeks a resolution to the Second Yasuki War elsewhere.
- Kitsune Ryosei, the aging daimyo of the Fox Clan, enters the Shadowlands to hunt down her father Kitsune Gohei, the Walking Horror of Fu Leng. She meets the corrupted ise zumi called Kokujin, who shows her a vast and terrible city deep within the Shadowlands: it is Daigotsu's City of the Lost.
- Shiba Aikune takes the battlefield against the Dragon, using the power of Isawa's Last Wish to devastate their armies and force them to retreat.
- Daigotsu's Shadowlands army assaults the Carpenter Wall, using Tsuno magic to strike the fortification from both sides at once. The Crab lose six of the twelve watchtowers on the Wall. Hida Kuroda, the Crab Champion, confronts Kyofu, the Onisu of Fear; Kuroda fights valiantly, but dies. Kuroda's advisor Hida Reiha carries the shards of Yuruginai, the Crab Celestial Sword, back to be reforged.

Year 1159 – Month of the Goat

- Daigotsu meets with Hida Kuon, Kuroda's younger brother, and offers to return Kuroda's body if the Crab surrender the rest of the Kaiu Wall. For answer, Kuon hurls a dai tsuchi at the Dark Lord's head. Although the blow fails to connect, Kuon escapes and rallies the Crab armies.
- The Crane retreat their armies from the Yasuki lands, but take all food stores with them. Kaneka, angered by this action, intercepts the main Crane force. Kakita Kaiten, daimyo of the Kakita, arrogantly challenges Kaneka but the younger man unexpectedly wins the duel. Kaiten dies and Kaneka gains repute as one of the finest duelists in the Empire.
- Shiba Aikune confronts the remaining Lion forces, declaring them cowards for withdrawing from the Dragon-Phoenix War. He slays them almost to the man, and declares the Phoenix - Lion alliance ended.
- Kitsune Ryosei manages to escape the City of the Lost with the help of a Tainted shugenja named Omen. Omen is actually the son of Kuni Utagu, and infiltrated the Shadowlands to spy for the Crab.
- The Crane Clan takes advantage of the Lion Clan's weakened state to attack the city of Toshi Ranbo, which has been in Lion hands for several years. Hantei Naseru steps forward and offers to arbitrate a peaceful resolution to the conflict. He eventually rules in favor of the Crane, who take control of the city.

Year 1159 – Month of the Monkey

- Hida Kuroda is re-animated with the Taint and merged with the Onisu of Fear, Kyofu. He becomes a powerful general for the Dark Lord's armies, and is placed in command of the forces holding the fallen Wall.

- Moto Chagatai arrives at Friendly Traveler Village with a large force of Unicorn samurai. He pledges loyalty to Akodo Kaneka, making the Unicorn the first clan to openly back one of the Winds. Yoritomo Kitao of the Mantis quickly follows suit, although she maintains relations with the other three Winds as well.
- Dragon Clan Champion Togashi Hoshi leaves the mortal realm. For the moment, neither his son Togashi Satsu nor the Mirumoto family daimyo, Mirumoto Uso, step up to take his place.
- Ikoma Fudai, a Lion historian, discovers the scroll claiming Akodo Kaneka to be the heir of the Yasuki family was falsified. He sets out immediately to inform the Emerald Champion.

Year 1159 – Month of the Rooster

- Daigotsu calls for his forces to rally in the City of the Lost for a new offensive, leaving the captured Wall under the command of Kyofu. Omen tries to learn Daigotsu's new target, but cannot.
- The three remaining members of the Phoenix Elemental Council – Shiba Ningen, Isawa Taeruko, and Isawa Hochiu – finally succeed in escaping their underground imprisonment. They resume control of the Phoenix Clan and seek a new member to replace Isawa Riake.
- Toturi Sezaru travels to the Dragon provinces and uses his immense magical powers to enhance their croplands, allowing them to have a bountiful harvest despite the destruction of the Dragon – Phoenix war.

Year 1159 – Month of the Dog

- Kaneka learns the scroll naming him as the Yasuki heir was forged, and concludes it was planted by his brother Naseru. In response, Kaneka declares himself Shogun, a theoretical office first proposed by the ancient ronin general Sun Tao. He calls for those who would serve him to break their wakizashi as a sign of loyalty. The Scorpion, Lion, and Unicorn representatives who are present all agree and shatter their weapons, but Yoritomo Kitao does not. At that moment a woman appears who calls herself Yoritomo Kumiko, pledging her sword to Kaneka in the name of the Mantis. She bears Yoritomo's lost set of kama and claims to be the rightful heir of the Mantis Clan Championship. Many Mantis samurai immediately join her in support of Kaneka. Kitao retreats to the Mantis Isles and gathers her forces to resist Kumiko's claim.
- The Crane and Phoenix forge an alliance, marrying Isawa Akiko, the returned spirit of Isawa's daughter, to Crane Champion Doji Kurohito. Akiko is also promoted to Master of Water, replacing the late Isawa Riake.
- The ronin Kaeru family, traditional guardians of the unaligned City of the Rich Frog, swear fealty to the Ikoma family of the Lion Clan. The Lion then annex the city. This angers the Unicorn Clan, since they believe the City of the Rich Frog lies within their lands.
- Toturi Tsudao, Bayushi Paneki, and their Imperial army drive the Tsuno out of the Lion lands and pursue them to the Shinomen Forest. There they confront the Dark Daughter Shahai and the ronin Junnosuke, who is now a Tainted slave of Shahai's will. After a long and desperate battle, Junnosuke is killed and Shahai is forced to flee. Tsudao and Paneki are praised as heroes across the Empire.
- Yasuki Hachi outwits Hantei Naseru in court, shaking off his reputation as Naseru's puppet. The two men gain a level of mutual respect.

Year 1159, Month of the Boar: The Fall of Otosan Uchi

The most dramatic events of the Four Winds era take place as Daigotsu launches a massive seaborne assault on Otosan Uchi, using a fleet of gaijin ships led by the Lost mortal known as Garen Hawthorne. Garen, consumed by hatred over the defeat of his fleet and his ambitions at the Battle of White Stag so long ago, eagerly aligns himself with the Dark Lord. Having spent the intervening centuries building additional ships to supplement his own Revenant and Eternal, Garen is easily able to move a huge army to attack the capital of Rokugan.

The defenders of the city include Ikoma Otemi, Toturi Tsudao, and many other heroes. They put up a valiant fight, but are outnumbered and facing an army of Shadowlands beasts and Lost warriors. They are unable to push the assault back, and Daigotsu makes his way to the Imperial Palace, passing easily through all of the protective wards until he reaches the throne room. There he uses the powerful spirit nexus in the room to open a portal to Meido, the Realm of Waiting.

Daigotsu confronts the Fortune of Death, Emma-O, and uses the artifact known as the Porcelain Mask of Fu Leng to subdue the Fortune, forcing him to free the soul of Fu Leng from imprisonment. Daigotsu then uses Sezaru's mask to open a portal to Meido so that Fu Leng can assault the Heavens themselves and claim his rightful place there. Daigotsu gives Emma-O's spear to Fu Leng, and promises the Dark Kami the devout worship of the Lost will give him the power to carry out his assault. Fu Leng storms the Celestial Heavens along with the spirits of some of the most powerful Oni Lords in history.

Daigotsu returns to the mortal world to discover Toturi Tsudao waiting to confront him. He tells her he is actually a scion of the Hantei bloodline, and offers a truce between Rokugan and his dark "Empire" within the Shadowlands. Tsudao rejects the offer and attacks, severing the Dark Lord's right arm at the shoulder. Daigotsu is forced to flee the city, using his powerful magic to transport himself back to the Shadowlands; he leaves behind the Steel Throne, now Tainted

after its time in the Shadowlands. With his departure, the rest of the Shadowlands army loses cohesion and is finally driven back, but the city is left in complete ruins, much of it Tainted and burned to the ground.

- In the wake of the battle, Toturi Tsudao concludes that none of her brothers are able to protect the Empire. She declares herself Empress Toturi II and moves the capital of the Empire to Kyuden Seppun.
- The corrupted madman Kokujin captures several Dragon samurai and uses their souls to create a set of powerful artifacts with the Anvil of Despair. The blades known as Shameswords will plague the Empire for many years to come. In the wake of this deed, Kokujin is confronted by Togashi Satsu and the famed hero Togashi Mitsu. Satsu calls on the powers of his grandfather, Togashi, to unleash an earthquake and defeat Kokujin and his demonic allies. The Anvil of Despair and Kokujin are both thought lost, consumed by the earth. Satsu claims the title of Dragon Clan Champion.
- As the Crab continue to reclaim the lost watchtowers, Hida Kuon is confronted by an ogre general named Kayobun, who claims his people are enslaved by the Dark Lord and offers a joint alliance against Daigotsu. Kuon furiously refuses, declaring he will never ally with any of the forces of darkness, and kills Kayobun

Year 1159 – Month of the Rat

- After many months of planning, the Crab begin a series of systematic attacks designed to retake the lost portions of the Kaiu Wall. They receive support from both the Unicorn and the Crane, including the notable warriors Iuchi Lixue and Daidoji Rekai. As the fighting rages, Hida Kuon learns his brother Kuroda is now Kyofu, the Onisu of Fear. Kuon fights off despair and swears to lay his brother to rest no matter what the cost.
- Matsu Nimuro, the Lion Clan Champion, orders the Tainted ruins of Otosan Uchi to be completely destroyed. The ronin band calling itself the Sword of Yotsu remains to guard the ruins.
- Daigotsu's forces regroup following the assault on Otosan Uchi. He unleashes all of the Onisu into the Empire to wreak havoc and spread fear. Though they are eventually all defeated, they inflict much loss and damage in the meantime. Daigotsu also re-founds the infamous Chuda family, appointing the family's last surviving descendent, Chuda Mishime, as the new family daimyo.
- Hantei Naseru moves to the City of Lies, Ryoko Owari. The Scorpion Clan publicly declares its support of Naseru as Emperor.
- The Dragon Clan offers to house Toturi Sezaru in their lands in reward for his help in blessing their lands. He takes the ruined Kyuden Tonbo as his stronghold and uses his magic to restore it to its former glory. The grateful peasants begin calling it "Kyuden Sezaru."
- The Lords of Death begin trying to wrench control of Meido from Emma-O, claiming the Fortune of Death – who has been left frail and paranoid by his defeat at Daigotsu's hands – cannot properly perform his duties.
- After over a year training with the kenku sensei called Kozue, Doji Yasuyo returns to the Empire and meets with her cousin Doji Kurohito, Champion of the Crane. She warns him that his sword Chukandomo bears an ancient and powerful curse. After considering this, Kurohito decides not to put aside the sword, instead declaring he will confront the curse and defeat it.



Naseru in the City of Night

According to certain tales which circulated through Rokugan in later years, it is in the Month of the Rat in the year 1159 that Hantei Naseru and several companions travel to the ancient pre-human city beneath the Great Crater and confront the mad shugenja Moto Vordu. Supposedly, Vordu discovered the crystal sphere created by the Five Ancient Races, imbued with the power to change all of reality. Ultimately, Naseru rejects the sphere's power and destroys it, believing no mortal should have such power. Whether or not this actually happened is a matter of considerable debate, and GMs can decide for themselves whether or not Naseru's adventure in the City of Night is real or merely a tale created by his supporters.

Year 1159 – Month of the Ox

- Daigotsu learns from the Dark Oracle of the Void exactly when and where he will die. With this knowledge in hand, he makes preparations to bring himself back from the dead at the appropriate moment.
- Agasha Tamori reveals himself openly on the Dragon – Phoenix battlefields, incinerating the forces of Dragon and Phoenix alike. Both clans realize something is amiss, since an Oracle – even a Dark Oracle – cannot directly intervene unless given express permission to do so.
- The Jade Dragon travels to Ningen-do to try to bring aid to the Heavens, which are still under assault by Fu Leng. Its spirit becomes trapped inside the Celestial Jitte, located in Daigotsu's throne room in the City of the Lost. There it senses the presence of Omen, who still has an honorable soul despite being Tainted. The Jade Dragon awakens Omen's true soul by calling him by his real name, Kiyoshi, and blesses the former Crab with his powers, making Omen the first Oracle of Jade. Omen uses his new powers to escape the City of the Lost and travel swiftly back to the Empire.
- Daigotsu sends an emissary to Hantei Naseru, offering peace and an alliance much as he earlier offered to Tsudao. Naseru rejects the offer and executes the emissary, but not before extracting from him the location of the City of the Lost.

Year 1159 – Month of the Tiger

- As battle continues to rage in the Celestial Heavens, the Kami Shinjo falls to Fu Leng. When she arrives in Meido, the Realm of Waiting, she finds the realm divided between Emma-O and the Lords of Death. With the help of her brother Ryoshun, who is accompanying the Lords of Death, she returns her soul to Ningen-do to be reincarnated when the time is right.
- Tensions between the followers of Yoritomo Kitao and Yoritomo Kumiko escalate into full-fledged civil war within the Mantis Clan.
- The Crab assault the Fifth Tower of the Kaiu Wall, the only one still in the hands of the Shadowlands. Kuon faces his former brother Kuroda, now the Onisu Kyofu, and narrowly prevails with the help of his allies. Kyofu flees, but as he escapes he calls on the power of Fu Leng, who unleashes a barrage of pure Taint from his place in the Celestial Heavens. The tower is permanently Tainted, making it into a stronghold of darkness – the Tower of Fear.
- Agasha Tamori is defeated when Isawa Nakamuro and Tamori Shaitung confront him with the Dark Covenant of Fire. During the confrontation, the corruption of the Master of Fire, Isawa Hochiu, is revealed to all. Hochiu dies fighting Tamori, and the Dark Oracle is then slain in turn by a Dragon samurai named Mirumoto Tsuge. This ends the Dragon-Phoenix War. However, when Tamori dies his brother Tamori Chosai becomes the new Dark Oracle of Fire. Thinking quickly, Nakamuro uses the Dark Covenant to banish Chosai beyond the borders of Rokugan, never to return.
- Rama Singh, an ambassador from the Ivory Kingdoms, arrives in Rokugan.

Year 1160 – Month of the Hare

- Yoritomo Kumiko, realizing she can never unite the Mantis Clan so long as she carries the Taint she inherited from her mother, seeks out the legendary ronin band called the Unbroken, who are said to be able to purge their Taint by slaying powerful Shadowlands creatures.
- Doji Kurohito, determined to overcome the curse of his sword Chukandomo, orders the Crane to withdraw from Toshi Ranbo; when he does this, the damned souls trapped in the sword erupt and try to destroy him. Doji Yasuyo counters them by releasing the souls of great Crane heroes from her own blade, Naishi. With the help of a Kitsu sodan-senzo who is present at the scene, the souls of Chukandomo are put to rest and the curse is broken. Kurohito gives Toshi Ranbo to the Lion Clan; he also gives them the now-cleansed Chukandomo, which had originally been intended as a gift to mend the feud between the Matsu and Kakita families.



Year 1160 – Month of the Dragon

- Kaneka and his allies march on the City of Lies to confront Naseru, who has made many political attacks against Kaneka in the last several months. Scorpion forces slowly give ground before him.
- Shiba Aikune tries to use Isawa's Last Wish against Fu Leng, but instead triggers a massive explosion that devastates everything for miles around. Realizing he has been mistreating the artifact, he goes into seclusion and ceases trying to lead the Phoenix. Soon afterward, the Elemental Council locates Shiba Mirabu and officially recognizes him as the Clan Champion.
- The Fortune of Death, Emma-O, roams the mortal world in search of more power for his struggle against the Lords of Death. He encounters the Onisu Kyofu and alters the balance of spirits within the creature, allowing Kuroda to regain at least partial control of his own will. The Fortune bestows a magical amulet on Kyofu that ensures the souls of anyone he slays will go directly to Meido, hopefully empowering Emma-O to defeat his rivals.

Year 1160 – Month of the Serpent

- A new Imperial Court assembles at Kyuden Miya, with representation from all of the Great Clans. At first tensions rise and it seems no progress will be made, but then Crane Champion Doji Kurohito and Lion Champion Matsu Nimuro appear before the court together. They offer the long-contested stronghold of Toshi Ranbo, Violence Beneath Courtliness City, to be the site of a new Imperial Capital with both the Crane and the Lion to defend it. Impressed, the Imperial Court begins work right away to establish the new capital.
- Kitsu Hisashi, a powerful sodan-senzo, visits the Realm of Meido to learn why it has become so disrupted. He mediates the conflict between Emma-O and the Lords of Death, proposing a compromise whereby the Fortune of Death will choose the destinies of the unworthy dead but the Lords of Death will choose their punishment. Both sides accept this agreement and the chaos within Meido comes to an end.
- The isolated stronghold known as Shinsei's Last Hope comes under attack by the Shadowlands general Tsukuro. Just when it seems the village will fall, Yasuki Hachi arrives and defeats Tsukuro. He returns to the Wall with twenty goblin heads, completing the Crab tradition of the Twenty Goblin Winter, and swears fealty to the Crab – but does not renounce his Crane allegiance. This makes the official Yasuki daimyo both a Crane and a Crab, and effectively ends the Second Yasuki War. Hachi decrees the Crab will control the Yasuki lands but the Crane will administer and protect them.
- Toturi Kaede returns to the Empire and reassumes the role of Empress, declaring the time has come for the Four Winds to gather and hear her guidance. Toturi Tsudao immediately renounces her claim to the throne in response.
- Kaneka's armies break into Ryoko Owari and he personally confronts Naseru. After a tense argument the two reluctantly agree to work together and heed Kaede's summons. They head to Kyuden Seppun, where Tsudao and Sezaru await them

Year 1160 – Month of the Horse

- Empress Kaede tells the assembled Four Winds they must work together in order to defeat Daigotsu and save the Celestial Heavens from Fu Leng. Each of the Four Winds, she says, brings something powerful to aid this goal. For the first time in two years, the Winds finally join together in unison.
- The Four Winds march into the Shadowlands and confront Daigotsu at the City of the Lost in the Temple of the Ninth Kami. As battle rages through the Temple, Daigotsu momentarily retreats and finds himself confronting Naseru. The Anvil points out that Fu Leng draws power not from the Lost but from Daigotsu himself, and without Daigotsu he will have nothing. This shakes Daigotsu's faith as he realizes Fu Leng doubts him and the assault on the Heavens will fail. Knowing he is destined to die this day, Daigotsu immobilizes the Winds with a powerful spell, then begins to cast a final ritual which will destroy the Temple and all within it. However, before he can complete the spell Tsudao breaks free and attacks him. His magic consumes her utterly, but he is himself struck down and slain. Stunned by their sister's sacrifice, the other Winds return to Rokugan with Tsudao's body.

- Though Fu Leng doubts Daigotsu for but a moment, it weakens the Dark Kami significantly. Confronted in the Celestial Heavens by the souls of the Seven Thunders themselves, Fu Leng retreats to Jigoku, ending his assault.
- Toturi Kaede asks the surviving Four Winds which of them should be Emperor. Kaneka and Sezaru renounce their claims to the throne. Hantei Naseru gives up the Hantei name and declares himself Toturi III, acknowledging his dead sister Tsudao as Toturi II. With the Throne secure, Kaede at last departs the mortal realm for good.

Year 1160 – Month of the Goat

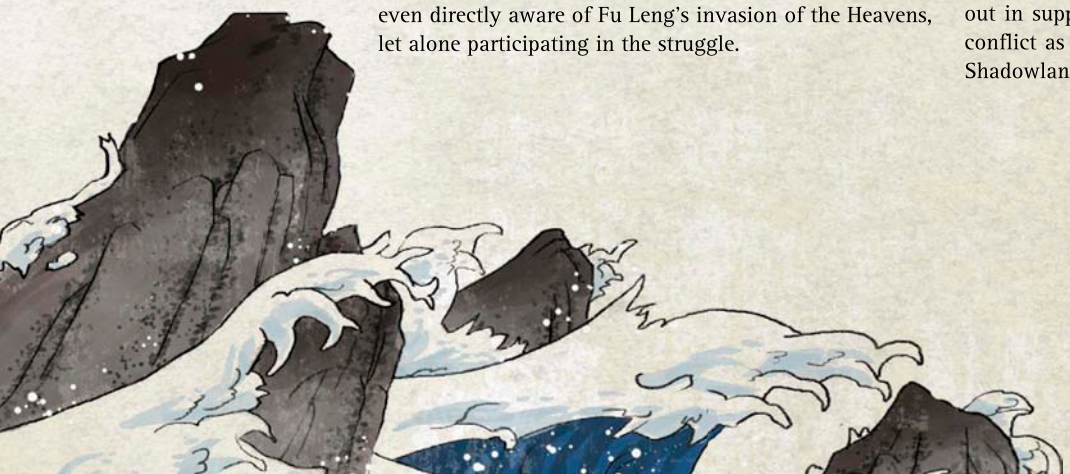
- Kaneka and Sezaru both swear fealty to the Phoenix Clan after officially accepting positions as the Shogun and the Voice of the Emperor, respectively. This action also officially recognizes the office of Shogun as a legitimate part of the Empire's government.

Year 1160 – Month of the Monkey

- Yoritomo Kumiko and Yoritomo Kitao finally meet in personal combat to decide the leadership of the Mantis Clan. Kumiko defeats both Kitao and the Onisu Settozai, purging her Taint with the Unbroken Technique and proving her right to be Mantis Clan Champion. Kitao flees into exile and the Mantis Civil War ends.
- Daigotsu returns from the dead as he planned, but finds he has lost his Taint and with it his ability to perform *maho*.

The Clans and Factions in the Four Winds Era

The time of the Four Winds sees a great deal of ferment and confusion within the Empire, but only a few really dramatic changes – most notably the destruction of Otosan Uchi and its eventual replacement as Imperial Capital by Toshi Ranbo. Although all of the clans are involved in the struggles of this era in one way or another, none of them faced a truly existential crisis; the Four Winds was an era of chaos and disharmony, but few samurai were even directly aware of Fu Leng's invasion of the Heavens, let alone participating in the struggle.



The Crab Clan

As the Four Winds era begins, the years have finally begun to catch up with Clan Champion Hida O-Ushi; she fears that she will soon be unable to lead the Crab Clan with the strength it requires. However, she believes her two sons Hida Kuroda and Hida Kuon are both capable leaders and worthy successors. Her clan shares a strong alliance and friendship with the Unicorn Clan, and during this era the friendship grows and prospers in the face of adversity. Likewise, the Crab have good relations with the Mantis Clan due to their shared history and Crab admiration for Mantis tenacity, though the relative silence from the Mantis islands during the Spirit Wars era weakened this relationship somewhat. The rest of the Empire is for the most part indifferent to the Crab, a feeling which the clan of Hida reciprocates, although both the Phoenix and the Lion try to win Crab support for their war with the Dragon Clan.

The one exception to these patterns is the Crane Clan. When Daidoji Hachi is proclaimed the heir to the rule of the Yasuki family, the Crab find themselves plunging into open hostilities with the Crane Clan. Neither O-Ushi nor her sons see any choice in the matter; without the Yasuki and their mercantile wealth, the Crab cannot possibly feed their armies or protect themselves or the Empire. The Crab view the whole conflict as a bitter and frustrating distraction from their real duties on the Wall, and when Kaneka and later Yasuki Hachi are able to resolve the struggle the Crab are more than willing to see an end to the fight – especially since by then the Shadowlands have become active once again.

At the start of this era the dark lands have been quiet for the past eight years, but the Crab have not dulled in their training or dedication. When the Dark Lord Daigotsu finally makes his move against the Kaiu Wall, the Crab find themselves facing their biggest crisis since the eighth century, and rally their full strength and that of their allies to drive back the Dark Lord's forces. The cost is high. Not only is Hida Kuroda slain and then transformed into the Onisu Kyofu, but the later transformation of the Fifth Tower of the Kaiu Wall into the Tower of Fear is a bitter loss, and one that lingers. The Crab are unable to destroy the Tainted tower and are forced to rebuild the Kaiu Wall opposite from it; it will serve as a constant reminder of their defeat for years to come.

The Crab are for the most part indifferent to the struggle between the Four Winds except insofar as the lack of an Emperor impacts their own affairs. They never come out in support of any of the Winds, and treat the whole conflict as a needless distraction from their war with the Shadowlands



The Crane Clan

At the dawn of this era, Doji Kurohito – the son of the hero Doji Kuwanan – has finally come of age and taken on the office of Clan Champion. Kurohito is a brave and honorable warrior who seeks to return the Crane Clan to the glory of years past, to make them unrivaled in the courts of Rokugan and a force to be feared on the field of battle. What Kurohito does not know is that his ambitions for the clan are being fueled and directed by his sword Chukandomo, an ancient blade which bears a powerful curse. The sword grants its wielder the ability and desire to perform great feats, but dooms them to eventually be consumed by the anger and thwarted ambition of the tormented spirits within it. Kurohito might easily have led the clan to disaster under Chukandomo's influence, but he is ultimately saved – and the sword purified – by the efforts of his cousin, Doji Yasuyo.

The Crane as usual have plenty of allies in this era, and do their best to expand their influence in the courts of all the other clans. The Lion, their traditional enemies, are still troublesome through much of this period, but ultimately Kurohito is able to mend relations with the Right Hand and bring an end to their eternal feud by gifting them with both the city of Toshi Ranbo and the purified blade Chukandomo. It is a measure of how much their relations improve that the two clans jointly agree to propose Toshi Ranbo as the new Imperial Capital.

However, the Crane do find themselves at odds with both the Scorpion and the Crab during this era. At this time the Scorpion are without rival in the courts, and they do everything they can to prevent the Crane from regaining their former advantage. Likewise, while the Crane do not particularly hate the Crab at this time, the opportunity to reclaim the Yasuki lands lost centuries ago is one Kurohito simply cannot pass up. Though the Crane initially attempt to negotiate with the Crab for the lands, conflict proves inevitable, and it does not end quickly or easily. Moreover, once Akodo Kaneka becomes involved the Crane suffer one of the most bitter losses of the era when he kills Kakita Kaiten, the family daimyo and former clan regent, in a duel.

The Crane maintain fairly even public support for each of the other Winds, but it is obvious early on that the majority of the clan supports Toturi Tsudao. She represents all of the ideals the Crane hold dear – beauty, skill, honor, courage, perfection. She shows little interest in political maneuvers, but the Crane view this as a positive thing, since if she succeeds in claiming the Throne she will be in need of strong political advisors – the sort which the Crane can provide. The Crane are thus disappointed when Tsudao dies and the Throne goes to the more Scorpion-oriented Naseru, although they do their best to build alliances with the new Emperor thereafter.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon Clan enters the Four Winds era in much in the same mode as they have spent so much of the Empire's history: aloof, distant, and tending to their own affairs. Having survived the reign of Hitomi a generation earlier, they are now led by Togashi Hoshi, the half-mortal son of the Kami Togashi. Hoshi has become distant and withdrawn not only from the affairs of Rokugan but even those of the Dragon Clan itself, leaving his son Togashi Satsu and the Mirumoto daimyo, Mirumoto Uso, to handle the day-to-day administration of the clan. When Hoshi does appear publicly, he speaks only in riddles, confusing many of his followers and offering no clear answers as to the direction the clan should take.

As always, the Dragon have few strong alliances with the other clans, although they do get along surprisingly well with the Scorpion during this time period. The Dragon do not seek their aid in the Dragon-Phoenix war, but the Scorpion provide it nonetheless, sharing what food they can spare and sending covert military assistance against the Phoenix and Lion. This lays the foundations for an alliance which will become much stronger in later eras.

The central focus of this era for the Dragon, however, is the conflict with the Phoenix which results from bizarre volcanic eruptions that destroy a large portion of the Dragon farmlands. Seeking to resettle in previously empty lands near the Phoenix lands, the Dragon soon

find themselves stumbling into a war with the Clan of Shiba. And while the Lion do not hold any grudge against the Dragon, they have an alliance with the Phoenix and honor demands they support them. (Of course, the Lion have also spent centuries looking for an excuse to assault the Dragonfly Clan.)

The Dragon seek to simply survive the conflicts they find themselves in. Eventually they discover the source of the war – a corrupted former Dragon, Agasha Tamori, now the Dark Oracle of Fire – but not before much conflict and suffering on all sides. Moreover, they also have fresh troubles with the corrupted ise zumi Kokujin, who kidnaps several Dragon samurai to create his sinister Shameswords. Kokujin is ultimately defeated by Togashi Satsu, who assumes leadership of the clan and enables them to move forward united.

While the Dragon remain largely apart from the political struggles in the rest of the Empire, they seem to favor Toturi Sezaru for Emperor. Although they respect all the Winds, Sezaru is the embodiment of all the ideals the Dragon hold dear – wisdom, thoughtfulness, and piety.

The Lion Clan

In this era, Lion Clan Champion Matsu Nimuro is the most well-known and arguably the most feared samurai in the Empire. Many view the Golden Lion of Toshi Ranbo as a violent and merciless leader, but those closer to him recognize he is actually thoughtful and wise beyond his years. Nimuro recognizes his fearsome reputation is a boon to the Lion Clan, since few are willing to openly oppose a man of such repute, and so he does nothing to combat his public image, preferring to discourage his enemies from even thinking of attacking him.



The Lion find themselves in a relatively stable position at the start of the Four Winds era. They have a strong alliance with the Phoenix, brokered by Hantei Naseru to unite the Empire's most able samurai and most powerful shugenja. (Naseru hoped the alliance might eventually aid the Crab in destroying the threat of the Shadowlands once and for all, but such was not to be.) When the Dragon-Phoenix War begins, many Lion eagerly join the cause, either out of obligation to their allies or for the chance to finally crush the Dragonfly Clan, whose very existence they have seen as a stain on their honor for centuries.

Interestingly, the Lion do not face enmity from the Scorpion in this era. Matsu Nimuro and Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Yojiro share a quiet friendship, and though the Scorpion covertly aid the Dragon Clan they are careful never to openly oppose the Right Hand. Nimuro and Yojiro often meet to exchange useful information, keeping both of their clans in a strong position within the Empire.

Relations with the Crane Clan are closer to the traditional norm of hostility during the early Four Winds era, but Doji Kurohito and Matsu Nimuro do respect one another, and after Kurohito breaks the curse of Chukandomo the clans are able to set aside their ancient feud and even work together to provide the Empire with a new capital at Toshi Ranbo.

The greatest challenge to the Lion Clan in this era is the sudden and mysterious attack by the race called Tsuno. These creatures prove to be descended from the ancient Kitsu race, and they bear a special hatred for the Lion Clan due to its connection to the Kitsu. With much of their strength committed to support the Phoenix, the Lion initially suffer heavily to the Tsuno raids, most notably when the creatures raze the fabled Kitsu Tombs. Ultimately, it is the intervention of Toturi Tsudao and her Imperial Legions which succeeds in ending the Tsuno threat.

The Lion are probably the most divided as a clan on which Wind to support. Although Tsudao's assistance and her intensely honorable ways win many hearts, especially among the Matsu, the Akodo view Kaneka as one of their own and feel a steadfast loyalty to the Bastard. The Ikoma respect Naseru for his traditional ways (especially since he bears the Hantei name), while the Kitsu hold Sezaru in the highest regard since he is one of the few shugenja from outside the clan to ever train at the Kitsu temples.

The Mantis Clan

Yoritomo Aramasu is one of the greatest heroes Rokugan never knows about. During the Spirit Wars, Aramasu leads a secret expedition to the Ivory Kingdoms to help that realm beat down the challenge from the Cult of Ruhmal, but only Emperor Toturi and the Mantis themselves know of this great struggle. As the Four Winds era begins, Aramasu has finally returned to the Empire and has begun working to rebuild clan alliances that have been allowed to lie fallow in his absence. Of course, this has a benefit as well: the Mantis have few true enemies within the Empire, and no clans who outright seek to destroy them. The only partial is the Scorpion Clan, who do not begrudge the Mantis Clan itself but have sworn enmity to Aramasu for his betrayal years before.

The Mantis Clan has always valued those who forge their own destiny in life, and thus it is not surprising that they overwhelmingly support Akodo Kaneka for Emperor. They empathize with the obstacles he has faced in life and respect both his prowess in combat and his cool intelligence. However, due to their absence from the Empire's politics in recent years they are not in a position to offer Kaneka much real support. The Moshi family, meanwhile, offers its support to Toturi Tsudao, who they believe has a spiritual connection to the former sun goddess Amaterasu.

Ultimately, any Mantis involvement in Rokugan's larger affairs takes a backseat after Aramasu is killed and Yoritomo Kitao becomes Clan Champion. Almost from the moment Kitao claims the office, rumors begin circulating of a true-born daughter of Yoritomo living in hiding. When Yoritomo Kumiko finally appears, the clan is instantly divided and plunged into civil war. This internal conflict occupies the clan's attention for the remainder of the era, effectively preventing them from playing any role in the Empire's other struggles.

The Phoenix Clan

Shiba Tsukune was one of the great Phoenix heroes of the Clan Wars era, but by the time of the Four Winds she is aging and deeply concerned over the fate of the Soul of Shiba which she carries. With the loss of the Phoenix ancestral sword at the end of the Hidden Emperor era, the Soul of Shiba no longer has an anchor in the mortal world, and Tsukune fears that with her passing all its wisdom and guidance will be lost.

The answer comes, ultimately, from the Heavens themselves. Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, appears to Tsukune and offers a choice. She can remain in the mortal world, protecting the Phoenix and her son Aikune, but the Soul of Shiba will be lost forever when she dies. Or she can ascend to the Heavens and become the Fortune of Rebirth, protecting the Soul of Shiba for all eternity... but the clan will face great challenges and loss. Tsukune chooses to ascend to the Heavens, praying her son will understand her decision.

The Phoenix Clan has only one real enemy during this era: Agasha Tamori, the Dark Oracle of Fire. The Master of Fire, Isawa Hochiu, secretly plots with Tamori to unleash volcanic eruptions that will drive the Dragon Clan into Phoenix lands and trigger a war; Hochiu believes this will promote the emergence of heroes among the Phoenix, while Tamori is simply delighted to unleash pain on both the Phoenix and his own former clan. The lengthy war which results from Tamori and Hochiu's machinations leads to great loss of life for both the Phoenix and their Lion allies, and ultimately two Elemental Masters – Hochiu and Master of Water Isawa Riake – perish.

Tsukune's son Shiba Aikune faces challenges of his own in this era. With his mother gone, Aikune effectively becomes the regent of the clan, but he knows this will only last until the Elemental Council can locate the next samurai to bear the Soul of Shiba. Moreover, he is forsaken by his ancestors, and this taken together with Tsukune's departure leaves him with a profound sense of isolation and abandonment. Perhaps it is precisely because of this internal conflict that he is able to find and bond with Isawa's Last Wish. The artifact allows him to easily gain the advantage in the Dragon – Phoenix war, but Aikune does not truly understand it and eventually causes a disaster when he tries to use it against Fu Leng. Aikune secludes himself to pursue meditation and better understanding of both the artifact and himself; he will go on to play a major role in later events in the Empire's history.

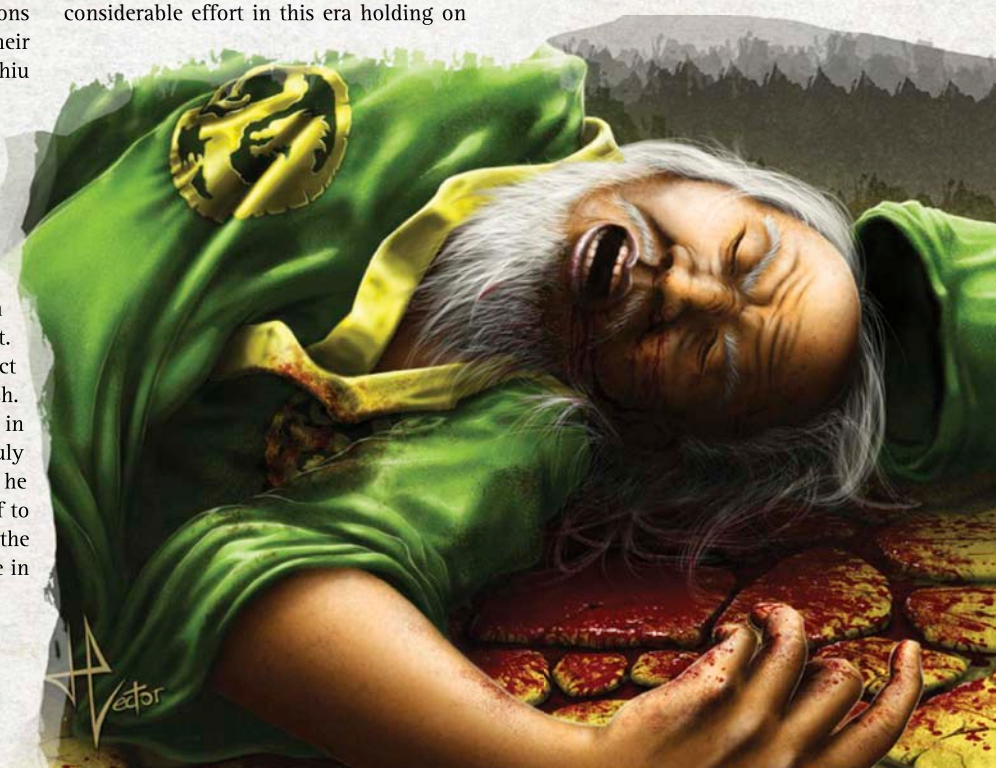
The Phoenix Clan considers Toturi Sezaru to be the most admirable of the Winds, both for his own nature as an immensely powerful shugenja and because he is the son of Toturi Kaede, the previous Master of Void. However, they recognize that his somewhat erratic nature and deep connection to the Void make him a poor choice for Emperor, and instead throw their political support to Toturi Tsudao, the eldest of Toturi and Kaede's children. After Naseru becomes Emperor Toturi III, the Phoenix accept the fealty of Sezaru; they are somewhat surprised when Kaneka offers his fealty as well, but accept it nonetheless.

The Scorpion Clan

Bayushi Yojiro is quite possibly one of the most widely respected Scorpion Clan Champions in history. His repute as the "honest Scorpion" and his heroic exploits during the War of Spirits have earned him respect throughout the Empire. By the time of the Four Winds he has ruled the Scorpion Clan for over two decades, and though he is aging his wits are as sharp as ever.

The majority of the clans have always held the Scorpion Clan at arm's length, but in this time the Dragon come to share a surprisingly open and friendly relationship with the Clan of Secrets. The Scorpion provide what assistance they can during the Dragon-Phoenix War. Bayushi Yojiro and Matsu Nimuro also share a quiet alliance and friendship, meeting in secret to exchange valuable advice and intelligence – a most unusual relationship by historical standards, and one that ensures the two clans avoid conflict throughout this otherwise chaotic era.

Early in this era the Scorpion are finally able to avenge themselves against Yoritomo Aramasu, the son of Bayushi Aramoro and a traitor to their clan. While they bear the Mantis Clan as a whole no ill will, the Scorpion are determined to make Aramasu pay for his disloyalty, and are finally able to do so with the covert help of the ambitious Yoritomo Kitao. The Scorpion also spend considerable effort in this era holding on



to the strong position they have in the courts and trying to obstruct the Crane Clan from overcoming their lead. In this regard they score a major victory when the Otomo family chooses one of their own, Bayushi Kaukatsu, to be the new Imperial Chancellor.

While the Scorpion Clan does not face any public wars in this time period, they do confront a devious and subtle threat in the form of the so-called Shadowed Tower, a group of discontented Scorpion led by none other than the returned spirit of Bayushi Atsuki, the man who led the Gozoku Conspiracy centuries before. The Shadowed Tower promotes the use of any and all methods to power, including maho and gaijin magic, and works to subvert the Clan Champion and ultimately take over the Scorpion Clan from within. Bayushi Yojiro eventually learns the truth about the Tower and chooses to step down as Clan Champion in order to be able to fight Atsuki's forces from the shadows. He passes the leadership of the clan to Bayushi Sunetra, a duelist and assassin of formidable skills, and the two work in concert – Sunetra in public, Yojiro behind the scenes – to root out and ultimately destroy the Shadowed Tower.

The Scorpion sought favor from all of the Winds in hopes of placing themselves in a strong position once one of them took the Throne. Although they showed the greatest public support to Hantei Naseru, they made sure to maintain contacts with all of the Winds and placed their representatives close to them wherever possible. Shosuro Higatsuku, for example, became an advisor to Kaneka (although the Scorpion did not realize the Bastard had managed to partially subvert Higatsuku's loyalty), and the Imperial Legionnaire Bayushi Paneki served as Tsudao's right-hand man. The Scorpion Clan was never one to turn down an opportunity, and the Four Winds presented many opportunities. And they could not help but be pleased when Naseru ultimately became Emperor Toturi III. Who better to rule than a man who understood and appreciated what the Underhand of the Emperor had done for over a thousand years?

The Unicorn Clan

When this era begins, the Unicorn are led by an aging Moto Gaheris, a legendary warrior of not one but two different lands. A powerful warlord of the Desert Moto, Gaheris led his people back to Rokugan behind the Kami Shinjo and helped her to purge the Kolat who had infiltrated the Unicorn Clan; in return, she appointed him to rule the clan as its new Khan. Gaheris fought valiantly during the War of Spirits, and while many considered him a barbarian none could question his skill on the field of battle. By the time of the Four Winds, however, Gaheris is an old man, and his grandson Moto Chagatai is already being treated as the effective ruler of the Unicorn Clan. Within a year, Gaheris will be dead and Chagatai will rule in truth.

The Unicorn and Crab are strong allies in this era, trading students between their schools and lending support and aid to each other as needed. When the Carpenter Wall falls to Daigotsu's Shadowlands forces, Chagatai dispatches the Baraunghar, one of the three great armies of the Unicorn, to aid the Crab. It is a major military commitment, but thankfully one which does not harm the Unicorn as a whole, for they enjoy a time of relative peace during this era. Their only conflict is with the Scorpion, for the Unicorn currently control the city of Ryoko Owari and the Scorpion are anxious to return it to their own rule. However, this conflict is primarily a mixture of covert sabotage and political clashes, since the Scorpion have no desire to fight the mighty Unicorn armies in the open field.

From the perspective of the Unicorn Clan, the most important event of this era is not the struggle between the Four Winds but rather their own confrontation with their past in the form of the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang, the Lords of Death. As noted in the Unicorn chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, the Lords of Death were once worshiped by the Moto but were forsaken when the Moto became part of the Unicorn Clan; their hostility has plagued the Moto ever since. Chagatai and his cousin Moto Chen seek out the Lords of Death in Meido and offer to restore their worship in exchange for the lifting of their curse. Coincidentally, within two years of this event the Lords of Death are able to gain an abiding place within Rokugan's cosmology as a side effect of Daigotsu's assault on the Fortune of Death, Emma-O. Thus the Unicorn end this era with both a new religious perspective and a newly close relationship to the Celestial Order.

As for the struggle between the Four Winds, many of the Unicorn admire Toturi Tsudao, who reminds them of their founding Kami Shinjo – graceful, powerful on the field of battle, and compassionate. Moto Chagatai respects her as well, but he holds Akodo Kaneka in the highest regard, and he becomes the first Clan Champion to openly throw the support of his clan behind one of the Winds. Needless to say, he is more than a little disappointed when the Throne instead goes to Naseru.

The Shadowlands

This era sees a major change in the nature and leadership of the Shadowlands. For the first time in history the Shadowlands contains a civilized structure and even a culture. The Dark Lord Daigotsu rises to power in the years following the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, taking in the thousands of samurai who become Lost during that conflict in Volturnum. He gives them a city, a code of beliefs – Shourido and the worship of Fu Leng – and a unifying cause: the absolute ruin of Rokugan and the ascension of Fu Leng to his "proper" position in the Celestial Heavens. Daigotsu is as charismatic as he is powerful, easily able to bend oni, ogres, and goblins to his will, but he is also powerful and knowledgeable enough to create fearsome new creatures, the Onisu, to prey on the weaknesses of the clans. The Onisu cause considerable damage during this time, serving as stark evidence of Daigotsu's immense power.

Daigotsu of course has no allies within Rokugan, since he is dedicated to toppling the Empire and constantly tries to turn the Four Winds against each other and keep the

Steel Throne vacant. He does, however, find useful allies in the Tsuno, the twisted cousins of the Kitsu who dwell in Toshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter. He also gains the support of Garen, the Lost gaijin whose fleet becomes an integral part of Daigotsu's plan to attack Otosan Uchi.

For all his power, Daigotsu is not without his own problems. He finds it difficult to maintain the loyalty of the Oni Lords, who seek to undermine and subvert his authority on many occasions. The race of ogres have slowly begun to free themselves from Fu Leng's Taint and some of their number turn against his rule. And most damning of all, for all his professed faith in Fu Leng, Daigotsu loses his confidence in the critical moment at the Temple of the Ninth Kami. It is a mistake he will be a long time correcting.

Major Figures in the Four Winds Era

A complete listing of the significant historical figures from this time is nearly impossible given the scope and depth of events. Many of the famous figures from the Four Winds era have already been described in the L5R 4th Edition supplements The Great Clans and Imperial Histories; this section therefore confines itself to the four most pivotal and unique personalities from this time – the Winds themselves.

Akodo Kaneka

the Bastard

Akodo Kaneka is technically the eldest of Toturi's four children, though he is never publicly recognized by the Emperor before his demise. Kaneka was conceived before the Scorpion Clan Coup, through the romance between Toturi and the geisha Hatsuko; when Toturi was cast down and made ronin, the Dragon of Water spirited away the pregnant Hatsuko and kept in the Celestial Realm, far from the eyes of the Empire. After the Battle of Oblivon's Gate, the Dragon returned Hatsuko to the mortal world and she gave birth to the son who would become Kaneka.

In his early years, Kaneka lived as a ronin, experiencing the harsh and often deadly life of a wave-man. He became quite skilled as both a warrior and a duelist, and won the allegiance of many friends and allies. Eventually, he learned the truth of his lineage from his mother and shared it with the world. While many shunned "the Bastard" (as he came to be known), Akodo Ginawa recognized Kaneka as a son of Toturi and offered him a place among the Lion in the Akodo family. Further, Matsu Nimuro offered the rule of the clan itself to Kaneka in recognition of his status as Toturi's heir; however, Kaneka had learned during his years as a ronin that status and recognition must be earned, and he declined the offer. When the Imperial Capital did not issue any rebuke to the actions of Ginawa and Nimuro, it became clear to many that Kaneka truly was Toturi's son.

Emperor Toturi I died on his way to Ryoko Owari, where Kaneka lived at the time, and many assumed he was going to officially recognize Kaneka as his son and declare him heir to the throne. Following Toturi's death, Empress Kaede did publicly declare Kaneka to be the son of Toturi, but she did not name him as heir, and he was forced to compete with the rest of the Four Winds for the Throne of Rokugan.

Kaneka is fueled by the desire to prove himself, but he does not seek the Throne out of any selfish desire for glory or recognition from the Empire. He recognizes Tsudao would make a worthy successor to Toturi, but considers his brother Sezaru to be far too unstable, too consumed by matters beyond mortal understanding to make a fit Emperor. Kaneka believes that Naseru, if left unchecked, would easily maneuver around Tsudao and Sezaru, who are no match for him in the ways of court. However, Kaneka despises all he thinks Naseru is – manipulative, deceitful, lacking compassion for others. Indeed, Kaneka seeks the Throne not just for himself but also to make sure it does not fall into the hands of a student of the Steel Chrysanthemum.

Kaneka has strong allies within the Lion Clan, and eventually wins support from the Unicorn, Crab, and Mantis. He is arguably the strongest of the Four Winds militarily, even if Tsudao also has the respect and support of the Lion Clan.

While many view Kaneka as brash and aggressive, he is actually surprisingly thoughtful for someone who has lived such a harsh life, and he often reads famous texts to clear his mind and focus his goals. The Book of Sun Tao is a particular favorite of his, and it is from there he eventually finds the inspiration to declare himself Shogun of the Empire.

Akodo Kaneka, the Bastard

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

Honor: 5.8 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 6.5* *Infamy: 2.0*

School/Rank: Gaze of Sun Tao (ronin path) / Hidden Sword (ronin path) / Akodo Bushi 2 (Insight Rank 5)

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 4, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 3, Horsemanship 3, Hunting (Tracking, Survival) 4, Iaijutsu (Focus) 5, Intimidation 3, Investigation 2, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: War (Crane Tactics) 2, Sincerity (Honesty) 3, Spears 2, Stealth 3

Advantages: Allies (many), Paragon of Courage, Social Position (one of the Four Winds), Tactician, Wary

Disadvantages: Brash, Infamous (former ronin, Imperial Bastard), Sworn Enemy (Hantei Naseru), Unluck (1 rank)

Note*: At the time Kaneka belonged to the Hidden Sword ronin band, it was known by the alternative name of "Hidden Storm." Mechanically, however, their Technique is the same.*



Hantei Naseru

the Anvil

Had things gone differently, Hantei Naseru could have easily have proven to be one of the most cunning and dangerous foes the Empire ever had. In order to end the War of Spirits, Emperor Toturi I agreed to give one of his children into the care of Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum, to take the Hantei name and study under his tutelage. That child was Toturi Naseru. The young Naseru learned much from Hantei XVI, but his loyalties to both Toturi and the Empire never waned; the Steel Chrysanthemum wanted to mold an heir himself to overthrow the Toturi Dynasty from within, but he failed. Instead, Naseru bolstered himself against the Hantei's cruelty and sought to learn everything he could from the former Emperor; he clearly saw the man had much to teach despite his madness and malignance. Instead of becoming angry, hateful, or despairing, Naseru let the experience mold him into a patient and cunning man.

Hantei XVI died under mysterious circumstances soon after his betrothal to the Imperial princess Otomo Hoketuhime. Some rumors claimed she killed him in self-defense when he assaulted her, while others (more sensational) claimed Hoketuhime and Naseru were lovers and Naseru killed the Hantei to save her. Regardless, it was at that time that Naseru lost his left eye, refusing to ever say how he got the injury.

After he returned to the Imperial Capital, Naseru used all he had learned to support his father and the dynasty. He quickly became one of the most respected, feared, and powerful politicians in the Empire, brokering alliances or settling disputes, and his crushing attacks on political rivals earned him the title of "the Anvil." He served as an advisor to Toturi I, for the Emperor recognized his younger son had a special talent for understanding the ebb and flow of court, one even the perceptive Emperor could not match.

In the days leading up to Toturi I's death, Naseru sought to extend his influence and sought allies in all of the clans, both great and minor. Though he was always careful to not give the impression he was seeking power for himself, he nonetheless built a formidable network of connections, since many influential samurai respected his talents as a mediator and political agent. Naseru used his expanding network to keep watch on every faction in the Empire, making sure no one group established too much strength.

After his father's death, Naseru believes he is the most capable to lead the Empire because he is willing to do what the others will not. Kaneka is too much the blunt warrior, Tsudao too obsessively honorable, Sezaru too eccentric to lead; only Naseru is intelligent, flexible, and practical enough to lead Rokugan. This attitude puts him at particular odds with his older half-brother Kaneka, who Naseru spends the majority of the era trying to discredit and sometimes even assassinate.

Hantei Naseru, the Anvil

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

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

Honor: 4.4 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 6.1*

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 4

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 6, Defense 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Courtesy) 5, Forgery 2, Games: Go 3, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation (Control) 5, Investigation (Notice) 5, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 3, Knives 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Underworld 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Stealth 2, Tea Ceremony 2, Temptation 5, War Fan 2

Advantages: Allies (many), Blackmail (many) Dark Paragon (Control), Great Destiny (become Emperor), Perceived Honor (2 points), Shadowed Heart, Social Position (one of the Four Winds)

Disadvantages: Contrary, Dark Secret (death of Hantei XVI), Missing Eye, Sworn Enemy (Akodo Kaneka).

Toturi Sezaru

the Wolf

Toturi Sezaru is certainly the most powerful shugenja in the Empire during the time of the Four Winds; indeed, many would argue he is one of the most powerful shugenja in the entire Empire's history. Whether or not this is true, he is certainly the single most powerful of the Four Winds. The oldest son of Toturi and Kaede, he is born with white-streaked hair – an omen of both great magical power and great destiny. He demonstrates immense magical talent at a very young age. On the day of his gempukku, a pack of Bloodspeakers tried to slay him by summoning and unleashing an immense oni. Sezaru dispatched both the creature and its summoners in the blink of an eye; on that day he took the name of 'The Wolf' – signifying his intention of hunting down and destroying all who might threaten the Empire.

Sezaru had an affinity for Void and Fire magic that was unmatched in the Empire, but he did not let this dull his understanding of the other Elemental kami. He trained heavily with the Isawa family of the Phoenix, but was also among the very few outside the Lion Clan to ever study with the Kitsu sodan-senzo.

While his other siblings felt great sorrow at the death of their father, Sezaru experienced none. Instead, he was filled with a deep hatred and rage at the loss of his father to a Shadowlands beast, and while his siblings sought to claim the Throne Sezaru wanted nothing more than to find those responsible for Toturi's death and bring them to justice. Only after he learns the true identity of the foe – Daigotsu – does he begin to seek the Throne for himself, believing his siblings do not understand their enemy and only he can undertake the responsibility of leading the Empire against the Dark Lord with any chance of success.

Sezaru is not altogether sane. The sheer power of his intense connection to the Elements makes him somewhat disconnected from normal human behavior, and he often comes across as mentally disconnected and somewhat uncaring about the fate of others; when angered, he is apt to unleash sudden volcanic eruptions of rage. He often hears a voice inside his head, speaking to him, and he is not sure if that voice is his own mind, in the mask he wears, or if it is the spirits of the Void speaking to him. During the Four Winds era, Sezaru's mental state for the most part remains fairly stable, with only occasional outbursts of strange behavior. In the later years of his brother Naseru's reign, he becomes increasingly erratic.

Sezaru probably gains the least political support of all the Winds, not surprising given that he spends most of his time seeking the onisu who slew his father. However, he does gain substantial support from the Phoenix, and the Kitsu family of the Lion also favor him. After he restores the croplands in Dragon territory and takes up residence in the reconstructed Kyuden Tonbo, the Dragon Clan offers him considerable support as well.

Toturi Sezaru, the Wolf

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

Honor: 5.5 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 6.0*

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (Void) 4 / Tamori Master of the Mountain 2

Skills: Athletics 1, Calligraphy (Cipher, High Rokugani) 4, Courtier 2, Defense 3, Divination (Astrology) 3, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Kenjutsu 1, Lore: Elements (Fire, Void) 5, Lore: History 3, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Lore: Spirit Realms 3, Lore: Theology 6, Medicine 3, Meditation 4, Sincerity 2, Spellcraft (Spell Research) 7

Spells: Sezaru has access to any spells he might need, and all of his Void and Fire spells are memorized. He also has access to many secret Phoenix and Imperial spells and several personal spells unique to him.

Sezaru's Mask

Sezaru's notorious Kabuki-like mask has no opening for the mouth; it is a pale white with a single bright red sphere on the forehead, symbolizing the rising sun. It was given to Sezaru by the Isawa when he completed his gempukku, and his mother Kaede assisted in its crafting, giving it a strong connection to the Void. The mask was intended to symbolize his power and his station as the child of both the Emperor (the Son of Heaven) and the Oracle of the Void. Sezaru normally only wore it when he intended to go to war – however, this meant he wore it for almost the entire period of the Four Winds, when he considered himself at war with the Shadowlands and Daigotsu. The mask was stolen by Daigotsu's minions and the Dark Lord later used its link to the Void to help him open the gateway to Meido and free Fu Leng. After the defeat of the Dark Lord, the mask was recovered and Sezaru wore it for the remainder of his life.

Mechanically, the Mask of Sezaru's connection to the Void awards its wearer two Free Raises when casting Void spells and causes all his Void Points spent for +1k1 enhancement effects to award an additional +1k0 each.

Kiho: Soul of the Four Winds, Earth Needs No Eyes, The Body is An Anvil, Buoyed by the Kami, Ride the Water Dragon

Advantages: Friend of the Elements (Fire), Great Destiny (Defeat Iuchiban), Ishiken-do, Inheritance (Sezaru's mask), Social Position (one of the Four Winds), Void Versatility (Water).

Disadvantages: Antisocial (2 points), Consumed by Determination, Driven (avenge his father, defend the Empire), Bad Fortune (inner voice), Sworn Enemy (Daigotsu).



Toturi Tsudao

the Sword

Toturi Tsudao was the eldest legitimate child of Toturi and Kaede, and a shining symbol of hope, honor, and tradition for the Empire. Although she was not known for political skills, she was nonetheless the darling of the courts, always the center of attention wherever she went. Some might have been made spoiled and self-centered by such attention, but Tsudao never let praise distort who she was – a selfless, skilled, and compassionate samurai who served the Throne and the Empire with every fiber of her being. Though she cared for her friends and allies (some of whom fell in love with her, although it is not known whether she ever returned anyone's affections), Bushido and honor were her guiding forces and drove every action she took.

Tsudao passed her gempukku flawlessly and received an appointment in the First Imperial Legion. At the time most believed this was an appointment based on station more than merit, but when a force of Yobanjin barbarians sought to attack the Phoenix lands, Tsudao led the First Legion with skill and cunning, saving the province and blocking the Yobanjin raiders from escaping, after which they were jointly crushed by the First Legion and the Phoenix army. This began a career of great glory and honor in which Tsudao earned the absolute respect and loyalty of the samurai under her command. It was this loyalty and dedication which allowed her to successfully lead the First Legion against the mysterious Tsuno. Her success against the Tsuno, including the rescue of her comrade Matsu Domotai from their torture and the defeat of the Dark Daughter Shahai, earns her increasing popularity and respect grows throughout the era of the Four Winds. It is also during this time that the Moshi family gifts her with the sacred Golden Obi of the Sun Goddess, believing her to be spiritually linked to the dead sun goddess Amaterasu.

When Toturi I dies, Tsudao is devastated, but she refuses to falter in public, knowing how many people in the Empire watch her and have faith in her. While no single one of the Four Winds could be said to have the support of the whole Empire, it is clear that Tsudao is admired and respected above all of her siblings, and there are samurai from every single clan who openly pledge their support for Tsudao to succeed her father as Toturi II. Although Tsudao does claim the title of Empress, she is always more concerned with the preservation of the Empire in the face of danger than in her own station or ambition. She makes a point of surrounding herself with capable advisors from many different clans, and while she has strong ties to the Lion Clan (as does her brother Kaneka) she shows no favor to any one clan in particular.

Tsudao's heroic death against the Dark Lord is in keeping with her entire life: an act of courage and honor, carried out without a single thought for herself.

Toturi Tsudao, the Sword

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

Reflexes: 5

Honor: 9.0 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 8.3*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4 / Akodo Tactical Master 1 (Insight Rank 5)

Skills: Battle (Mass Combat) 6, Defense 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: History 4, Sincerity 2, Iaijutsu 5, Artisan (Painting) 2, Athletics 3, Courtier 3, Etiquette 4, Horsemanship 4, Knives 3, Meditation 3, Perform: Storytelling 3, Warfans 3, Lore: Theology (Shintao) 2

Kata: Strength of the Lion, Strength of Purity Style, Striking as Fire, Striking as Water

Advantages: Allies (many), Imperial City Citizen, Inheritance (Golden Obi of the Sun Goddess), Leadership, Paragon of Courage, Social Position (one of the Four Winds, First Legion commander)

Disadvantages: Idealistic

The Onisu: Nightmares of the Eight Clans

Daigotsu was a threat to the Empire not only because of his raw power but also due to his immense cunning and creativity, which set him apart from previous leaders of the Shadowlands. After establishing the City of the Lost, he forged an alliance with the enigmatic Tsuno, who had the ability to travel freely between the various Spirit Realms. It was through his study of Tsuno magic that Daigotsu and his minion Shokansuru were able to enter the Realm of Dreams and there create some of the darkest and most terrible creatures in Rokugan's history – the Onisu.

One of the things that Daigotsu prided himself on was understanding his enemies, and he sought to create creatures that would prey on the weaknesses of the Great Clans, their deepest flaws and greatest vices. In Yume-do he used the Tsuno magic to plumb the dreams of the samurai of Rokugan, and there he found the things they hated the most about their own clans, the things they feared the most, the things that drove their enmity for the other clans. And there the Onisu were born, merging the stuff of dreams with the demonic essence of Jigoku's oni.

Each Onisu represented one of the Great Clans, represented what they feared or hated most about themselves or others' misconceptions of themselves. The Onisu came to be referred to as the 'Nightmares of the Great Clans' because they fed on the vices and weaknesses of each clan, growing stronger with nearly every samurai they encountered.

Fushin, the Onisu who slew Toturi, represented Betrayal, a vice many associated with the Scorpion despite their unwavering dedication to loyalty. Kyofu represented Fear, a trait the Crab Clan loathed within its own ranks.

Kanashimi, the Onisu of Regret, plagued the Dragon, since their ability to understand the future yet often do nothing about it led many of them into regret over actions not taken. Muchitsujo, the Onisu of Chaos, hunted the Unicorn Clan, for while they were a clan that often wandered the world they were not without order or law... despite the misconceptions of other clans. Nikushimi, the Onisu of Hatred, led the assaults against the Lion provinces, for the Lion were a proud clan and their pride often led them to hold grudges for far too long. Their feud with the Crane over the centuries only fueled the anger and hatred in their hearts, which in turn empowered Nikushimi. The Mantis Clan focused obsessively on acquiring wealth to substitute for their lack of numbers, and this greed fuled the Onisu of Larceny, Settozai. Yokubo, the Onisu of Desire, gathered strength from the Crane Clan, as the pursuit of perfection often left the Crane desiring what they could not have. Finally, arguably the most powerful of the Onisu was Hakai, the Onisu of Death, antithesis of the peaceful Phoenix.

The Onisu were quite powerful even by the standards of Shadowlands creatures, and there were not many who could confront them. Even Sezaru the Wolf had to flee the first time he faced one of the creatures, since his intense desire for revenge fed its power and made it far more than a match for him. The Onisu preyed not just on the bodies but also the minds and souls of the samurai they fought, and many samurai fell before they were finally all defeated shortly prior to the Four Winds' march into the Shadowlands.

Despite their power and lethality, the Onisu were not without their weaknesses. When they confronted a noble soul who embodied the opposite of the sins and vices they fed upon, they grew weak and even a modestly skilled samurai could defeat them. In one instance, a single warrior called Bayushi Kwanchai was actually able to defeat two of the creatures.

While the Onisu were all ultimately defeated during the Four Winds Era, they are somewhat like normal oni in that they are not truly creatures of the mortal realm and have the ability to return to physical existence in a later time. While few samurai would ever admit it, the flaws and misconceptions which empowered the Onisu will always be present, and thus the creatures will always have the potential to return if Daigotsu or some other powerful sorcerer chooses to summon them again. Indeed, the ascension of Daigotsu to the post of Lord of Jigoku itself at the end of the Destroyer War (see Chapter 11) would suggest that the eventual return of the Onisu is an inevitability.

The Cursed Blade Chukandomo

During the Four Winds Era, Crane Clan Champion Doji Kurohito carries an ancient katana gifted to him by his mother. This is the sword Chukandomo, bearer of a powerful curse, whose fate becomes deeply entwined with both Kurohito's own destiny and that of both the Crane and the Lion Clans.

Chukandomo was not always a cursed blade – in fact, it was originally forged with nothing but good in mind. Its original creators were Doji Yasurugi and Kaiu himself; it was the third of Yasurugi's five great swords, and was meant to be given to the Lion Clan to help mend the rift created by the animosity between Kakita and Matsu. However, the blade never made its journey to the Lion Clan, and was locked away deep in the vaults of Kyuden Doji where many



of the Crane Clan's treasures and artifacts were kept. This inability to fulfill its purpose twisted Chukandomo into a cursed relic that destroyed its later wielders.

Chukandomo was still a Crane masterpiece, even if the spirits within it were cursed, and it placed high demands upon anyone who touched it. Honorable actions, honorable thought, and adherence to Bushido were paramount for the blade, and those who could not meet its impossible standards were inevitably driven to madness, disaster, and death. Over its long and murky history many samurai found wanting were killed, and each time their souls were consumed by the blade to join the countless others who had fallen to the sword.

On the day of Doji Kurohito's birth, the sword appeared on the shores of Kyuden Doji. His mother kept the blade and eventually gifted him with the magnificent sword on his gempukku. Kurohito had a high sense of honor, and acted in a manner the blade respected. In return, it helped him to achieve great things, and he seemed destined to be one of the greatest Crane Champions in history.

Salvation came when Kurohito's cousin Doji Yasuyo received a vision from the founder of the Crane Clan, Lady Doji herself. At Doji's command, Yasuyo sought out the ancient Kenku sensei named Kozue, who knew the truth of the cursed weapon and eventually shared it once Yasuyo proved herself a worthy student.

When Yasuto warned Kurohito of the blade's curse, he sought to resolve the hatred of the spirits within the blade by ending the long and bitter feud between the Lion and Crane. When he relinquished control of the city of Toshi Ranbo to the Lion, Chukandomo unleashed the souls of all those it had consumed to try to slay Kurohito and force him to join their numbers. However, Kozue had gifted Yasuyo with Naishi, another of Doji Yasuragi's legendary blades and the sister-sword to Chukandomo. She used it to call forth the honorable spirits of past Crane heroes to drive back the cursed souls of Chukandomo. This finally purified the blade, and Kurohito finally delivered it to the Lion and thereby cemented an end to the millennia-long hostilities between Crane and Lion. The sword remained in the Lion Clan through the end of the Age of Exploration, when it was carried by Matsu Benika, owner of the Jade Hand.

Chukandomo is a powerful relic and a formidable weapon in the hands of someone worthy enough to wield it. Mechanically, Chukandomo as a 4k3 katana that grants its wielder +1k1 to Kenjutsu Skill rolls for every Honor Rank he has above 6. Like most nemuranai, it can harm Invulnerable foes. Finally, if the GM is using the optional Honor Roll rule, the bearer of Chukandomo may make one additional Honor Roll per session.

Prior to its purification, Chukandomo will never be satisfied by any wielder's honor or capabilities, and will gradually drive its owner to deeds of greater and greater ambition and glory. In game terms, the wielder of Chukandomo will eventually become Driven and Brash as the sword pushes him toward more and more extravagant goals. Eventually and inevitably this will end in failure and defeat – at which point the sword loses all its magical properties, becoming a mundane katana with a damage rating of 1k1. This almost certainly leads to the wielder's death, and the cursed sword consumes the souls of all those who die while possessing it.

Once Chukandomo has been purified, it no longer drives its wielder to doom, but it still has high standards for anyone who presumes too use it. Anyone with an Honor Rank of 3 or lower cannot draw the blade from its saya at all. Anyone who does wield Chukandomo but willingly commits a dishonorable act will find the blade immediately loses all magical properties and becomes a 1k1 katana as above. If the wielder continues to commit dishonorable acts the sword will eventually simply vanish, returning to the Matsu family to await a more honorable samurai to carry it.

The Shadowed Tower

Daigotsu and his Shadowlands armies are not the only enemies Rokugan faces in the time of the Four Winds. Although most samurai do not realize it, there is also a conspiracy against the Throne within the heart of Rokugan itself, and it originates in the clan most dedicated to loyalty above all else: the Scorpion.

The Shadowed Tower is a small and secretive organization that believes the only proper way for the Scorpion to serve the Empire is by doing whatever they believe is necessary and using whatever means are most effective. They are led by Bayushi Atsuki, once a leader of the Gozoku conspiracy, who returned to the world of the living at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate. He proved to be even more ruthless and ambitious in his second life than in his first. Atsuki preyed on the suspicions of many Scorpion toward their leader, Bayushi Yojiro, the so-called "Honest Scorpion." Far too many Scorpion feared such a man was unfit to lead the Clan of Secrets, despite his many accomplishments. Under the alias of Shosuro Furuyari, Atsuki gathered these individuals and forged them into a sinister conspiracy, promising he would lead the Scorpion Clan back to its "rightful place" as the secret masters of the Empire. Under his leadership they quickly began to embrace the most terrible of methods, including maho and gaijin magic, to further their goals. Some among their ranks, notably a man named Bayushi Ogura, even learn the Bloodspeaker Technique, which allows maho to be cast without gaining the Taint.

The name "Shadowed Tower" was specifically meant to mislead and deceive those who might seek out the group.

There was no central 'tower' or other central headquarters for the conspiracy, but instead a number of smaller locations, often deceptively ordinary in nature, avoiding the notice of all but the most keen samurai. If there could be said to be a central base of operations for the group, it was Ryoko Owari, where Atsuki himself resided. Secrecy was vital not only for protecting the organization but also because their methods resulted in many of their members acquiring the Taint. Those who dealt with maho were assigned yojimbo known as "Witnesses" whose duty was to kill their charges if they became too careless or showed too much evidence of the Taint.

One of the Tower's more effective strategems was the development of a sinister drug known as Shadowed Powder, a tasteless and odorless dust which could dissolve without trace into sake, soup, or even water. Ingesting the powder weakened the victim's health and clouded his mind, making him easy to manipulate (or murder). In game terms, each dose of Shadowed Powder creates a +5 TN penalty to any and all rolls using Willpower or the Earth Ring. The effects last four hours, and multiple doses produce a cumulative effect.

A notable achievement of the Tower was the "purifying" of the Steel Throne after it was recovered from Daigotsu. Scorpion members of the Tower promised to cleanse the Taint from the Throne, and they were as good as their word – they used maho rituals to force the Taint out of the Throne and into a group of unwilling peasants. Following this, they placed subtle but powerful wards and enchantments upon the Throne, allowing them to see and hear everything that happened around it. This gave the Shadowed Tower an immense advantage, though the enchantments were eventually superseded by more powerful spells from Sezaru a few years after the Four Winds era.

Shortly after the return of the Steel Throne, Bayushi Yojiro first became aware of the existence of the Shadowed Tower. He viewed it as a terrible threat to the Empire and decided to step down as Clan Champion, appointing Bayushi Sunetra his replacement. This allowed Yojiro to operate from the shadows against Atsuki while Sunetra moved against him more openly. The strategy worked, though it cost many Scorpion lives on both sides.

It was Sunetra, however, who finally tracked Bayushi Atsuki to his headquarters in Ryoko Owari and brought the full force of the Scorpion Clan to bear against the organization. Atsuki had prior warning of the assault, thanks to his many sources in the clan, and was able to escape and pursue further schemes in the future. However, the threat of the Shadowed Tower itself was laid to rest once and for all. The Scorpion Clan made sure none outside their own ranks were ever aware of the problem, and within a few years it was nothing more than a vague whisper even within the clan.



New Mechanics

New Ronin Path: The Unbroken

The Unbroken are among the most famous and legendary of ronin bands, but also one of the smallest and most transient. The band has formed and collapsed many times over the Empire's history, re-organizing whenever a Tainted wave-man manages to unearth the secrets of its technique. The origins of the Unbroken Technique are mysterious; some claim they learned their methods from studying the Naga or perhaps the Ratlings, while others claim it was originally devised by some legendary and long-forgotten ronin in the Empire's early history. Whatever the case, the Unbroken Technique is both singularly powerful and extremely dangerous: it can purge the Taint from one's body – perhaps the only way to completely purge the Taint short of outright divine intervention. However, it does so through the practitioner successfully defeating powerful Shadowlands creatures. Needless to say, one is more likely to die in the pursuit of this goal than to succeed at it.

The Unbroken traditionally work as a unified group, each willing to sacrifice himself for the others. Only a handful have ever been cured of the Taint, and the entire band has never been larger than thirty individuals. Supposedly, the mystical Technique which they use shortens their lifespan, allowing them to survive for only a single year – unless they can purge their Taint before that time expires. All members of the group wear masks, both to conceal their identity and to reinforce the principle that they are a group that stands or dies together.

New Ronin Path: The Unbroken [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Requirements:** Lore: Shadowlands 3
- **Special:** Must have at least one Rank of Taint and find a way to learn the Unbroken Technique.

Technique: The Unbroken

The students of the Unbroken learn to set the impurity within themselves against the impurity of their foes. When you are fighting a Shadowlands creature or one of the Lost, you may add your Taint Rank in unkept dice to your attack rolls. Each time you do this you gain three additional Point of Taint. However, any time you single-handedly kill a Shadowlands creature or one of the Lost, you may spend a Void Point to permanently lose one Point of Taint.

If you ever single-handedly kill an extremely powerful Shadowlands foe, you may spend a Void Point as a Free Action to make a Contested Earth roll against the Earth of the foe you have slain. With a success, you immediately purge all the Taint from your body – and thereafter lose the ability to perform this Technique.

Ultimately, it is the GM's discretion whether a particular foe is powerful enough to trigger the more potent aspects of the Unbroken Technique. Examples of creatures which could trigger the effect include major oni, any of the Onisu, or a Lost of at least two Insight Ranks higher.

New Item: The Tears of Lady Doji

It is said that when Lady Doji wept, she wept tears of pure incorruptible jade. These are the items that Four Winds took with them into the Shadowlands.

Anyone bearing one of the Four Tears of Lady Doji is immune to the effects of the Shadowlands Taint or from acquiring Shadow Corruption. The Tears are so powerful, in fact, that if someone chose to willing embrace the Taint or to practice the art of maho, they would find the effects would no occur – they would not gain the benefits of the Taint, nor the corruption, and the spells they tried to cast using maho simply would not occur, as the Tears are powerful enough to stop even willing infection by the Taint or the Lying Darkness. The Tears can in theory be destroyed, though it would take extraordinary force upon the items themselves.

New Creatures: The Onisu

The Onisu are a merging of demonic oni with the baku, the spirits of Yume-do. In the canonical history of Rokugan, only Daigotsu and Shokansuru have the ability to summon them; these two individuals also have the ability to re-summon an Onisu after it has been destroyed, although this cannot be done more than once per month. It is possible that other powerful maho-tsukai in earlier eras of history might also have been able to create the Onisu, and in later periods there is always the possibility that Daigotsu will share his secrets with his followers or successors, allowing the Onisu to walk the surface of Ningen-do once more.

Fushin, Nightmare of the Scorpion

The Onisu of Betrayal is a massive bipedal creature, eight feet tall, with a hide resembling overlapping plates of bright red armor. It has four arms, each wielding a gigantic katana, and is quite skilled in kenjutsu. It is the most notorious of the Onisu, since it was the one which killed Emperor Toturi I. It is a vain and boastful creature, and given its nature as feeding on Betrayal, an untrustworthy – even Daigotsu had to watch it closely lest it turn on him.

After perishing twice in the Dark Lord's service, Fushin did indeed turn on him. It became the first Onisu to align itself with the Oni Lord known as the Maw.

Fushin, Nightmare of the Scorpion

Air: 8	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 5
Initiative: 10k8			*Armor TN: 50*
Attack: Sword 10k5 (see below)			*Damage: Sword 8k3*
Reduction: 15 (5 against jade, crystal, and obsidian)			*Wounds: 36: +5; 72: +10; 108: +15; 144: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Defense 5, Intimidation 5, Kenjutsu 8, Sincerity (Deceit) 5

Special Abilities:

Fear 5

Huge

Multiple Attacks: Fushin may make his Sword attack four times per Round.

Hakai, Nightmare of the Phoenix

The Onisu of Death, which feeds on mortals' fear of their own mortality, appears as a spindly humanoid with skinny arms and legs. It has a skull-like head adorned with long horns, and often wears dark crimson robes bearing its personal mon: a stylized skill within a circular pattern. It has the ability to snuff out life with a mere touch, and never allows anything to live within its presence – not even plants or grass. It also has the ability to foresee the cruelest and most terrible potential deaths of any mortals it encounters, and sadistically shares this information with its victims in order to demoralize them.

Hakai was among the most destructive of the Onisu and wrecked particular havoc on the lands of the Phoenix, although it was eventually driven away by the combined efforts of Shiba Aikune and Shiba Mirabu. It fought at Daigotsu's side against the Four Winds at the Temple of the Ninth Kami, but afterward departed the City of the Lost to join the power struggles between the various Oni Lords – serving Akuma no Oni. It was slain several years later and none who could re-summon it were willing to do so.

Hakai, Nightmare of the Phoenix

Air: 5	Earth: 5	Fire: 5	Water: 5
Initiative: 8k5			*Armor TN: 30*
Attack: Claw 9k5 (Simple)			*Damage: Claw 5k3*
Reduction: 10 (reduced to 0 by jade, crystal, or obsidian)			*Wounds: 36: +5; 72: +10; 108: +15; 144: Dead*

Taint Rank: 9

Skills: Hunting 4, Stealth 6

Special Abilities:

Death Sight: Hakai has the ability to foresee the worst potential death in a mortal's future. Pronouncing this doom to a victim is a Fear 8 effect, and at the GM's discretion may make it more likely for this future death to actually come to pass.

Death Touch: Once per skirmish, Hakai's claw attack will automatically kill any one target of Insight Rank 1. Any other person who is targeted by the Death Touch will suffer an additional +2k2 damage over and above his normal claw damage.

Fear 4

Spells: Hakai may cast maho spells as though he is Insight Rank 5, and knows all maho spells in the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook. He always prefers to power his spells with the blood of others rather than his own.

Swift 3 (when flying)

Onisu Qualities

While each Onisu has specific unique qualities (as described in their individual entries in this chapter), they all share certain aspects in common, listed here.

Draw Upon Weakness – The Onisu feed on moral weaknesses, a specific weakness for each one. Whenever a person within a hundred feet of an Onisu commits an action or has thoughts that reflect the weakness that Onisu feeds on, one of the Onisu's Traits (chosen by the GM, but usually associated with the type of weakness being exhibited – an Air Trait for emotional weakness, an Earth Trait for lack of willpower, etc) increases by 1 Rank for one month. The Onisu will also grow slightly in size, visually signifying what has happened. An Onisu can grow enormously in power by feeding on mortal sins in this manner, but its Traits cannot rise to higher than double their original Rank.

Vulnerability to Honor – Just as the Onisu grow strong from the sins and weaknesses of others, they are weakened when exposed to paragons of virtue. Whenever a person within a hundred feet acts in a way to reject the sinful weaknesses which an Onisu feeds upon, one of the Onisu's Traits (again chosen at GM's discretion) is reduced by 1 Rank for one week. An Onisu's Traits cannot be lowered below 1 by this effect.

Spirit Portal Sense – An Onisu can sense passages to the realms of Jigoku and Yume-do, and can pass through such portals as a Complex Action. Onisu in either of these spirit realms can pass into Ningen-do as a Simple Action.

Special Invulnerability – Onisu are normally Invulnerable in the standard manner. However, weapons dipped in the waters of Yume-do ignore their Invulnerability. Also, an Onisu loses its Invulnerability completely while it is suffering from at least two Trait penalties due to others' honorable actions (as per the Vulnerability to Honor ability).

Kanashimi, the Nightmare of the Dragon

The Onisu of Regret is one of the more dangerous of these demons due to its association with one of the Three Sins that plague the minds and souls of samurai. It appears as a large woman covered in armor made from blackened human flesh; the armor plates are sculpted to resemble tormented faces. It carries a daisho and fights equally well with swords or bare hands, often mocking its opponents by disarming them and reducing them to helplessness. Given the chance it will capture its foes and torture them for days or weeks before finally killing them.

Kanashimi did not appear in Rokugan as often as the other Onisu, in part because it preferred to hunt individual targets rather than going on large-scale rampages like some of its brethren. After Daigotsu fell, it joined Fushin in service to the Maw. A few years later, it encountered Isawa Sezaru, who destroyed it.

Kanashimi, the Nightmare of the Dragon

Air: 3	Earth: 6	Fire: 6	Water: 4
Reflexes: 6			Strength: 8
Initiative: 9k6			*Armor TN: 40*
Attack: Sword 10k7 (Simple), Claw 10k6 (Simple)		*Damage: Sword 10k2, Claw 9k1*	
Reduction: 7 (0 against jade, crystal, or obsidian)			*Wounds: 36: +5; 72: +10; 108: +15; 144: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Defense 5, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 6

Special Abilities:

Fear 5

Sow Regret: Kanashimi may speak to a mortal and attempt to sow regret in their soul as a Complex Action. This is a Contested Willpower roll, and the target suffers a TN penalty equal to twice the Experience Point value of any Social Disadvantages that reflect regrets (GM's discretion). If the victim fails the Willpower roll, for the duration of the encounter with Kanashimi he cannot make Raises or spend Void Points.

Kyofu, Nightmare of the Crab

The Onisu of Fear became one of the most notorious of the Onisu due to its connection to the Crab Champion, Hida Kuroda. Initially, it appeared as a giant figure completely covered in heavy armor, superficially resembling the Armor of the Shadow Warrior. After the Onisu perished with Hida Kuroda during Daigotsu's initial assault on the Wall, the Dark Lord fused Kuroda's body into the Onisu's essence, creating a new and more powerful version of the Nightmare of the Crab. Kyofu assumed a more human-like form, a huge and bestial perversion of Kuroda's real body, armed with a massive spiked club. The very presence of this creature inspired terror in the ranks of the Crab and even Hida Kuon nearly gave into despair after his first encounter with it.



As noted in the timeline presented earlier in this chapter, Kyofu's encounter with the Fortune of Death, Emma-O, resulted in Kuroda regaining some degree of control and self-will over the spirit of the Onisu with which he was merged. Although the Onisu continued to serve Daigotsu for some time afterward (even saving him from Iuchiban when the Bloodspeaker seized control of the City of the Lost), over time Kuroda's soul gradually came to exert more and more control, finally completely purging the demonic spirit (and in the process becoming far more human in appearance). Eventually, several years after the Four Winds era, he rejoined the Crab Clan and became the commander of the Damned Berserkers. He died in the year 1168 in battle against the forces of Kyoso no Oni.

Kyofu, Nightmare of the Crab

Air: 3	Earth: 6	Fire: 3	Water: 4
Reflexes: 6		Agility: 4	Strength: 6
Initiative: 10k6			*Armor TN: 45*
Attack: Club 10k5 (Simple)			*Damage: 10k3*
Reduction: 15 (reduced to 10 against jade, crystal, or obsidian)			*Wounds: 40: +5; 80: +10; 120: +15; 160: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Battle 5, Defense 5, Heavy Weapon 10

Special Abilities:

Fear 8 (10 against Crab)

Heightened Fear: As a Complex Action, Kyofu may inflict his Fear effect against up to three specific targets within his sight.

Huge

Wounding Club: Anyone struck by Kyofu's monstrous spiked club will continue losing 1 Wound per Round (cumulative for each hit) until magically healed.

Muchitsujo, Nightmare of the Unicorn

The Onisu of Chaos was a creature of raw destructive power which spread violence and chaos wherever it went. Its physical form stood twelve feet tall and resembled a horrifying cross between a giant insect and a human skeleton, but despite its size it moved with blurring, impossible speed. Its body was covered with overlapping bone plates which constantly rubbed against each other when it moved, creating a maddening clicking noise that often drove its foes literally insane. Moreover, the Onisu had a gift for spotting its enemies' weaknesses with merely a glance, and took horrible delight in striking at those weak points with its jagged claws, often crippling its foes and then toying with them for extended periods.

Muchitsujo died twice in Daigotsu's service, perishing the second time during the Four Winds' assault on the City of the Lost. After Daigotsu was defeated, it joined some of the other Onisu in serving the Maw. Its final fate is unknown.

Muchitsujo, Nightmare of the Unicorn

Air: 4	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 8
Initiative: 8k4			*Armor TN: 35*
Attack: Claw 9k4 (Simple)			*Damage: Claw 10k2*
Reduction: 10 (5 against jade, crystal, and obsidian)			*Wounds: 36: +5; 72: +10; 108: +15; 144: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Defense 6

Special Abilities:

Exploit Weakness: Muchitsujo's claw attacks may ignore the effects of armor on its opponents' Armor TN.

Huge

Sow Confusion: Those who can hear the hideous clattering of Muchitsujo's armored plates are affected as though by a Fear 5 effect at the start of their Turn each Round; however, if they fail to resist the Fear, they are maddened and their behavior falls under the control of the GM until their next Turn.

Swift 6





Nikushimi, Nightmare of the Lion

The Onisu of Hatred outwardly resembled a Tsuno warrior, a fitting shape given both its association with Hatred and its role as Nightmare of the Lion Clan. It stood sixteen feet tall, far larger than any Tsuno, and disdained weapons of any kind, preferring to tears its enemies apart with its claws and teeth. Consumed as it was by hatred, Nikushimi constantly sought battle and violence, and even when it was not in combat it constantly fidgeted and snarled and panted, looking toward its next battle. It usually traveled with a Tsuno war-pack and its favored enemies were, of course, the Lion.

Nikushimi was the first Onisu which Daigotsu created, and its early versions were so violent that even the Dark Lord could not control them. Only after it was slain and remade several times did this Onisu finally become a useful servant to the Dark Lord. Its missions were generally of the most simple and destructive sort.

Like several of the other Onisu, Nikushimi fell into the service of the Maw after Daigotsu was defeated

Nikushimi, Nightmare of the Lion

Air: 4	Earth: 5	Fire: 4	Water: 5
Reflexes: 5		Agility: 6	
Initiative: 10k5			*Armor TN: 35*
Attack: Claws 10k7 (Simple), Bite 10k8 (Complex)			*Damage: Claws 8k3, Bite 9k4*
Reduction: 10 (5 against jade, crystal, and obsidian)			*Wounds: 36: +5; 72: +10; 108: +15; 144: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Hunting 6

Special Abilities:

Fear 4

Fearful Strike: Anyone struck by Nikushimi's claw attacks suffers a Fear 6 effect.

Huge

Settozai, Nightmare of the Mantis

The Onisu of Larceny was not as rawly powerful as the other Onisu, instead relying on deceit and cunning to corrupt others into performing its tasks. It stood only six feet tall, and bore a superficial resemblance the insect of the clan it reflected – the praying mantis. Its body was covered with a thick green carapace, horns sprouted from its head, and spines extended from its limbs and back. Although it could attack with both its insectile claws and its bare hands, its strongest weapon was its ability to implant suggestions in the minds of those around it, causing their material desires to spin out of control.

Settozai was one of the less successful of the Onisu and was defeated several times. At the climax of the Mantis Clan civil war, it tried to murder both Yoritomo Kitao and Yoritomo Kumiko, but Kumiko instead slew it and in the process purged her own Taint.

After the defeat of Daigotsu, Seettozai joined several other Onisu in serving the Maw.

Settozai, Nightmare of the Mantis

Air: 4	Earth: 5	Fire: 5	Water: 5
Reflexes: 5		Intelligence: 8	
Initiative: 8k4			*Armor TN: 35*
Attack: Mantis Claws 10k5 (see below), Hands 10k5 (Simple)			*Damage: Mantis Claws 7k3, Hands 6k1*
Reduction: 7 (0 against jade, crystal, and obsidian)			*Wounds: 36: +5; 72: +10; 108: +15; 144: Dead*

Taint Rank: 8

Skills: Defense 4, Temptation 5

Special Abilities:

Fear 3

Multiple Attacks: Settozai may make its Mantis Claw attack up to four times per Round.

Sow Greed: As a Complex Action, Settozai may attempt to cause a mortal within his sight to succumb to inner greed and selfishness. This is a Contested Willpower roll between the Onisu and its target; if the target already suffers from an appropriate Disadvantage (such as Driven or Fascination) Settozai gains two Free Raises on the roll. If the target fails the roll, he will succumb to his petty desires for the next 24 hours, pursuing them above all else and becoming violent if he is thwarted from them.



Yokubo, Nightmare of the Crane

The Onisu of Desire was one of the strongest of its kind, hardly surprising given how many samurai fall to the Sin of Desire in Rokugan. It resembled a large heavily-armored man with vulture-like wings sprouting from its back, and favored aerial hit-and-run attacks over the more straightforward bloodshed favored by many of the other Onisu. It also enjoyed using its supernatural powers to strip away mortals' resistance to their own desires, causing them to forsake honor and duty.

Yokubo came close to defeating Toturi Sezaru himself, whose desire to avenge his father's death made him vulnerable to the creature, and it did succeed in stealing Sezaru's mask. Although it was later defeated by a Crane warrior named Daidoji Megumi, its Tainted blood seeped into her flesh and corrupted her. Yokubo returned to the living world to fight at Daigotsu's side against the Four Winds, and later served the Maw.

Yokubo, Nightmare of the Crane

Air: 5 **Earth:** 4 **Fire:** 6 **Water:** 4

Agility: 8

Initiative: 9k5 *Armor TN:* 40

Attack: Claws 10k8 (Simple) *Damage:* Claws 6k3

Reduction: 8 (0 against jade, crystal, or obsidian) *Wounds:* 40: +5; 80: +10; 120: +15; 160: Dead

Taint Rank: 9

Skills: Defense 4, Temptation 6

Special Abilities:

Fear 4

Sow Desire: As a Complex Action, Yokubo may attempt to cause a mortal within his sight to succumb to inner desires. This is a Contested Willpower roll between the Onisu and its target; if the target already suffers from an appropriate Disadvantage (such as True Love or Lechery) Yokubo gains two Free Raises on the roll. If the target fails the roll, he will succumb to his lusts for the next 24 hours, pursuing them above all else and becoming violent if he is thwarted from them.

Swift 4 (when flying)




勇功昌

The Shadowed Throne

Kitsu Manobu comes awake with a start, sweat beading his forehead. He shivers uncontrollably for a moment, clutching himself as though to squeeze out the memories of the dreams. Then he rises carefully, lighting a candle and shuffling through night-darkened corridors to the Hall of Ancestors.

The song of the ancestors seems remote, almost thin, but Manobu tells himself that is merely his own lingering unease. He kneels in seiza, murmuring prayers and sutras to himself as he tries to clear his mind and ease his soul.

"Trouble sleeping, my student?"

Manobu gulps and presses his forehead to the cool wooden floor. "Merely a few dreams, sensei-sama. I will return to rest once I have meditated."

Kitsu Akiko kneels opposite the young man, her graying hair glowing a faint reddish-silver tone in the candlelight. For a moment her eyes seem to shine green, like a cat reflecting the light. "I do not think a mere few dreams would have my prize student here in the Hall of Ancestors after midnight. Speak, boy."

Manobu is silent for a time. He stares into the candle, letting the yellow light blur everything around him. Finally he murmurs, "It seemed so real. Not like other dreams."

"As though you gazed upon the living, waking world."

He nods and then lifts his gaze from the candle, staring at her in shock. "How do you know?"

The old woman smiles. "Normally we would not speak of such things until you were older, boy, and ready to begin learning the ways of the Spirit Realms. But it seems you have hurried on ahead of us again, as you are prone to do."

The boy's face is suddenly flushed and burning with embarassment. "I am sorry," he stammers. "I did not mean to be disobedient, I only... I..."

"Hush, boy. Keep your On.*" The sensei stares past him at the statues which line the hall, her head slightly cocked as though she is listening to them even know. "You have done nothing wrong, merely stumbled into a place you were not prepared for." Her eyes refocus on his, suddenly intent. "Yume-do. The Realm of Dreams. All mortals visit it in their sleep, but those with our gifts can do more. We can find... worlds, entire worlds within that place. Dreams so vast and infinite that they are not truly dreams at all."*

"Other worlds?" Manobu whispers. "What I saw... it was truly real? Another Ningen-do, as true as ours?"

"Yes, boy, it was real... or close enough to make no difference, in truth." Akiko rests her chin on one hand, regarding him with a smile. "A remarkable feat, to find one of them so young, and with no training. We must train you to exert greater control on your trips to Yume-Do – you would not wish to become trapped in one of those other worlds."

"No, never!" Manobu agreed fervently, his face blanching.

"No indeed. So, my student, which world did you see?"

The Kitsu boy frowns, furrowing his brow. "It was... it was like our world, yet not. The Toturi Dynasty still ruled, but all was changed. The Dark Lord was dead, but somehow things were terrible nonetheless, and the Empress was threatened by her brother..."

The old woman raises her eyebrows. "A new world? We have not encountered this one before." She leans forward, suddenly intent. "Tell me everything."

History of a Different Shade

In the year 1160, the children of Toturi gathered and entered the Shadowlands to face the Dark Lord Daigotsu, the man who had killed their father, brought ruin to Otosan Uchi, and spread chaos and destruction throughout the Empire and even into the Heavens themselves. At the climax of the battle, Toturi Tsudao sacrificed herself to kill the Dark Lord and protect her siblings. With her death, her brother Hantei Naseru took the throne as Emperor Toturi III, giving up the Hantei name and acknowledging Tsudao as his rightful predecessor.

While no one would openly speak ill of the reign of Toturi III, no one can deny it was a troubled time in Rokugani history. His time on the Steel Throne saw the return of both Daigotsu and the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban, and he continually found himself at odds with his brother Kaneka, the Shogun. The heir of shinsei, Rosoku, brought enlightenment to Rokugan, only to be assassinated by Bloodspeakers in the Imperial Palace itself. Ultimately, Toturi III sacrificed himself in the Shadowlands for a cause many did not understand, leading to further disarray and eventually to the end of the Toturi Dynasty and the emergence of the Celestially-endorsed Iweko Dynasty.

During her life, many saw Toturi Tsudao as a beacon of honor; some in the Moshi even believed her to be Amaterasu reborn. In the years after her death, blood would literally rain down on the Empire, two of the Empire's greatest armies would go to war with each other (drawing in a third to try to enforce peace), Iuchiban's followers threatened areas all across the Empire in their master's name, and the hope of Enlightenment seemed all but lost. Later on the Unicorn Khan Moto Chagatai tried to seize an empty Throne, the madman Kokujin incited peasant unrest and rebellion, and even Lord Sun and Lady Moon were cast from the Heavens, replaced as they had replaced their predecessors. During these times of turmoil and strife, more than one Rokugani wondered if things would had been different under the reign of an Empress Tsudao. In their darkest moments they wished for her light to show the way.



The brightest of lights, however, can cast the deepest of shadows.

Every wish made, every wistful dream, exists within the realms of reality. These are shades of the true world, imitations of Ningen-do and the other realms, but they seem real enough to those who experience them. But wishes are not always fulfilled as expected, and dreams rarely fulfill the dreamer's hopes. In one of these dreams, Toturi Tsudao survived the battle against Daigotsu; it was Kaneka who sacrificed himself, protecting the family he had never been a part of. Thus began the true reign of Toturi II, the Glorious Emperor... whose reign would also become known as the era of the Shadowed Throne.

This chapter, like several others in this book, presents an alternate history of the Emerald Empire: the hopes and fears of an unknown dreamer. The events in the era of the Shadowed Throne never happened in the canon history of Rokugan, though many things do seem familiar in the way that dreams may seem familiar and strange at the same time. This is a world of shadows, where great heroes can succumb to temptations they were never meant to face. A world that asks the question: would a better person on the Throne have meant a better Empire... or a worse one?

Year 1160: The Shadow of the Empress

The children of Toturi return to the Empire victorious and word of Daigtosu's defeat and Kaneka's sacrifice spreads quickly once they reach Kyuden Seppun. The three surviving Winds present themselves to the Steel Throne where their mother, Toturi Kaede, waits. There are whispers all around them, whispers of Kaneka's courage, of Tsudao's valor and Sezaru's power. Hantei Naseru hears all of these, but few about himself. None know of his subtle but vital contribution to the battle, of how he had convinced a dark god to lose faith in his greatest servant. It was Naseru who truly defeated Daigotsu, with words. His brother and sister know the truth, of course, but as he studies the Imperial Court he knows they are telling a different tale. He knows who their hero is.

When Kaede asks the siblings who should take the Throne, Naseru steps forward. He voices his support of his sister and suggests Tsudao's claim be recognized. Tsudao accepts the recommendation graciously, and Sezaru offers no argument. Kaede acknowledges her daughter as the true Emperor and then vanishes, never to be seen again by mortal eyes.

Naseru and Sezaru are the first to bow before their sister as the true reign of Toturi II begins. At his brother's suggestion, Sezaru declares he will follow tradition and give up the Toturi name. Unexpectedly, he chooses to join the Tonbo family and become a member of the Dragonfly. He has already made his home within the minor clan's holdings and wishes to recognize their support. For his part, Naseru decides to continue to using the Hantei name, honoring past promises and a fallen dynasty. He also suggests their fallen brother, Kaneka, should be remembered by recognizing his claim to be Shogun. Toturi II agrees, declaring a new Shogun will be named in due time.

The Shadows Grow

With a new Empress on the Throne, Rokugan begins to recover from its recent conflicts. The Lion and Crane have already offered Toshi Ranbo as a new capital to replace the fallem Otosan Uchi. Toturi II agrees reluctantly, only after Naseru advises her that efforts to reclaim the old capital can continue. Naseru suggests Sezaru would be ideally suited to assess the full effects of the Shadowlands attack and determine what will be necessary to repair the damage.

Toturi II married Doji Tanitsu, a match arranged by Kakita Nanami. It was a happy pairing, and many saw it as a sign of hope and prosperity for the Empire as a whole. As the new Imperial Consort, Tanitsu resigned from his position as Imperial Advisor, and Naseru took the office in his place. He worked with the Imperial Chancellor, Bayushi Kaukatsu, to rebuild the Imperial Court, calling on each clan to send their best diplomats to represent their interests and, of course, offering his own suggestions and personal recommendations.

After a time of consideration and discussion with her advisors, Toturi II appoints her loyal Shireikan, Bayushi Paneki, as the new Shogun, transferring a portion of the Imperial Legions into his command. Both the Lion and the Unicorn voice objections to this selection, but neither clan is willing to directly oppose a decision of the new Empress.

Not content with merely appointing a Shogun, Toturi II continues to redefine the military of the Empire, increasing the size of the Jade Legion and dividing the rest of the Imperial Legion into three pieces: one commanded by her Right Hand Matsu Nimuro, one commanded by the Emerald Champion Yasuki Hachi, and one commanded by herself. Thus a total of five distinct Imperial armies are organized to represent the interests of the Empire and the will of the Empress. Some clans, however, feel snubbed by these decisions. The Crab had hoped measures would be taken to reinforce their defense against the Shadowlands in the wake of their recent struggles with Daigotsu. They are disappointed but sadly unsurprised when that does not occur. The Unicorn, meanwhile, feel they have finally proven themselves a superior military force and deserve a share of the recognition given to the Lion and the new Shogun. The Unicorn Khan, Moto Chagatai, concludes his clan will have to prove itself yet again.

The first Winter Court of Toturi II is held at Kyuden Bayushi. Hantei Naseru meets in secret with the Scorpion Champion, Bayushi Sunetra, to discuss the state of the new Empire. Naseru confesses his concerns over his sister's ability to properly lead and his belief steps should be taken to strengthen her reign... without her knowledge. He sees Toturi II as an example of what the people want in an Emperor, but someone who lacks the skill and ruthlessness to properly govern. There are some things an Emperor must be prepared to do, or at least be willing to have done by others. Naseru believes it is his duty to ensure such matters are appropriately dealt with, allowing Toturi II to focus on her own concerns and on being a properly inspiring figurehead to the people. Sunetra is impressed by Naseru's proposal and swears loyalty to him, promising her support in whatever measures he deems necessary. She also shares the secrets of her clan's recent struggles with the Shadowed Tower.

The World of the Toturi Dynasty

This chapter depicts an alternate version of the Toturi Dynasty. In the canonical history of Rokugan, the dynasty lasted only nine years past Toturi I's death, ending in 1169 when Toturi III died in the Shadowlands. (Kaneka and Sezaru perished the following spring during Moto Chagatai's attack on the Imperial City, as did Naseru's widow, but none of them ever claimed the Throne as Toturi IV.) This era has not been extensively detailed in the 4th Edition of the Legend of the Five Rings RPG, although brief accounts of some of its notable events are found in the 4th Edition Core Rulebook and in the supplements *Emerald Empire* and *Enemies of the Empire*.

GMs seeking more information on the canonical era which is the inspiration for the Shadowed Throne may wish to seek out the L5R 3rd Edition supplements *The Four Winds* and *The Vacant Throne*, which are available as PDFs from DriveThruRPG.com.

Year 1161

- The fragile new peace between the Dragon and the Phoenix is strained by the return of Shiba Aikune, who still bears the Last Wish. Although the Elemental Council has found and recognized the new Clan Champion, Shiba Mirabu, many in the Phoenix armies still greatly respect Aikune, and the Empress shows him more favor than Mirabu.
- Tonbo Sezaru travels to the ruins of Otosan Uchi to begin the cleansing and rebuilding desired by the Empress. He is accompanied by a small force of Jade Magistrates and Jade Legionnaires, as well as Kaiu engineers. Progress is slow but promising... until Sezaru disappears. (Unknown to anyone at the time, he is captured by the Ninube, servants of the Shadow who mistakenly believe themselves to have free will.) When he is finally found, he cannot remember what has happened to him, save for one unexpected piece of information: somehow, Daigotsu is alive. Sezaru declares the ruins are unsafe and disbands the expedition, before traveling south to hunt the Dark Lord.
- Late in the year, the Empress gives birth to her first child, a son.



Year 1162

- The Shogun's forces discover and raid the lair of Bayushi Atsuki. The head of the former Shadowed Tower is personally slain by Bayushi Paneki, while Bayushi Sunetra secures Atsuki's records. All of his information, contacts, and resources, including his plans to restart the Gozoku conspiracy, falls into the hands of the Scorpion.
- Following a resurgence of Yobanjin aggression along the northern borders, Empress Toturi II leads the Empress' Legions into the field. She is swiftly victorious.
- Tonbo Sezaru works with the Crab Clan to confirm the continued existence of Daigotsu. The Dark Lord has lost much of his power in his rebirth and has little choice but to continually relocate to avoid the efforts of Sezaru and the Crab, while dispatching his agents to seek a way to restore his power. The lack of progress in the search for Daigotsu makes the Wolf increasingly frustrated and for the first time in his life he becomes prone to angry outbursts, although he does not connect this to his strange experience in Otosan Uchi the previous year.

Year 1163

- In the spring Toturi II gives birth to her second child, a daughter.
- Using the information provided by Bayushi Sunetra, Hantei Naseru begins reaching out to those Bayushi Atsuki courted for his new Gozoku. The Imperial Advisor's power grows as he combines the influence of these new confidants with his old allies and others who owe him favors.

Year 1164

- The Empress again takes the field with her Legions, tracking and destroying a large bandit force hiding in the Mountains of Regret.
- Shahai, the Dark Daughter, hatches an elaborate plan to free the ancient Bloodspeaker Iuchiban from his tomb. She believes she can steal Iuchiban's power and use it to restore her lover Daigotsu to his full potency.
- Conflicts begin to re-emerge between the various Great Clans. The Unicorn and Scorpion begin to skirmish with one another as Moto Chagatai tests the strength of the new Shogun, Bayushi Paneki. Lingering tension between the Dragon and the Phoenix becomes open conflict when the Dark



Covenant of Fire disappears, with each side blaming the other for the loss. The agreement between the Crane and the Crab regarding the Yasuki family is likewise strained when Tonbo Sezaru's hunt for Daigotsu begins to draw significantly on the Yasuki resources.

Year 1165

- As the winter ends, the Empress orders her armies to restore peace between the clans. The Shogun responds fully to the Khan's aggression, leading his forces against the Unicorn. The Jade Champion, Asahina Sekawa, leads the Jade Legions to intervene between the Dragon and the Phoenix. The Emerald Champion, Yasuki Hachi, leads the Emerald Legions to reinforce the Crab and assist Tonbo Sezaru, hopefully easing the tension with the Crane.
- Naseru forms the Shadow Court, a secret court with members from every clan which aspires to be the true governing power of Rokugan. Toturi II does not realize what is happening; her focus on military and familial concerns allows Naseru's political power to grow unimpeded.
- After years of searching, the Wolf finally locates and confronts Daigotsu. The diminished Dark Lord is easily outmatched and quickly defeated, but before Sezaru can execute him, however, Shahai and the now freed Iuchiban arrive. Sezaru is forced to retreat before the superior power of the Bloodspeaker. Once he is gone, Iuchiban transfers his soul into the Dark Lord's body. Weakened by his battle with Sezaru, Daigotsu does not survive. Shahai turns on Iuchiban in rage but is easily slain, leaving the Bloodspeaker in command of the City of the Lost.

Year 1165: The Rain of Blood and the Birth of the Realm of Shadows

Iuchiban sacrifices a sacred Ki-Rin in a profane ritual that causes Tainted blood to rain down on the Empire. Every clan feels the effects of the corrupting storm. Moto Chagatai is caught in the blood rain while facing the Shogun's armies in the field; driven mad by its influence, he kills Bayushi Paneki and declares himself the new Shogun. Those from both armies who are affected by the rain place themselves under his command.

Ironically, the blood rain causes the Dragon and Phoenix to make peace, as Shiba Aikune uses the power of the Last Wish to protect the armies on both sides. However, neither the Dragon nor the Phoenix are able to protect the rest of their territories. The Crab at the Carpenter Wall are only lightly affected themselves, but must then defend themselves against the maddened onslaught of a significant portion of the Emerald Legions. At the height of the chaos, the Crab watch in amazement as Tonbo Sezaru walks out of the Shadowlands, apparently unaffected.

Alternate Paths: Canon Heroes versus PC Heroes

Iuchi Katamari and his companions play a significant role in this timeline through their quest to hunt down the hidden heart of Iuchiban and thus put an end to the Bloodspeaker's third and greatest reign of terror. However, there is no requirement for these individuals to be the ones who bring down Iuchiban. A GM who runs a campaign set in the world of the Shadowed Throne is perfectly free to swap in his own group's player-characters for Katamari and Toku. Indeed, given the nature of the Shadowed Throne as an alternate timeline where the accepted reality of the L5R canon has been overturned, the GM should feel free to do this with any aspect of the timeline, not just Katamari's quest.



Many who perish during the Rain of Blood awaken in a new spirit realm, one created by changes to the Celestial Order since the Second Day of Thunder. The souls in this realm continually relive their lives, often making different decisions and facing different fates; most are unaware of the true nature of their existence. Some, however, see the shadowy darkness that envelopes them and glimpse the serpentine form that stalks the darkness. They call their new home the Realm of Shadows.

- Iuchiban's lieutenant Jama Suru leads an attack against the Hare Clan. The minor clan suffers many losses, but is saved by timely aid from the Tsuruchi family of the Mantis Clan.
- Iuchi Katamari, the son of the legendary hero Iuchi Karasu, returns to the Empire from the Burning Sands. He has learned the ways of the Doomseekers and is determined to destroy the Bloodspeaker. He seeks aid in his quest from the aging Monkey Clan Champion, Toku.
- Over the winter many of those touched by the blood rain throughout Rokugan make their way to Unicorn lands and join Moto Chagatai's forces.

Year 1166

- The self-proclaimed Shogun, Moto Chagatai, and his Blood Army attack the Lion as the winter ends. Those of the Unicorn who are not corrupted rally under the banner of Shinjo Shono, daimyo of the Shinjo, and oppose Chagatai as best they can. Toturi II calls for the other clans to aid Shono and the Lion, knowing that if they fall Toshi Ranbo will be next. However, most of the clans are slow to respond due to facing problems and threats of their own. Only the Scorpion are able to commit substantial troops to the fight.



- At Iuchiban's command, the Carpenter Wall is besieged by waves of Lost and oni, including Shokansuru's Brood, powerful oni which the Crab have never seen before. Shiro Hiruma is attacked as well; cut off from supplies and reinforcements, it soon falls to the Lost.
- On the seas, Garen Hawthorne and a Blood Rain-corrupted Yoritomo Kitao attack the Mantis Isles. The Tortoise Clan aids the Mantis in gratitude for the aid given the Hare the previous year.
- The Crane face a major rebellion by peasants corrupted by the Rain of Blood. Daidoji Rekai, the former daimyo of the Daidoji family, is likewise corrupted and takes command of the uprising.
- Iuchiban and his Bloodspeakers attack the Phoenix Clan directly, seeking the power of the Last Wish. The Dragon and the Jade Legions March toward Phoenix lands to assist them against the Bloodspeakers. While Iuchiban himself assaults Kyuden Isawa and tries to capture Shiba Aikune, Asahina Yajinden makes his way to the hidden city of Gisei Toshi, repository of countless magical artifacts.
- Shiba Aikune, Togashi Satsu, and the Elemental Council face Iuchiban directly but find him far more powerful than they imagined. Satsu and Isawa Nakamuro, Master of Air, face Iuchiban alone to allow Aikune and the rest of the Council to escape. While the battle ultimately forces Iuchiban to withdraw, Nakamuro and Satsu are both slain.
- The defenders of Gisei Toshi finally drive off the undead army under Yajinden's command, but cannot prevent him from stealing many scrolls and artifacts from the city, including his own personal scrolls from the fifth century and the shards of the Bloodsword Ambition.

Death of the Bloodspeaker

Iuchi Katamari and Toku enter the ruins of Otosan Uchi in search of Iuchiban's hidden heart. They are accompanied by Naka Tokei, the Grand Master of the Elements. During their search they come under attack by Jama Suru and many other Bloodspeaker cultists. Naka Tokei battles them by himself, allowing the other two heroes to continue toward their goal. He is not seen again.

Katamari and Toku finally locate the heart of Iuchiban; sensing the danger to his immortal life, Iuchiban himself appears. Katamari is mortally wounded in the battle, but buys enough time for Toku to destroy the heart, rendering Iuchiban mortal. With his last dying act, Katamari kills Iuchiban.

- As Chagatai's Blood Army advances toward Toshi Ranbo, Empress Toturi II issues a formal challenge to Moto Chagatai to a duel of personal combat. Although no one doubts her courage or ability, some wonder if the challenge is truly wise, or merely an attempt to restore the faith of the Empire. The Blood Shogun accepts the challenge even as his army lays siege to the Imperial City. The Empress prevails, killing Chagatai, although the city suffers heavy damage from the Blood Army's attack.
- The Crab finally secure the Wall with the help of the Emerald Legions under Yasuki Hachi's command, but are unable to recapture Shiro Hiruma.
- Togashi Satsu's wife gives birth to his daughter several months after his death. The Mirumoto family assumes leadership of the clan until Satsu's heir comes of age.
- Victory over Iuchiban and Chagatai restores public faith in Toturi II, but true political control of the Empire remains in her brother's hands. Over the winter, Naseru takes advantage of public opinion to enhance the Empress' image even as he gathers more real power into his own hands. Tonbo Sezaru is missing, not seen since his return to the Empire.

Year 1167

- Asahina Yajinden recovers the Anvil of Despair from the Twilight Mountains, where it was lost when Kokujin was defeated a few years earlier. He transports it to the City of the Lost and resumes his sinister arts.
- Within Otosan Uchi, Sezaru the Wolf confronts the Ninube once more, having finally remembered what happened to him years earlier. He finds them conducting a strange ritual connected to the emerging power of a new Celestial Dragon: the Obsidian Dragon, kharmic counterpoint to the Jade Dragon. Sezaru disrupts their ritual and personally communes with the Obsidian Dragon, becoming its Oracle. The Ninube flee to the Realm of Shadow.

What Happens Next?

Much like the Shattered Empire alternate timeline presented in Chapter Eight, the era of the Shadowed Throne does not have a definitive ending; rather, it concludes with the establishment of a new and darker status quo, a changed Empire where both the practical realities of politics and the Celestial Order itself have been altered for the worse. The power of the Emperor has been subverted, and true control of Rokugan now lies in the hands of Hantei Naseru and his secretive Shadow Court. The creation of the new spirit realm known as the Realm of Shadows has given the Lying Darkness a base of power from which to resume its slow subversion of creation. And the Obsidian Dragon has emerged as a much more potent and untrammeled force than in the canonical history, able to spread sin and dishonor far and wide.

Where does this world go? That is up to the GM and the players. Perhaps it will continue to spiral down into greater darkness and dishonor, with an oblivious puppet Emperor watching serenely while Bushido crumbles away. Or perhaps heroes will uncover and destroy the Shadow Court and restore honor and truth to Rokugan. The future, as always, is unwritten.

Clans and Factions Under the Shadowed Throne

Although the world of the Shadowed Throne is only beginning to diverge from the canonical history of Rokugan, the clans face significantly different challenges, and the histories of their most prominent figures and heroes shift notably from the "official" timeline.

The Crab Clan

The Crab welcomed the reign of Toturi II, hoping her militaristic nature would benefit them. However, her focus on keeping peace between the clans and encouraging recovery in the rest of the Empire left little aid to offer the Crab. The Empress was confident they could continue in their duty as they always had and directed her concerns elsewhere. Fortunately, the first few years following the Dark Lord's defeat were relatively quiet. The Carpenter Wall was repaired and reinforced, although the Tower of Fear remained an ominous symbol of earlier defeats.

When Tonbo Sezaru arrives to search for Daigotsu, the Crab welcome his determination and supported his mission. Hida Kuon, the Clan Champion, offers Sezaru whatever resources he might need for his hunt. However, he does not anticipate the Wolf's extreme zealousness, and Sezaru's continual strikes against the Shadowlands become a significant drain on the clan's resources. This leads to tensions with the Crane as the Crab begin to call on more and more of the wealth of the "shared" Yasuki family and lands. For a time another Yasuki War seems likely, but the tensions are eased when Yasuki Hachi arrives with some of the Imperial Legions to support the Crab.

When the Blood Rain falls, many of the Crab are protected by Wall or the jade they carried, and the Kuni use their magic against the rain as well. Unfortunately, the Emerald Legions defending the Wall beside them do not all have the same protections. The Crab are forced to kill many who succumb to the rain. Subsequently, the Wall is assaulted by a horde of Lost and unknown oni, the latter created by the oni summoner called Shokansuru. The assault does not breach the Wall, but it does cut off all communications with the Hiruma lands, which also come under assault from the Lost. The Hiruma fight valiantly but lack the strength or supplies to hold out on their own, and are ultimately forced to stage a fighting retreat back to the Wall, abandoning their ancestral lands once more. It is a bitter pill to swallow coming so soon after their successful recapture of their home a generation earlier.

By the year 1167 the Crab are weakened and face new threats from Yajinden and the rest of the Lost. Yasuki Hachi and what is left of his legions remain with them, unwilling to return to the Empress while there is still danger to the Wall. Fortunately, the clan's supply shortfalls are finally being met... courtesy of Hantei Naseru.

The Crane Clan

Doji Kurohito and the rest of the Crane Clan welcome the ascension of Toturi II, a highly honorable and traditional samurai, especially after she chooses her Imperial Consort from their clan. Crane samurai also hold the offices of the Emerald and Jade Champions, giving the Left Hand considerable influence in the new Empress' government.

Still, their political power remains far below its peak under the later years of the Hantei dynasty. With the Scorpion controlling the vital office of Chancellor and Hantei Naseru serving as Imperial Advisor, the Crane still find themselves at a disadvantage in the courts. Many wish to find some way to restore the influence they

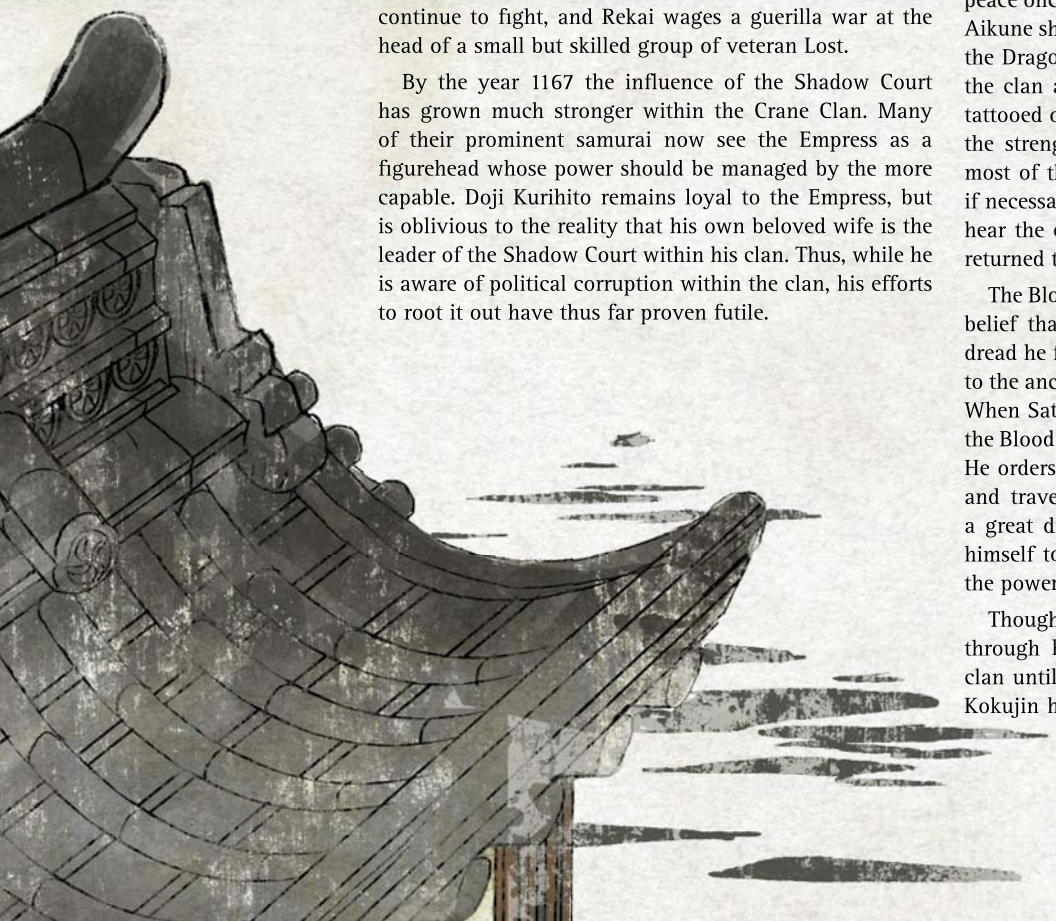


have lost, and these Crane are among the first to fall under Hantei Naseru's influence. Doji Akiko, the wife of the Clan Champion, is an early recruit based on the journals of Bayushi Atsuki. Another recruit is the influential veteran courtier Kakita Munemori, who had already come under the influence of the Shadowed Tower before it was rooted out. Both of these notables recruit other members of the clan into Naseru's Shadow Court, promoting the idea of restoring Crane influence while undermining faith in the Empress.

Although many younger samurai in the clan are eager for another war with the Crab, the clan's leadership is less sanguine, and Kurohito welcomes Yasuki Hachi's decision to use his power as Emerald Champion to resolve the disagreements with the Crab. What Kurohito does not know is that it is Munemori who suggests the idea to Hachi. Likewise, it is Doji Akiko who requests the assistance of the Jade Champion in mediating the disputes between the Dragon and the Phoenix. These actions seem to offer further proof to Naseru's supporters that his covert methods are superior to the Empress' rule.

When the Rain of Blood falls, most of the Crane Clan's samurai are safe within their courts and palaces. Countless heimin, however, are caught in the fields during the corrupting storm. The rain drives them mad, leading to violent revolts against their lords. These rebels come under the control of Daidoji Rekai, the former family daimyo, who voluntarily gave herself to corruption to protect her son Kikaze. The Jade Champion, Asahina Sekawa, quickly returns to the Crane lands to address the threat. Together with Rekai's son Kikaze they wage a relentless war against the Tainted rebels, although Rekai's skills make this war a difficult challenge indeed. Even after they break the back of the rebellion, isolated pockets of Tainted madmen continue to fight, and Rekai wages a guerilla war at the head of a small but skilled group of veteran Lost.

By the year 1167 the influence of the Shadow Court has grown much stronger within the Crane Clan. Many of their prominent samurai now see the Empress as a figurehead whose power should be managed by the more capable. Doji Kurihito remains loyal to the Empress, but is oblivious to the reality that his own beloved wife is the leader of the Shadow Court within his clan. Thus, while he is aware of political corruption within the clan, his efforts to root it out have thus far proven futile.



The Dragon Clan

The Dragon Clan Champion, Togashi Satsu, goes into seclusion shortly after Toturi II ascends to the Throne. Most assume he is adjusting to his new connection to his grandfather; the spirit of the Kami Togashi inhabits Satsu, giving him both immense power and the gift of mystical foresight. However, this ability to see the future greatly troubles Satsu. He increasingly fears to make any change lest the results be worse than the current situation. Moreover, many of his visions seemed to depict some manner of impending doom.

When Shiba Aikune returns to the Phoenix with Isawa's Last Wish, Satsu fears this is the doom he had foreseen. He commands the Mirumoto nemuranai hunters to search even harder for ways to neutralize the Wish and other such items of power. The peace with the Phoenix degrades and is ultimately lost with the disappearance of the Dark Covenant of Fire; both clans blame each other for its loss and any danger it might create. With Satsu's blessing, the Dragon march to war, their armies commanded by family daimyo Mirumoto Rosanjin.

The battles between the clans are chaotic and wild, with both sides wielding powerful magic. Shiba Aikune, chastened by his previous experiences, refuses to call on the power of Isawa's Last Wish despite requests from the Phoenix armies and even the Elemental Council. As the war threatens to escalate, Asahina Sekawa intervenes, placing the Jade Legions and himself between the two armies. His numbers are not actually enough to end the war by force, but neither side is willing to defy the Jade Champion.

It is as the Dragon and the Phoenix attempt to find peace once more that the Blood Rain falls. Although Shiba Aikune shields the armies with the power of the Last Wish, the Dragon mountains have no such protection. Many in the clan are lost to the rain, although the monks of the tattooed orders are able to resist the corrupted blood with the strength of their tattoos. The Dragon quickly bring most of the afflicted samurai under control, killing them if necessary, but some disappear into the mountains. They hear the call of Kokujin, the tattooed madman, who has returned to plague the Empire once again.

The Blood Rain causes Togashi Satsu to doubt his earlier belief that the Last Wish is directly responsible for the dread he feels, though he senses there is still a connection to the ancient artifact. The armies of the Dragon withdraw. When Satsu receives reports of Iuchiban's involvement in the Blood Rain, he finally begins to understand his visions. He orders the Dragon to march to the Phoenix Clan's aid and travels personally to Kyuden Isawa in the form of a great dragon. There he confronts Iuchiban, sacrificing himself to allow Aikune to escape and to deny Iuchiban the power of the Wish.

Though the Dragon Champion is dead, he lives on through his newborn daughter; the Mirumoto lead the clan until she is ready. She will face a serious threat, for Kokujin has gathered the Dragon corrupted by the Blood

Rain and is tattooing them with his own Tainted blood, building an army to confront his former clan.

The Dragon Clan proves the most difficult for the Shadow Court to recruit or manipulate. The Dragon do not approach politics in the same way as other clans and the guidance of Togashi shields them from unwanted influence. For now, however, that guidance is lost, and the Shadow Court begins working to recruit those Mirumoto and Tamori who are still resentful of the Phoenix, trying to turn their bitterness toward other targets.

The Lion Clan

The Lion Clan eagerly embrace the reign of Toturi II; they have always admired her honor and courage, and remember how she helped them fight off the Tsuno assaults that plagued their lands. They find, however, that under her reign their authority is diminished. The Lion Clan Champion, Matus Nimuro, expects to lead the Empress' armies in her stead, but Toturi II chooses to divide the Imperial Legions between the Lion Champion, the Emerald Champion, the Jade Champion, the Shogun, and herself, diluting and weakening the Lion Clan's traditional place within Rokugan.

When conflicts began to erupt between other clans, the Lion are not called upon. It is the Shogun who rides against the Unicorn. It is the Emerald Champion who pacifies the Crab and Crane. It is the Jade Champion who intervenes between the Dragon and the Phoenix. And the Lion wait, growing slowly more restless. This allows Hantei Naseru's agents to sow dissent. The influence is subtle at first, limited to the lowest ranks of the Lion... but from there it can spread.

As with the Crane, it is the peasants serving the Lion who suffer most from the Blood Rain. However, numerous samurai are corrupted as well. They become merciless and savage, cutting down any peasant they see. Although the armies of the clan survive the rain with relatively modest losses, many of the clan's fields will lie fallow without the hands to tend them.

The true threat from the Blood Rain, of course, is the army of the corrupted Moto Chagatai, and the Lion commit whole-heartedly to the fight against it. They fight fiercely in defense of their lands and of the Empress, sacrificing themselves fearlessly and gloriously, but in the end it is not their valor which defeats the Blood Khan but the sword of the Empress, facing him on the field before Toshi Ranbo. The enemy is defeated, but the honor belongs to the Empress alone.

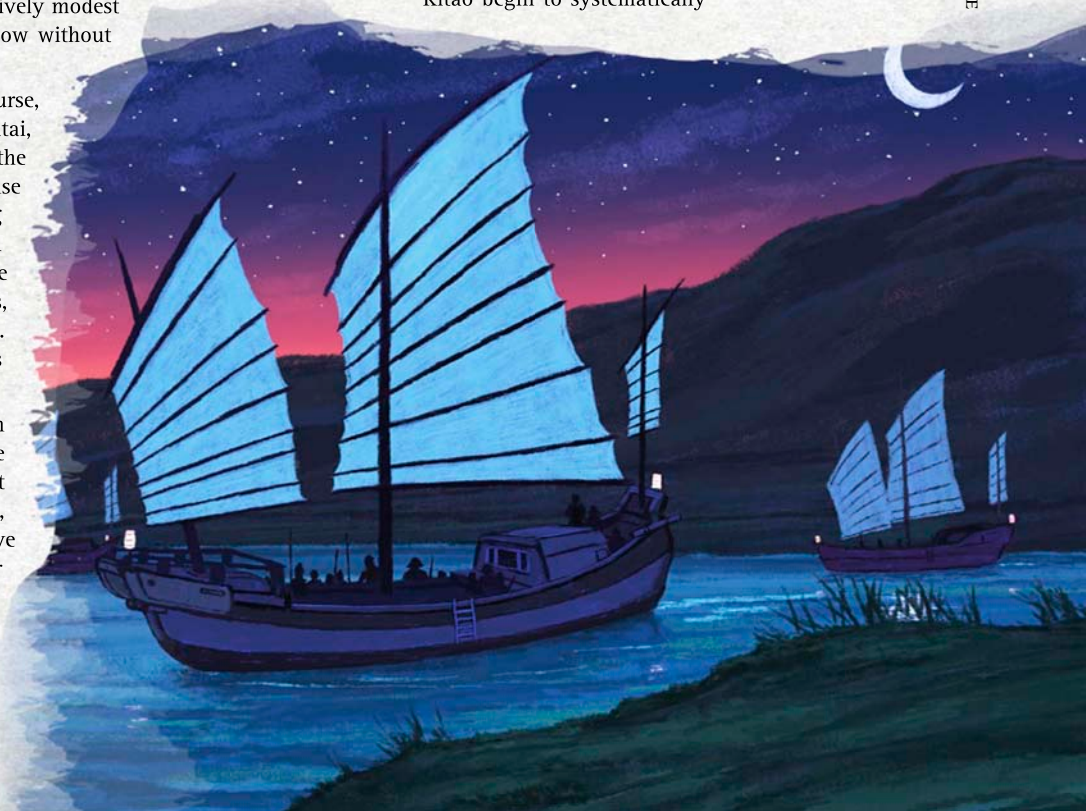
In the wake of the Khan's attack, the Lion feel lost. They remain loyal, willing to serve in whatever capacity the Empress wishes, but they wonder if she is truly willing to use them, if she truly values their service. They have faced great losses and still endure hunger years after the Blood Rain, and yet the Empire and the Empress seem unmoved. Now a new generation of officers is rising from the lower ranks, hungry for battle and purpose...

The Mantis Clan

At the height of the Mantis civil war during the Four Winds era, Hantei Naseru gifted a crystal arrow to Tsuruchi Okame. The arrow came from the Imperial Armory and was given to use against the Onisu called Settozai. It was also a subtle show of support for Yoritomo Kumiko, an act she would remember once she won the civil war and became undisputed Clan Champion.

The first years of Toturi II's reign are quiet for the Mantis. They are on fairly good terms with the other clans and face few challenges, allowing them to recover the losses suffered during their civil war. This recovery is accompanied by an increased presence in the courts; Naseru and Kumiko agreed to allow the Mantis more influence in exchange for supporting his agenda. At his request the Mantis also reach out to the Minor Clans, suggesting their former peers form a new independent alliance and offering to support such efforts in the courts. These efforts initially produce little result, but gain more support after the Mantis save the Hare Clan from attack by the Bloodspeakers.

The Islands of Silk and Spice are all but untouched by the Rain of Blood; only the mainland holdings of the Tsuruchi and the Moshi are affected. The clan suffers only minor losses and recovers much more quickly than the other clans. However, the Blood Rain does claim one victim of great significance to the clan: Yoritomo Kitao and her followers, living in exile after her defeat by Kumiko. Kitao soon reappears in command of an impressive fleet of captured ships from various clans, along with the Tainted fleet of the gaijin Garen Hawthorne, who previously supported the Dark Lord's attack on Otosan Uchi. Calling themselves the Dark Wave, Garen and Kitao begin to systematically





attack Mantis ships, sinking them or seizing them to add to their corrupted fleet. After each attack they retreat into the Sea of Shadows, leaving the Mantis unable to wage an effective counterattack.

The Mantis thus find themselves at a crossroads by the year 1167. Their political power is growing rapidly thanks to their close relationship with the Shadow Court. But the threat of the Dark Wave is beginning to take a serious toll. The Tortoise have offered their assistance in the conflict, but the Mantis need more. They are desperate to find a way to track down the hidden base of the Dark Wave and bring it to bay. Whoever can offer that boon to them first – whether it be a force for honor and purity or for dishonor and corruption – will likely shape the fate of the Mantis Clan for many years to come.

The Phoenix Clan

As Toturi Tsudao took the throne, the Phoenix were still struggling with the aftermath of their recent conflict with the Dragon. In particular, the leadership of the clan was divided: although the Elemental Council had recognized Shiba Mirabu as the bearer of the Soul of Shiba, many Phoenix still remembered Shiba Aikune as the man who had saved them from the Dragon with the power of the Last Wish. Aikune's struggle with the power of Isawa's Last Wish had led him to exile himself, but in seclusion he had learned more control and had grown to understand the nature of the artifact. Aikune reappears soon after Tsudao's crowning, and his return deepens the division within the clan – especially since Shiba Mirabu is a relatively passive leader.

Unfortunately, Aikune's return also brings renewed friction with the Dragon Clan. The mistrust of the Dragon Clan and the actions of their nemuranai hunters make all of the Phoenix uneasy and suspicious. Regardless of what dangers the Wish might pose, the Elemental Council finds the idea of destroying any such great artifact to be appalling. When the Dark Covenant of Fire disappears, the Phoenix fear the Dragon have done something foolish – while the Dragon, of course, accuse the Phoenix of the same. With war looming, Isawa Nakamuro, the Master of Air, attempts to make peace with the Dragon through his close association with their leading shugenja, Tamori Shiatung. He hopes the two together can bring reason to the rest of their clans, but Shaitung refuses to answer his requests for a meeting. With the two clans on a collision course once more, all her old resentment of the Phoenix surges to the fore once more, and she sets aside her own feelings for Nakamura lest they blind her to where her true loyalties lie. When Nakamura makes a final plea through a letter confessing the depth of his feelings for her, she returns it torn into pieces.

Once the war erupts, however, it is another Elemental Master, Master of Water Doji Akiko, who finds a solution: she asks her fellow Crane, Jade Champion Asahina Sekawa, to intervene. Sekawa's actions bring about a truce, and in the wake of Akiko's success more than a few Phoenix wonder why the Empress herself did not take action to prevent war. This is as Akiko hopes, of course, for she is already an enthusiastic supporter of Hantei Naseru's Shadow Court.

The Blood Rain's threat is averted from its armies by Shiba Aikune, who uses the Last Wish to protect Phoenix and Dragon alike. However, the rest of Phoenix lands have no such protection. Many fall under the rain's influence, embracing maho and joining the ranks of Iuchiban's Bloodspeaker cult. They eventually rally to the side of Iuchiban's lieutenant Yajinden, who leads them in a potent attack on Gisei Toshi.

Neither Shiba Aikune nor the Elemental Council are prepared for Iuchiban's direct assault on Kyuden Isawa, arrogantly believed the wards on their capital can stop any such threat. The wards do keep him and his cultists at bay... at first. But Iuchiban is not to be denied. Even from outside the walls he can sense the Last Wish and the nature of its power, an artifact from the days when blood was still freely used in all magic. Any artifact forged even in part with blood magic, no matter how pure it may have been, is something he can influence and control. He influences the Wish, causing it to bring Shiba Aikune into the open and forcing the Elemental Council to come forth in his defense. With Aikune struggling not to let the Wish slip wholly into Iuchiban's control, he can do nothing to help in the battle with the Bloodspeaker, whose power exceeds that of the entire Council. The Master of Air dies protecting the Council, the rest are forced to retreat, and only the arrival of Togashi Satsu in his dragon form allows Aikune and the Wish to escape, fleeing to Toshi Ranbo and the Empress.

In Toshi Ranbo, Aikune seeks redemption for his failures and for his perceived guilt at bringing the Wish back to Phoenix lands and thereby attracting the wrath of Iuchiban. He suppresses the Wish's power, refusing to use it at all even when Moto Chagatai and his Blood Army attack the capital. He joins the defenders of the city, but fights only with sword and bow.

In the year 1167, the Phoenix are still struggling to recover and rebuild from their losses of the last decade. A new Master of Air must be chosen, and while most Phoenix now acknowledge Shiba Mirabu as their Champion, there are still many who hope for Shiba Aikune to return and protect them with the Last Wish. The influence of the Shadow Court grows within the Phoenix as a younger generation rises to power under the watchful eye of Doji Akiko. And in the City of the Lost, Yajinden and his followers are forging their own plans for the Phoenix...

The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion were prepared for any of Toturi's children to ascend to the Throne, having placed operatives close to each of them. Hantei Naseru, however, seemed to be the only one of the Four Winds to truly appreciate what the Scorpion could do. When his sister became Empress, he soon began to conspire with the Scorpion Champion, Bayushi Sunetra. He convinced her the Scorpion Clan, the loyal Underhand of the Empire, should do whatever must be done to preserve the interests of the Empress... if even they did so without her knowledge.

The first step is the appointment of Bayushi Paneki as Shogun. The man was a hero of the Empire and Toturi II was personally aware of his abilities, so it is a simple matter for Naseru to persuade her to name him to that position. As Shogun, Paneki has the resources to track down and destroy the remnants of the Shadowed Tower, finally disposing of Bayushi Atsuki for good and in the process gaining access to Atsuki's networks of contacts, information, and alliances.

Naseru and the Scorpion also arrange for Naseru's brother Sezaru to marry Soshi Angai, allowing the Clan of Secrets to watch him directly. However, this proves less successful when Sezaru is kidnapped by the Ninube in the ruins of Otosan Uchi. Although Sezaru is later found and rescued, Angai is never recovered – she is now Ninube Angai, agent of Nothing.

Despite this failing, the Scorpion as a whole and especially Bayushi Sunetra remain Naseru's closest allies in forming and strengthening the Shadow Court. She is careful not to let everyone in the clan know about the Shadow Court, only those who need to know. Others do as they are commanded, according to long-standing Scorpion tradition, asking no questions and expecting no answers as they manipulate the Empire.

Initially, the Scorpion are unconcerned with the Unicorn skirmishes along their borders. The Unicorn intent seems obvious and is confirmed by one of their most skilled infiltrators, a man called Ide Tang who has risen to a high post in the Ide family. Bayushi Paneki sees no threat from the Khan either, but loyally moves to the border when commanded to do so by the Empress. Thus both his army and that of the Khan are exposed when the Rain of Blood begins. Most of the Shogun's legions, who are selected disproportionately from the ranks of Paneki's clan, are corrupted and fall under the Khan's control, while Paneki himself falls in battle with the blood-enraged Moto Chagatai. The rest of the Scorpion Clan faces troubles of its own as blood-maddened samurai and peasants rampage within their lands. These problems are suppressed fairly quickly compared to the Crane lands, but the loss of Paneki and the Legions is a harder blow to bear.

While the rest of the Empire struggles against the forces of Iuchiban, the Scorpion prepare themselves for his defeat, ignoring his threat and instead sending limited forces to join the Lion and Shinjo Shono against the Blood Khan. By this time the Shadow Court has grown in power and is set to serve its purpose. There is, however, still the danger that the conspiracy might change and become a threat to its founders; Bayushi Sunetra holds some clan resources in reserve for such a contingency. Thus, while the Scorpion publically recover from the Unicorn assault and the Blood Rain, they privately make sure to keep watch over the Shadow Court, and avoid promoting any of the conspiracy's members (other than Sunetra herself) into leadership roles within their own clan. Whatever the future holds for the Empire, the Clan of Secrets will be ready.

The Unicorn Clan

Moto Chagatai, the Khan of the Unicorn, considered the man known as Kaneka to be a personal friend. Initially, he is saddened but also pleased that Kaneka died heroically and with honor. He accepts the reign of Toturi II, who is a warrior to be respected. Her decision to appoint a Shogun out of respect for her late brother also pleases him... but giving the position to Bayushi Paneki does not. Chagatai questions whether a Scorpion, even one as renowned as



Paneki, can separate his loyalties enough to act as the Shogun should. He decides the Unicorn will test that.

One of Hantei Naseru's closes allies is Shinjo Shono; the Shinjo daimyo earned Naseru's respect, and he earned Shono's trust, during the Four Winds era. As a result, Shono is brought into the Shadow Court conspiracy almost as quickly as Bayushi Sunetra. Shono is reluctant, for his own family's past involvement with the Kolat makes him wary of secrets. Naseru ultimately convinces him, however, by outlining the true intent and methods of his plan: to protect the Empress, not overthrow her. Shono decides he will cooperate so long as those guidelines are followed.

Moto Chagatai is pleased when he finally sees the banner of the Shogun marching against him; now he can test the mettle of the man. Their battle is chaotic and unpredictable, as the maneuvers of the Unicorn cavalry are met and countered with special tactics Paneki had prepared. But just as Chagatai seeks out the Shogun for personal combat, the Blood Rain begins to fall. Madness and rage overcome Chagatai and he attacks Paneki with brutal power; Paneki responds with more savagery as well, using precise strikes intended to cause debilitating pain. But under the influence of the Tainted rain the pain only maddens the Khan further. He cuts the Shogun down, screaming that he is a usurper and imposter, and declares himself the only true Shogun. Thousands of samurai on the battlefield around him, all touched by the Blood Rain, fall quickly under his control and forsake all other loyalties. Chagatai leads his new army back to Shiro Moto, killing any Unicorn who stands in his way, and waits there for his army to grow. He knows the rain will bring more.

With so many samurai corrupted and with these fallen men slaughtering any who do not join them, the remaining pure Unicorn give their lost Champion a wide berth. Most make their way to Shiro Shinjo, looking to Shinjo Shono for leadership. What remains of the Shogun's forces also find their way to Shono's side. The Shinjo daimyo organizes them and watches for a chance to defeat his insane lord.

The maddened Chagatai now chooses the Empress as the target of his bitterness and ambition. The following year, when his armies reach their peak, he leads them against her. The Lion oppose him, and Shono takes this opportunity to strike at his flank and rear, but sheer numbers and unnatural strength allow Chagatai and his Blood Army to cut a swath of destruction all the way to Toshi Ranbo. There, however, the Empress' personal challenge brings an end to the false Shogun. Without his leadership, the Blood Army is finally scattered and destroyed by the combined forces of the Lion, Shono's forces, and the Empress' Legions.

By 1167, the Unicorn are at peace, but they have been devastated. Their armies are broken, the Empire mistrusts them, and their Champion is gone. With no one else to take up the mantle, Shinjo Shono now leads the clan, and Moto Chen commands what is left of the Unicorn military, focusing their attention on the western border and the Shinomen Mori. Ide Tang is responsible for acquiring the resources necessary for Unicorn recovery. His true clan, the Scorpion, and the Shadow Court assist with this effort, keeping their involvement unknown to the new Unicorn Champion... for Shinjo Shono has cut his ties to Hantei Naseru. He will not betray the Imperial Advisor, but he wishes nothing more to do with his conspiracy. The future is uncertain and he cannot lead his clan with doubts in his heart.

The Minor Clans

Initially the ascension of Toturi II brings little change for the Minor Clans as a whole. The most significant event is the choice of Toturi Sezaru to join the Dragonfly Clan; the Tonbo grow more influential and prestigious by association. But this improvement does not extend to the other Minor Clans, who remain as weak and divided as ever. They are largely ignored by the militaristic Empress and contribute little to Hantei Naseru's plans. The Mantis attempt to organize them, but it is not until the Rain of Blood that they agree this is necessary.

The Hare have a long and difficult history with the Bloodspeakers, and they are targeted for vengeance by Iuchiban and his servant Jama Suru. After they are saved by the timely aid of the Tsuruchi, the Minor Clans begin to see the need to band together for future survival. They accept the assistance of the Mantis in forming the Minor Clan Alliance. As turmoil continues across the Empire, the Minor Clans protect and support one another, as well as returning the Mantis Clan's assistance as best they can.

Despite their new Alliance, however, the Minor Clans are still too limited in power and numbers to be truly involved in the power struggles of the Empire. Whether the Shadow Court will decide they are worthy of its attention remains to be seen.

The Imperial Families

Just as in the canonical history of Rokugan, the Imperial Families enter the reign of the second Toturi Emperor uncertain of their place in the Empire. Their traditional duties and roles were tied to the Hantei dynasty and there is still the fear those will be taken away by the new dynasty. The choice of Toturi Sezaru to swear fealty to a Minor Clan and of Hantei Naseru to keep the Hantei name, each refusing to join the Otomo as of old, increases the concern that the traditions of the Imperial Throne are being cast aside.

Despite his refusal to become a Hantei, many Imperials hope Naseru will improve their position. They are swayed in part by Otomo Hoketuhime, for the Otomo daimyo has always been a strong supporter of Naseru (and perhaps, so rumors say, was once his lover). She joins the Shadow Court early on and assists his efforts to expand its influence and power. Another such ally in the Imperial families is Seppun Toshiaki, head of the Hidden Guard,

who uses his magic to gather information for Naseru and to shield the Shadow Court's activities. Although Miya Shoin, the Imperial Herald, has connections to Naseru as well, the Shadow Court sees him as too loyal to the Throne to approach openly. Nonetheless, the conspiracy grows within the Imperial ranks throughout this era, and is well positioned to continue to do so in future.

The Shadowlands

The final rise of Iuchiban causes great turmoil within the Shadowlands. Daigotsu's distorted mirror of Rokugan, the City of the Lost, celebrates his return from death only to discover he has come back greatly weakened, creating doubt and disloyalty among the Lost and leading many of the oni and other Shadowlands beasts to leave completely. The oni cannot obey someone separated from the Taint. When Iuchiban arrives and seizes Daigotsu's body for his own, the Lost and the beasts of Jigoku follow him with equal fervor.

Iuchiban ultimately has little interest in the Shadowlands, since his goals lie within the Empire itself. He hands leadership of the Shadowlands Horde over to the demon-summoner called Shokansuru, who leads them in devastating attacks on the Crab. When the initial attacks are ultimately repulsed, Shokansuru retreats back deep into the Shadowlands to conduct further demon-summoning experiments. The Lost, meanwhile, occupy Shiro Hiruma, making it into a stronghold of their own separate from the City of the Lost.

After Iuchiban's death, the Shadowlands remains fractured, with the demons, the beasts, and the Lost each pursuing their own interests. Yajinden assembles the remaining Bloodspeakers in the City of the Lost, where he plots to create new masterpieces to rival his Bloodswords. Shokansuru raises new hordes of oni for a future attack on the Empire, and within Rokugan's borders lesser threats such as Kokujin, Daidoji Rekai, and Yoritomo Kitao continue to plague the Empire. The forces of Jigoku may have lost their unity, but they remain as deadly as ever.

Notable Figures of the Shadowed Throne

Obviously, most of the significant NPCs of the Shadowed Throne era will be the same as those from the canonical post-Four Winds era. GMs seeking such personalities should consult some of the NPCs presented in the L5R 4th Edition supplements *The Great Clans* and *Imperial Histories*. The following section presents three lesser-known NPCs whose personal history and nature are greatly changed by the altered world of this timeline.

Esteban Cornejo

Ambassador of Merenae

In the distant land of Merenae, an old nobleman named Calixto Cornejo was plagued for years by visions of his missing grandson, Alhundro Cornejo, who appeared in these nightmares to be trapped somewhere in the strange kingdom known as Rokugan. For a long time Calixto dismissed these dreams in spite of what they portrayed and how often he experienced them. However, when he received messages from someone claiming to be Alhundro's son, a man living in Rokugan and calling himself Rodrigo, he began to believe the visions were real. He sent his other great-grandson, Esteban, to find their missing family members and bring them home.

Esteban Cornejo arrived in Rokugan and slowly made his way to Toshi Ranbo, trying to avoid the attention of the Imperial authorities. He knew his great-grandfather had seen the Imperial city in his dreams and it was the only location that could be identified. However, he was soon discovered by Emerald Magistrates and detained for questioning. Any gaijin within the Empire is considered highly suspicious, of course, and one entering the capital is not merely suspicious but an active threat. Esteban would have been held indefinitely, or perhaps executed, if not for Bayushi Paneki.

The Shogun had Esteban brought before him and explained that two men who appeared to be of Merenae descent had been found aiding an enemy of the Empire: Bayushi Atsuki, the leader of the defunct Shadowed Tower. The men had died, and Paneki believed they had been magically coerced into cooperation; he did think they were truly responsible for their crimes, nor did he suspect Esteban was in league with them. However, it was necessary to be certain. The Shogun took Esteban into his personal custody.

Paneki wanted to learn if Esteban knew anything about Bayushi Atsuki or his plans. The presence of two Merenae gaijin within Atsuki's hidden base suggested a possible connection, as did Esteban's story. Esteban thus found himself traveling with the Shogun and his Legions for some time, and fate dictated he was present at the battle with the Unicorn during the Rain of Blood.

Esteban survived the conflict and managed to avoid the sinister influence of the Blood. He followed other survivors to join Shinjo Shono. Shono's men regarded him with some suspicion, of course, both for his gaijin identity and the sheer improbable oddity of his presence. However, the Unicorn are far less hostile to gaijin than other clans; after all, many of them were once gaijin themselves. They offered him what hospitality they could. Esteban remained with the Unicorn and eventually volunteered to accompany them against the Tainted army their Khan now led. He fought bravely, even assisting with the defense of Toshi Ranbo itself.

Esteban Cornejo now finds himself in a unique position. His mission to rescue his cousins has failed, and he has already made arrangements to send word back to his family. As a gaijin, he remains technically a criminal within the Empire. However, his assistance in the defense of the capital has been recognized and the Unicorn have spoken on his behalf. It has been suggested he remain and serve as an ambassador for his nation, perhaps even swear fealty to the Unicorn Clan. He has no experience with such things, and longs to return home, but a request for help has now arrived from the Mantis. They describe strange ships that Esteban recognizes as Thrane in design. How could a Thrane fleet be attacking Rokugan? Perhaps he should stay for a little while longer...

Esteban Cornejo

Air: 2 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 1
Reflexes: 3 Intelligence: 4

Honor: n/a (gaijin) Status: N/A Glory: 2.0 Infamy: 4.6

School/Rank: None (Insight Rank 3)

Skills: Athletics (Swimming) 3, Craft: Gunpowder 2, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 2, Firearms (Pistol) 5, Horsemanship 3, Investigation (Notice) 3, Jiujutsu 2, Swordsmanship (Gaijin Rapier) 5, Knives 3, Lore: Gaijin (Merenae) 9, Lore: Rokugani Culture 3, Medicine 2, Sailing 5, Sincerity 2, Stealth 3

Advantages: Allies (Shinjo Shono's forces), Languages (Merenae, Rokugani, Thrane), Luck (2 Ranks)

Disadvantages: Infamous (gaijin), Social Disadvantage (gaijin)

Katsu

A lost son

The man known as Katsu was born Tainted. His parents Shiba Katsuda and Soshi Jomyako had both been Tainted during the Battle of Oblivion's Gate and remained within the Shadowlands rather than carry their evil back to the Empire. After Jomyako gave birth to Katsu, she gave him to Katsuda to care for; she was aware she was becoming the Dark Oracle of Air and would have to leave them both. Katsuda raised his son as best he could, and they both fought to resist the corruption within them. Even as an adult, Katsu continued to fight the Taint, trying to live as his father wanted.

When Katsu was brought before Daigotsu and made to serve the Dark Lord, Katsu still resisted the control of Jigoku. He did as Daigotsu commanded and fought beside the other Lost when they attacked Otosan Uchi. He followed the Dark Lord as required, but still found ways to rebel. He occasionally aided or even healed Rokugani samurai he encountered in the Shadowlands. He met with others in the City of the Lost who had not yet wholly succumbed to the Taint, who wanted freedom from Jigoku's influence. He even helped some of them to escape from Daigotsu's kingdom. But Daigotsu always kept watch over him and Katsu could never hope to escape for himself.

When he witnessed the death of the Dark Lord, Katsu rejoiced. He might be doomed to always be Tainted, but he would not longer had to serve the Dark Lord of the Shadowlands. He made his way into the Empire, hoping to live quietly there away from the terrible influence of the Festering Pit. He continues to resist the Taint and has even covertly aided the Crane in their hunt for Daidoji Rekai. Unknown to him, however, he has drawn the attention of his mother, Soshi Jomyako. The Celestial guidelines that restrict the Oracles have begun to waver, and the Dark Oracle of Air seeks to bring her wandering son under her control. If he joins her, he can serve as her agent and seek out ways to allow her even more freedom to act. Jomyoko believes she will be reunited with Katsu soon...



Katsu, Tainted Shugenja

Air: 3 Earth: 4 Fire: 3 Water: 4 Void: 4
Intelligence: 4 Strength: 7

Honor: 4.6 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 1.2* *Infamy: 9.3*

School/Rank: Ronin Shugenja 2 / Bloodspeaker Technique

Shadowlands Taint: 4.2

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Divination 3, Etiquette 1, Lore: Maho 2, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Meditation 2, Spellcraft 5

Advantages: Idealistic

Disadvantages: Driven (resist the Taint), Shadowlands Taint, Social Disadvantage (ronin)

Doji Yasuyo

The Raven

Most of Doji Yasuyo's history remains the same in this timeline as in the real history of Rokugan. On her twentieth birthday, she had a vision of Lady Doji. Doji warned her it was her sacred duty to protect her cousin, Doji Kurohito, Champion of the Crane. She should seek out the famed kenku sensei, Kozue, to train and learn what must be done.

As the kenku's student, Yasuyo increased her already impressive swordsmanship and eventually learned the truth about Kurohito's blade, the cursed sword Chukandomo. Kozue also gave her Naishi, the companion to Chukandomo, a blade which had once belonged to her grandfather. Much like Chukandomo, the blade was intended for warriors of great destiny and possessed the spirits of those who had wielded it before. Ultimately, Yasuyo used the blade to help Kurohito cleanse the curse from Chukandomo, saving both him and the Crane Clan, and ending the ancient feud with the Lion Clan.

Believing her destiny was complete, Yasukyo tried to return Naishi to Kozue. The kenku refused it, however, saying her fate had not yet been fulfilled.

Recently, Doji Kurohito has begun to realize there is some manner of political corruption within the Crane Clan, although he cannot unearth any concrete information about it. He has called on those he trusts fully, including Yasuyo and his other cousin Doji Nagori. Yasuyo now believes her true destiny is to cleanse the Crane Clan of all conspirators, upholding the honor of the Crane. She is a skilled and determined woman, and already several minor members of the Shadow Court have died under her blade. Yasuyo will not rest until she is certain the threat within her clan is gone.

Doji Yasuyo, the Raven

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

Honor: 7.5 *Status: 3.0* *Glory: 4.8*

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 2/Kenku Swordsman 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 3, Courtier 3, Defense 5, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Iaijutsu (Focus) 5, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 2, Lore: Spirit Realms 3, Lore: Theology 2, Meditation 5, Perform: Dance 2, Sincerity (Honesty) 4, Tea Ceremony 3

Advantages: Ally (Kozue the Kenku), Great Destiny, Inheritance (Naishi), Multiple Schools

Disadvantages: Driven (protect the clan), Idealistic

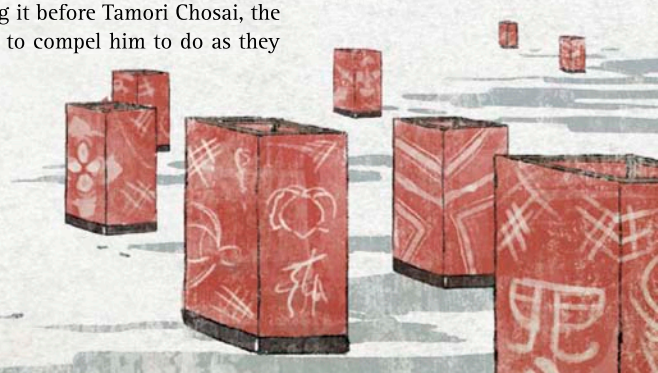
What Happened to the Dark Covenant of Fire?

A focal point in the conflict between the Dragon and the Phoenix is the disappearance of the Dark Covenant of Fire. The previous war between the two clans was instigated by Isawa Hochiu's misguided use of the Dark Covenant and then ended when the Covenant exiled the new Dark Oracle, Tamori Chosei, beyond the borders of Rokugan. After the clans made peace, the Covenant was placed in a shrine within the Dragon lands, guarded by Shiba samurai. When it disappeared, each clan feared the other had stolen it. The Blood Rain and its consequences, however, ultimately motivated the Dragon and Phoenix to find peace again. What happened to the Dark Covenant remained unknown.

Any number of answers to the Dark Covenant's fate are possible, and the GM can use such answers as a focus for a campaign during the Shadowed Throne era. The simplest answer is that the Dark Covenants, like the Covenants of Light, have a history of relocating. They disappear from one location and reappear in another, seemingly at random. However, this is not a very interesting answer, and creative GMs may want to try something else.

Members of the Dragon or the Phoenix could, in fact, have stolen the Dark Covenant, either on their own or with the connivance of their superiors. They may have felt it would be safer under their sole protection. They may have wanted to study it, hoping to find a way to restrict or even destroy it. Or they may even have wanted to use it against the other clan or against some third party which had earned their wrath.

Of course, there are several other groups who would also be interested in the power of a Dark Covenant. Agents of the Dark Oracle of Fire himself, Bloodspeaker cultists, the Shadow Court, the Goju or the Ninube, the Kolat, or even other clans could have stolen it... or discovered it after it disappeared. Regardless of who took it or why, if they wish to use it they will have to carry it into the Yobanjin territories and bring it before Tamori Chosai, the Dark Oracle of Fire, in order to compel him to do as they wished.



A campaign involving the disappearance of the Dark Covenant of Fire would focus on investigating the nature of the Dark Covenant, the mystery of its disappearance, and finding those who may have stolen it. This could be a relatively straightforward process if it was taken directly from the shrine by a "normal" group or an individual. If it was relocated magically, however, things get more complex. It may be noted that Covenants exist outside of the Elements, and those who can sense a "hole" where no Element exists would be able to find them. Regardless, an investigation of the missing Dark Covenant of Fire can be as simple or as complex as the GM might desire, potentially involving almost every notable factions and event within the era of the Shadowed Throne.

The Tests of Enlightenment

The Brotherhood of Shinsei maintains the bloodline of Shinsei in secret, with each generation raised in seclusion within remote Shintaoist monasteries. This ensures the line of Shinsei can continue unbroken until the Celestial Wheel returns him to life once again. In the canonical history of the Empire after the Four Winds era, the heir of Shinsei was a man named Rosoku, son of the Hooded Ronin who led the Thunders in the year 1129. Rosoku studied the Prophecies of Uikku, which many believed had been fulfilled by the events during the Clan Wars. He soon came to believe that recent events were similar in several ways to the prophecies, suggesting the Dooms of the Empire were occurring once again. He came to believe a cycle had been established that would continue until all of the prophecies had been truly fulfilled and the Empire was destroyed.

In an effort to avert this and protect the future of the Empire, Rosoku emerged from hiding and announced the Test of Enlightenment, challenging the samurai of the Empire to follow the ways of Enlightenment and thereby win a series of Elemental Books containing the accumulated wisdom of Shinsei's line. (This event is described in the L5R supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 75, and the individual Elemental Books are discussed in the Elemental series of L5R 4th Edition supplements.)

In the timeline of the Shadowed Throne, however, Rosoku never issued the Test of Enlightenment. Before he could emerge from isolation and introduce his books to the Empire, several violent conflicts erupted across Rokugan and it became a much more chaotic and uncertain place. Events were occurring differently than he had anticipated, and the threat to Enlightenment he had earlier noticed seemed to be fading. Rosoku decided it was safer to remain in hiding, preserving his own life and keeping the Books of the Elements safe.

This, however, is not to say a samurai could not have tracked down Rosoku and sought Enlightenment from him directly. Anyone who can do so and prove their enlightened ways to Rosoku could potentially earn one of the Books of the Elements. The GM can find all manner of creative ways to create adventures out of such themes. For example, Rosoku will try to find samurai who most perfectly embody each Element – not merely by being strong or perceptive or intelligent or agile, but by showing an approach to problems that evokes the philosophical qualities of the Element. For example, a character who shows patience and endurance in the face of provocation or failure would be demonstrating the qualities of Earth.

The Shadow Court

In many ways the Shadow Court is like other conspiracies that try to manipulate the Empire: the first and second Gozoku, the Shadowed Tower, and of course the Kolat. Indeed, many of Hantei Naseru's methods evolve from the plans Bayushi Atsuki made for his Second Gozoku. However, Naseru's initial goal was not to usurp his sister; indeed, he believed that of all his siblings she was the most worthy to succeed their father. She was an honorable warrior with the best intentions for the Empire. However, Naseru was intimately familiar with the nature of politics and knew the challenges facing Toturi II would probably be beyond her skills. She could not imagine the sort of decisions an Emperor had to make or the consequences she would have to accept. She would need his help, and therefore he assumed the position of Imperial Advisor and began to rebuild the Imperial Court.

Naseru's entertained a hope that a more cooperative and efficient court could be created, but it quickly became clear there would always be rivalry and strife. That was the nature of the Empire, and indeed Hantei XVI had taught him it was a necessity to secure the rule of the Throne. As long as the clans were at odds, they could not combine their power against the Emperor; conversely, they might be willing to cooperate if they felt they had a greater measure of power. Naseru decided that would be his goal: a secret government which would ensure greater cooperation and unity within the Empire, ruled not by the Empress' decrees but by soft words spoken in the shadows.

Before his goals could be accomplished, the Imperial Advisor needed to ensure his plans would remain secret from his sister; she would never appreciate his efforts and would simply see his actions as a betrayal. Fortunately, establishing her new reign and ensuring the Toturi line would continue kept her distracted. Her main concern was maintaining peace within her Empire; Toturi II reviewed every report of every conflict, no matter how minor, sending aid to whoever seemed to need most. With her attention divided between these concerns, her husband, and the family they had begun, Toturi II remained blissfully unaware of Naseru's activities, trusting him to act in her interests.

Their brother Sezaru had even less political acumen than the Empress, but his mystical awareness allowed him to perceive more of the world than anyone else. However, he also struggled with his own unsettled thoughts and impulses, inner demons that drove him against the enemies of their family. If he were to learn Naseru's plans, if he were to see him as an threat, the consequences would be uncontrollable and devastating. Naseru needed to maintain control. To do so, he gave his brother a new quest, suggesting he focus on cleansing and restoring Otosan Uchi. Although Naseru intended this to keep Sezaru fully occupied, it did not turn out that way – the interference of the Ninube sent the Wolf off on a different quest. Still, either way he was removed from the world of politics.

The Scorpion understood the shadows best, and their Champion was already a personal friend and ally, so they were the perfect resource for creating what Naseru wanted. They became an even stronger asset after Bayushi Paneki rooted out and destroyed the last remnants of the Shadowed Tower. Bayushi Sunetra secured all the journals and other records that documented Atsuki's past activities and future intentions, and these inspired new methods and offered new recruits for Naseru's plans.

The foundations of the Shadow Court were formed by Doji Akiko, Bayushi Sunetra, Otomo Hoketuhime, and Shinjo Shono. While each of them had resources Naseru valued, he believed Sunetra, Hoketuhime, and Shono were his most loyal of allies; they would be the most willing to support him (or, if necessary, to stop him). Doji Akiko had already been recruited by Bayushi Atsuki, and her motives were more questionable than the others, but she was willing to follow Hantei Naseru, believing any effort to undermine the Toturi Dynasty would benefit the Empire and potentially return it to its ancient glory. Her influence within the Crane and the Phoenix allowed her to recruit many more conspirators, such as Kakita Munemori and Isawa Sachi, and bring much of each clan's resources under the control of the Shadow Court.

The influence of the Shadow Court spread slowly through the other clans and factions as more samurai were brought into the conspiracy. Some, like Seppun Toshiaki, were tempted with promises of power. Others, like Akiko, had more complex reasons for following the Imperial Advisor. Yoritomo Kumiko simply saw the opportunity to improve her clan and remain in Naseru's favor, since he had already assisted her in ending the Mantis civil war and it was clear he could offer much more. To secure her allegiance, Naseru arranged for the Scorpion to surrender Bayushi Kamnan, the man who personally killed Mantis Champion Yoritomo Aramasu. After that, Kumiko was completely willing to pursue the interests of the Shadow Court on the seas and with the Minor Courts.

There were also agents of the Court such as Ide Tang who remained inactive until they might be needed. These were mostly Scorpion spies and infiltrators, carefully placed in positions of potential power and influence. Most of them did not know the true reasons for their promotions or what tasks that might be required to perform. Indeed, the majority of the samurai serving the interests of the Shadow Court were unaware of the full nature of the conspiracy or of who controlled it. And since most of the directives they were given seemed beneficial to the Empire, they had few incentives to resist their orders.

As the years pass, the evolution of the Shadow Court increases Hantei Naseru's ability to manipulate the Empire. What began as a way ensuring his sister's reign is secure and successful becomes a way for him to rule from behind the Throne. The resentment he has always felt when she was praised as a warrior and a hero, while his own accomplishments were ignored and forgotten, has become justification for his activities through the Shadow Court. Indeed, the fact that he could create the Shadow Court so easily seems to prove his superior worthiness to rule. His orders become more overt, interfering more in military matters and other concerns Toturi II believes to be under her control.

The net effect of Naseru's machinations is that many even outside the influence of the Shadow Court have begun to lose faith in the Throne. The Imperial Advisor's power has grown as the Empress' has waned. She relies on her husband Tanitsu to find political allies while she uses what military influence she retains to do the same outside of the courts. The loyalty of the Jade and Emerald Champion are in question, since they have acted outside of her orders on more than one occasion. Many of the political maneuvers against the Throne seem to have originated within the Crane, yet Doji Kurihito appears to remain completely loyal. The Lion, dissatisfied with many of her previous decisions, await her next one. Will she appoint a new Shogun to replace Paneki? If so, who will it be, and who will Naseru try to lead her into choosing? Does she even realize that Naseru is behind the subtle weakening of her authority?

Ultimately, the outcome of this struggle is left to the GM.



The Realm of Shadows

The balance of reality is a delicate thing. Any major event has the potential to shift it, to alter the Celestial Order, creating a cascade of subsequent events and changes. The deaths of gods, the rise and fall of dynasties, the ascension of man, the return of ancestors, and the reign of Oracles all bring disruptions with then, rippling through all of the Spirit Realms. In the canonical history of Rokugan, these disruptions give rise to the Realm of Thwarted Destiny, and later lead to the exile of Lord Sun and Lady Moon from the Heavens to be replaced by the Jade and Obsidian Dragons.

In the timeline of the Shadowed Throne, a different Celestial event takes place. The disruptions in reality force the spirit realms father apart, straining the bonds between them, tearing at the underlying fabric of reality. From the pieces of different realms and the Nothingness between them, a new spirit realm begins to form. It has no definition, and at first is shapeless and without purpose. The Shadow Dragon senses this inchoate creation, for much of it was drawn from Nothing. The creature seized control of this realm, determined to make it his own. Spirits of those slain by Goju and Ninube awakened in this realm, and their thoughts and desires, the lives they wished they had lived and the destinies they feared to face, became a part of the shadows and of the dragon who dwelt there. The Shadow Dragon became the master of this new realm, ascending to a place of power on par with its former station as an Elemental Dragon in the Celestial Realm. As the realm grew stronger, so too would the Dragon, until it became strong enough to tear asunder the entirety of creation... as the Nothing had always wished.

And as a Dragon in its own realm apart from Ningen-do, it now chooses an Oracle to serve the cause of Nothing in the mortal world.

The Oracle of Nothing could be any villain of sufficient power and sufficiently nihilistic character. Anyone corrupted by the Shadow would be ideal, such as Soshi Angai or even Sezaru (although in the "official" version of the Shadowed Throne era, Sezaru winds up serving Obsidian instead). Kokujin, the mad tattooed man, would also be a good choice despite his lack of connection to the Shadow. And of course a PC who has fallen down the paths of sin and evil could take on the role as well.

The Oracle of Shadow, a servant of Nothing, is not subject to the same rules as other Oracles – or simply refuses to recognize them. Such a being does at it pleases, serving the interests of the Nothing and trying to send more souls to the eternal trap of the Realm of Shadows. The Oracles of Light have already been forced to largely withdraw themselves from the mortal world in order to uphold balance, and now the creation of the Realm of Shadows and the actions of its Oracle create even greater imbalance. The Heavens may respond to this more actively, such as by restoring their Oracles and allowing them to act more openly. The Thunder Dragon in particular, known for its love of mortals, may enhance the power of its own Oracle, Togashi Mitsu, to preserve destiny.

As the rules of the Celestial Oracles are rewritten by these events, so too is the Oracle of Jade impacted. It has more freedom to inspire virtue and eliminate corruption, and this causes its counterpart – the Oracle of Obsidian – to likewise be more potent when it emerges. While this conflict may not be so direct as that between Thunder and Shadow, it is just as deadly to those mortals who get involved. And the Dark Oracles, too, seek new opportunities, testing the restrictions that hold them at bay. Where this might end is anyone's guess..

New Mechanics

New Advanced School: Tsudao's Legion

Under the reign of the Emperor Toturi II, known to many by her youthful nickname of the Sword, the greatest force for enforcing the laws of the Empire is the Imperial Legions which serve the Throne directly. Reorganized by the Empress during the early years of her reign, these Legions operate under the direct command of the Emerald Champion, the Shogun, the Jade Champion, and most notably the Empress herself.

The Empress oversees the reorganization of these military forces personally, continuing her father's tradition of military innovation throughout her reign. In particular, she institutes a rigid set of requirements that restricts membership in the Legions, with the most stringent requirements for the Legion she personally commands. She also devises a set of new Techniques which she teaches to the best warriors of that Legion, making it one of the most formidable military forces in the Empire's history.

Requirements:

- Rings/Traits: Agility 5, Strength 4
- Skills: Battle 5, any one Weapon Skill at 5
- Other: Honor Rank 6+, Status Rank 2+, any one Paragon Advantage

Techniques:

Rank 1: All Things through Honor

The members of Tsudao's Legion are taught there is nothing that cannot be accomplished if one's Honor is true. When making a Skill Roll with a High or Bugei Skill in which you have at least 1 Rank, you may spend a Void Point to make that roll as though your Skill Rank is equal to your Honor Rank.

Rank 2: Wisdom of the Sensei

The dojo of Tsudao's Legion teaches both tactical versatility and the joy of battle in the name of one's lord. When rolling on the Mass Battle Table, you may add or subtract your Void Ring from the total of your roll, as desired. Additionally, you may select one Maneuver. Whenever you attempt that Maneuver, you gain one Free Raise toward success.

Rank Three: Empowered by her Name

Those who devote themselves utterly to the cause of the Empress are nigh unstoppable in their fervor. If your Honor Rank exceeds your opponent's Honor Rank, you may make a single additional melee attack (as a Free Action) once per Round against that opponent.

New Alternate Path: Agents of the Second Gozoku

Despite his genuine affection for his sister, Hantei Naseru uses his influence and connections to resurrect the Gozoku conspiracy, an organization defunct since the fifth century. The goal of the Second Gozoku is not to overthrow the Empress but rather to ensure her rule is prosperous despite her own shortcomings. Naseru and his allies among the Scorpion Clan are well aware of the hindrance Honor brings with it, and seek to ensure their beloved Empress flourishes by taking the steps she cannot, doing what must be done regardless of the consequences.

New Alternate Path: Second Gozoku Agent

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any School 2
- **Requirements:** Honor Rank of 4 or less. Must have Obligation to the Second Gozoku or its leader.

Using These Mechanics in Other Settings

The mechanics of the Shadowed Throne setting are designed for that alternate timeline, and using them in other L5R campaigns can be somewhat problematic.

Tsudao's Legion is especially troubling in this regard, since it is both extremely potent and extremely specific. However, this Advanced School is essentially representing a highly elite military force based around Honor, and can thus potentially be used as a more advanced version of the mechanics provided in the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook for the Imperial Legions. Alternatively, it can be used for a version of the Shogunate, the Jade Legion, or virtually any other elite Imperial military force that might exist in Rokugan. It could also be used to represent elite organizations within the Lion or Dragon Clans (since it is based on their Techniques) or even to represent the Blessed Guard, the order of ancestral spirits who guard the portals into Yomi.

The Gozoku Agent path is less problematic, since the Second Gozoku is also active in the canonical history of Rokugan under the leadership of Bayushi Atsuki. GMs may freely use this Technique to represent the training of that organization as well.

Technique: To Shield the Empress

The members of the Second Gozoku believe they do what they must to protect the Empress from the harsh realities of rule, and this philosophy in turn protects them from the worst excesses they must embrace. Whenever you take an action that would result in a loss of Honor, if by taking this action you spare Honor or Glory loss to someone of higher Status Rank than you, the loss is halved (rounded down).







Outside Kyuden Ashinagabachi, Summer 1173

If you had asked Utaku Hidaki where the final battle that would decide the very fate of the Empire would occur, he would never have chosen this place. This place, a standing shame to the very Lion troops arrayed before it, was hardly the most defensible position in the Scorpion or Mantis lands, and yet here they stood. Desperate times had called together men and women of every clan, a colorful and mottled array of clan and family mon arrayed as far as the eye could see. And yet their strength was as nothing compared to the horde before them.

The enemy were like nothing Hideki had ever seen before this war began. He had fought several of them over the last two years, slain more than one, yet they seemed as alien and unstoppable as ever. Indeed, the Destroyers seemed almost a cosmic opposite to the armies of Rokugan gathered on that field. They stood in eerily perfect, uniform lines for almost as far as the eye could see, the only real distinctions between them in the nature of some of their units. There were some specific formations than seemed somehow different, larger and more sinister. But other than that it was as though the Rokugani faced a vast sea of uniform gray steel, a flood of dark metal meant to sweep over every inch of the Empire. Utterly unlike humanity, these things had been designed in some way, forged from the Fortunes only knew what dark magics. They were not living things, not complete; no heart, no soul burned within them. Hideki felt a tremor run through his body as he watched them, shifting slightly in his saddle, waiting for the order to charge.

Hideki turned his head, looking again at the army of Rokugan gathered around him. Three years ago many of those samurai would have sought nothing other than to kill each other, for slights ancient or recent. But now, faced with the destruction of all they held dear, they had risen up as one body, fighting together with passion, honor, and selfless devotion. They came from every walk and station of life, from the lowliest of ashigaru and ronin to the highest ranks of clan generals and champions. It was almost enough to bring a tear to the eye, but Hideki suppressed the feeling – such a loss of face would not be fitting, here on this field.

"Utaku-san, don't tell me you're philosophizing again at a time like this," said a man whose armor was lacquered in blues and grays. His expression was jovial, a look that seemed unsuitable to a soldier fighting in these final hours, and he sat his stout pony with a casual air. Tsuru's Legion was not a large force, but its ferocity was undeniable, and this man seemed to fight without ever letting the weight of events settle on his shoulders. They called him blessed by Hotei. Utaku Hidaki sometimes thought a simpler explanation was that Hida Noboru was a little touched in the head. Still, if there was a good man to die beside, the Crab was probably him.

Hideki offered a more restrained smile in return. "It is hard not to when one faces the inevitability of fate, Hida-san," he said, gripping the pommel of his saddle. He looked back toward the peak of the hill behind him, picking out the commander of his unit. Even with the grievous wound that had claimed most of one arm, Utaku Yu-Pan was a strident and imposing figure even at a distance. Confidence and cold ferocity brimmed off her every motion as she gestured commands. It would be soon. It was time to end this war, one way or another.

"Hah!" bellowed the Crab cavalryman. He laughed aloud and slapped Hidaki on the back. Under other circumstances the Unicorn might have been offended at the casual touch – he had always been more traditional than most of his brethren – but he knew there was no harm in it. And on this day even a samurai could appreciate a moment of human contact.

"You think far too much," Noboru continued. "We need only worry about one thing this day, and that's where the next of our targets will be. And believe me, my friend, there are plenty of those to go around. Save that quick little mind of yours for the field before us. We can sort out the philosophy tomorrow, here or in Yomi."

The Unicorn soldier nodded grimly at that.

The Battle Maidens were forming up, claiming pride of position as always. The Moto would flank along with the supporting units, and the Shinjo would follow them in with archery fire to support. It was a traditional attack, one that had always worked well in the past; the only question now was whether there could be enough force behind them to win against such an overwhelming foe. The enemy formations had begun to move, their advance eerily synchronized. On the hilltop, Utaku Yu-Pan raised her war-fan, awaiting the final signal from the ramparts of Kyuden Ashinagabachi.

In that moment Hideki knew Noboru was right. None of his philosophizing mattered. There was only the here and the now, the moment where lived or died by Heaven's will.

The fan came down. As one, they charged.

The Destroyer War, also known as the Plague War or the Kali-Ma Invasion, is the last and one of the worst of the long series of great crises which beset Rokugan in the twelfth century. Rokugan's very existence would be threatened by an evil from beyond its borders, a foreign goddess called Kali-Ma who assembled a vast demonic army and sought to utterly overturn and destroy the Empire. The climax of this desperate struggle would bring about profound changes in Rokugan and indeed in the Celestial Order itself, with the Spider Clan elevated to Great Clan status, the Dark Lord Daigotsu becoming the ruler of Jigoku, and the Empire undertaking the exploration and colonization of the former Ivory Kingdoms (described in Chapter Twelve, the Age of Exploration). Like other "epic" periods in Rokugani history, such as the Clan Wars and the Eighth Century Crisis, the Destroyer War allows the GM to throw the PCs into the midst of huge battles and desperate struggles, with the fate of the Empire riding on their shoulders.



The Timeline of the Destroyer War

The Destroyer War follows immediately after the conclusion of a lesser but still destructive conflict, the War of Dark Fire, in which the Dark Oracle of Fire unleashes an attack on the northern Empire. This event is described briefly on page 257 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire. However, certain key events that led up to the invasion of Kali-Ma's forces were set in motion several years earlier.

Year 1168

During a border skirmish with the Crab, the Scorpion shugenja Soshi Natsuo opens a mysterious scroll which had been retrieved from the Tomb of the Seven Thunders a year earlier. The power of the scroll causes considerable devastation to the Crab forces and leaves the battlefield a wasted lifeless ruin. Unbeknownst to any but the now hopelessly mad Natsuo, the scroll contained some of the essence of Kali-Ma, a goddess of destruction from the Ivory Kingdoms, and opening it frees that essence to rejoin the goddess' weakened spiritual self.

Iuichi Yue, the former daimyo of the Iuchi, is sold into slavery in Medinaat al-Salaam.

Amid the celestial upheavals that mark the Race for the Throne, few notice that something of equal significance occurs: Fu Leng is expelled from Jigoku by Kali-Ma. The Realm of Evil is seeking a new champion for its will, and Kali-Ma aspires to the role. She severs a portion of Fu Leng's divinity from

him, and it is sealed away within the same scroll which formerly held her power – a scroll which later comes to be known as the Essence of Jigoku. Cast down into the mortal plane, Fu Leng becomes outwardly mortal.

Year 1169

Fu Leng is discovered by agents of Daigotsu and brought to the hidden Spider stronghold known as the Fingers of Bone. There he slowly recuperates from the spiritual and physical shock of his recent defeat.

In Medinaat al-Salaam, the sinister cult known as the Jackals dupe Iuchi Yue into performing a blasphemous ritual involving the murder of an innocent plague victim. This ritual fulfills an ancient prophecy and transforms her into an avatar and servant of Kali-Ma.

Yue, now known as the Ebon Daughter, initially focuses her attention on a monastic order known as the Ebonites, which she largely annihilates. That accomplished, she travels to the Ivory Kingdoms and joins with the Cult of Ruhmal to institute a reign of terror over that formerly peaceful land.

Year 1170

Kali-Ma's followers slaughter the people of the Ivory Kingdoms and the dark goddess attacks and destroys the other deities of that land. Recognizing her power, Jigoku accepts Kali-Ma as its new champion, and she begins preparations to conquer Rokugan. To distract and weaken the Empire, she makes a deal with the Dark Oracle of Fire, Tamori Chosei, who soon unleashed the Army of Dark Fire against Rokugan's northern provinces.

A small group of samurai manage to trap the soul of the Oni Lord Kyoso no Oni inside a newly created Black Scroll. Although they do not realize it, they have performed a vital service to the Empire, for Kyoso is also a fragment of Kali-Ma's divine essence. This scroll thus prevents her from exerting her full divine power, and will becomes the focus of ongoing quests by both her followers and Fu Leng.

Year 1171, Spring

The armies of Rokugan win the Battle of the Dragon's Heart Plain, finally crushing the Army of Dark Fire. In the wake of their victory, the Empress Iweko announces an Empire-wide festival to honor the valiant heroes who defended the people. All the Clan Champions are commanded to be in attendance. Most Rokugani expect a period of peace in which to rebuild the damage to the lands of the Phoenix, Dragon, and Unicorn.

The Dark Oracle of Earth is defeated by a group of Phoenix shugenja. They discover the Bloodsword called Handen (Justice) in his possession, and use it to destroy him. The Phoenix Elemental Council, determined to never face another threat like the War of Dark Fire, give the Bloodsword to a young shugenja named Isawa Mitsuhiko with orders to hunt down and kill all five of the Dark Oracles.

As part of the effort to rebuild the Empire, the Ise Zume are ordered by their new Clan Champion Mirumoto Kei to traverse the land, going where they please to seek out and help those in need. Many regions record instances of tattooed men unexpectedly appearing, sometimes to lend aid, something for mysterious purposes of their own. A particularly curious case involves a man named Togashi Akagi, who seats himself upon the roof of a Crane palace in meditation for several months.

Empowered and emboldened by his Bloodsword, Isawa Mitsuhiko locates and kills the Dark Oracle of Air, Soshi Jomyako. She is the second Dark Oracle to fall to the blade.

A scout named Hida Fumetsu brings reports to the Crab Clan from the depths of the Shadowlands. It seems the so-called Wall of Bone, formerly one of the principle defenses of the City of the Lost, has been shattered and destroyed by an oncoming horde of oni and other Shadowlands beasts. The situation within the City of the Lost is unknown. What is most distressing, however, is the mass of monsters pouring past the destroyed Wall of Bone and advancing rapidly toward the Kaiu Wall.

Year 1171, Month of the Monkey

The first known instances of what will eventually be known as the Destroyer Plague are found among the peasants of the Scorpion and Crane lands, as well as among the secondary ranks of the Crane court. Unknown to the Rokugani, the plague is being spread by the Ebon Daughter and her ally, a gaijin creature calling itself the Ghul Lord.

Crane efforts toward the plague focus on containing known cases and seeking aid from their shugenja (as well as their friends in the Phoenix clan). Scorpion efforts are focused on eradication of infected regions. The Empress orders Kuni Daigo, the Jade Champion, to research the plague.

The first major waves of demonic attacks reach the Kaiu Wall, battering repeatedly at the Crab defenses. Shiro Hiruma is bypassed, but the presence of the horde completely cuts it off from contact from the Empire. While the Wall initially stands firm against the assaults, the Crab grow increasingly concerned about the strange, seemingly terrified behavior of the Shadowlands creatures, as well as their own mounting casualties and rapid expenditure of resources. The Lion and Unicorn both dispatch relief forces to support the Crab, under the leadership of Clan Champion Akodo Shigetoshi and family daimyo Utaku Yu-Pan respectively.

Year 1171, Month of the Rooster

After a month of desperate combat against the Shadowlands forces, the defenders of the Wall finally see what has driven the denizens of Jigoku to such frantic efforts at escape: the Destroyer army. The inhuman entities known as Ironclads and the seemingly endless hordes of Destroyer half-human demons are like nothing Rokugan has ever seen before. The invaders attack the Wall head-on, and the fighting is fierce and horrifying; the combined armies of the Unicorn, Lion, and Crab are hard-pressed to repel several breaches.

With everyone in Rokugan wondering what could be behind this massive attack, a small group of young samurai secretly enter the Shadowlands to try to discover the identity of the Destroyers' leader. They encounter the goddess Kali-Ma, and half their number die in the confrontation. The rest, led by a pair of young men named Yoritomo Saburo and Akodo Shunori, flee back to Rokugan to try to warn the Empress.

The rapid spread of the plague prompts drastic measures to try to contain it. With the worst outbreak being in the lands of the Horiuchi family, the Empress reluctantly gives the command for the Horiuchi to be killed and their lands burned in hopes of containing the disease. Almost all of the Horiuchi perish, leaving only a handful scattered across the Empire.

Year 1171, Month of the Dog

The young samurai led by Saburo and Shunori find themselves trapped within the courts and bureaucracy of Toshi Ranbo, unable to deliver their message to the Empress. They are forced to remain in the capitol for weeks, waiting for an audience. During this time they meet and come under the influence of an enigmatic monk calling himself Furumaro... who is actually Fu Leng.

After weeks of fighting, the Kaiu Wall's defenses collapse. Crab Champion Hida Kuon confronts the enemy commander, a Rakshasa, and is grievously wounded. Only the heroic sacrifice of a Crab named Kaiu Taru, who detonates a cache of gaijin pepper laced with jade, manages to temporarily drive off the Rakshasa, allowing Kuon to be rescued.



Year 1171, Month of the Boar

Hida Kuon requests seppuku for allowing the Destroyers to breach the Kaiu Wall. Empress Iweko I accepts his request but orders him to commit seppuku in "a fashion befitting the Crab." Kuon makes a suicide attack on the enemy-held portion of the Kaiu Wall, accompanied by his personal honor guard, and dies confronting the foe. In recognition of this deed, the Empress declares no clan may speak ill of the Crab Clan's failures; all dishonor from the fall of the Kaiu Wall is washed away. Kuon's widow, Hida Reiha, becomes regent until their young son can come of age.

In the wake of the fall of the Kaiu Wall, Crab, Lion and Unicorn forces prepare defenses along the borders of Crab lands, in Shiro Kuni, and in Kyuden Hida. Fighting is severe in all locations, and it becomes increasingly apparent that the enemy cannot be contained within Crab lands.

Year 1171, Winter

Mirumoto Kei, daimyo of the Mirumoto, is on her way back to Dragon lands for the winter when she is ambushed by forces of the Army of Dark Fire, which have returned to Rokugan in support of Kali-Ma's attack. Kei sends one of the Togashi tattooed men to warn the rest of the Empire that the Dark Oracle's forces have returned.

The Imperial Winter Court is held in Kyuden Gotei on the Mantis Isles to try to ensure the safety of all of the guests. Soon after the court begins, Empress Iweko sends shockwaves throughout the Imperial Court by ordering the death sentence against Daigotsu be temporarily suspended. She commands that he be summoned immediately to an audience.

Iweko I weds Akodo Setai in a lavish ceremony attended by all the samurai present at Winter Court.

As the winter comes to an end, the war resumes in full force. Even while the snows are still melting the Destroyer armies resume their march and the Army of Dark Fire unleashes a second invasion of the northern part of the Empire. The continued ravages of the plague also leads to increased lawlessness and banditry throughout the Empire, forcing precious resources to be diverted to quell these uprisings.

Year 1172, Spring

Saburo, Shunori, and their fellow samurai finally meet with the Empress. She listens to their story and then orders them to remain in Toshi Ranbo, much to their frustration. There they fall further under Furumaro's influence, becoming increasingly convinced it is their destiny to help save the Empire, and increasingly troubled by their inability to do anything.

Spider operatives plant the bodies of several Scorpion magistrates within the Crane borders, leaving a trail from a burned plague-ridden village. Scorpion wardens investigating the situation encounter a hostile Crane patrol, suspicions run high, and an armed confrontation ensures, ratcheting up tensions between the clans.

The Mantis Clan makes preparations to launch a return expedition to the Ivory Kingdoms. Led by Moshi Kalani, it will the first major voyage to the Ivory Kingdoms since Yoritomo Aramasu visited there many years before.

A spirit portal to Toshigoku appears randomly within the Empire. It is the first of many spirit portals to appear, manifestations of chaos apparently coming in the wake of Kali-Ma's efforts to disrupt the very balance and fabric of reality. Isawa Mitsuko, the Master of Air, spearheads the efforts to close these portals, using powerful magic to travel to each as it is found by Phoenix operatives and allies.

Year 1172, Month of the Dragon

The siege of Shiro Kuni begins to turn against the defenders. The commander, Horiuchi Nobane (one of the few Horiuchi still alive), tries to hold out until Dragon and Phoenix reinforcements can arrive, but the Destroyers prove too strong. As the castle falls, arguments break out between Crab and Phoenix defenders over the fate of the many scrolls in the Kuni library, scrolls containing much of their accumulated wisdom on the Shadowlands. One of Nobane's lieutenants finally convinces the Crab to let the Phoenix transport the scrolls in exchange for a Phoenix pledge to respect their integrity as clan secrets of the Crab. Nobane leads the remaining Rokugani forces out of the Kuni lands to Crane territories.

Daigotsu meets with the Empress by possessing a Pekkle no Oni and using it as his mouthpiece. (The presence of such a creature within the palace gardens is infuriating to the Seppun, who re-double their efforts to strengthen Toshi Ranbo's spiritual defenses.) The Empress agrees to accept an emissary from Daigotsu, a corrupted Dragon named Mirumoto Taishuu, in exchange for some of the Dark Lord's extensive knowledge of the Destroyers.

Year 1172, Month of the Serpent

Groups of madmen begin to appear within the Empire who are, apparently, willing converts to the cause of the Destroyers. Most of these are quickly and brutally suppressed by Imperial forces, but their mere presence is deeply alarming. There are also increasing numbers of peasant revolts due to the ongoing spread of the plague.

A new group of elite Destroyer units appear which call themselves Centuraie. They appear to be Yodotai gaijin who have converted to the service of Kali-Ma. They strike in many border regions throughout the Empire. Some even possess



ships and make several naval landings against the Empire's coast; others are sunk at sea by the Mantis before they can threaten land.

Bayushi Hisoka, the Imperial Chancellor, manages to bring an end to the clashes between the Scorpion and Crane. He forces both clans to accept apologies for the earlier incidents, and although the situation initially remains tends it soon becomes clear there is no desire in the higher leadership for any major confrontation.

The Empress finally issues orders to the group of young samurai waiting in Toshi Ranbo: they are to track down rumors of a Scorpion relic of great power, a mysterious scroll called simply "Essence of Destruction." This is the Black Scroll containing the spirit of Kyoso no Oni. The samurai travel to Ryoko Owari, and while there they assist a Daigotsu bushi in killing the creature known as the Ghul Lord, thereby somewhat slowing the spread of the plague.

Despite the death of the Ghul Lord, plague outbreaks reach pandemic proportions in Crane and Scorpion lands. Even worse, victims of the plague begin rising as zombies, wrecking further havoc on the surrounding territories.

Kyuden Hida, the greatest castle in Crab lands and one of the clan's few surviving military strongholds, falls after a lengthy siege. (Details on the fall of Kyuden Hida may be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*, page 41.)

Year 1172, Summer

Bayushi Paneki, Champion of the Scorpion, succumbs to the plague. He intends to commit seppuku before the plague can overcome him, but a moment's hesitation by his second results in his rising as a powerful zombie lord. Known thereafter as "The Disgrace," the creature slaughters many in Kyuden Bayushi before leaving to wander the Empire. It begins gathering many other plague zombies to its side, apparently by sheer force of will.

The ronin warlord Karatsu attacks the remote stronghold known as the Palace of Breaking Dawn. (See the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*, page 43, for details.)

An immensely powerful monster appears in the ranks of the Destroyer army. Called simply "The God Beast," it is apparently a former deity of the Ivory Kingdoms, its mind shattered and its power forced to serve the will of Kali-Ma. She moves her armies aside and sends the God-Beast forward alone to wreak havoc on the Rokugani. Initially, all attempts to stop it prove ineffectual, and its power is made even more fearsome by the hordes of spawn which it unleashes.

Year 1172, Month of the Monkey

A large force of the Empire's finest heroes confront the God-Beast on the plains before Ryoko Owari. Although they do not realize it, their efforts are aided by a goblin called Gakku, who delivers a vial of Fu Leng's blood into the God-Beast by the simple expedient of getting eaten by it; the Dark Kami's divine quintessence weakens the creature. It is further weakened when the Master of Void, Isawa Kimi, manages to call forth some of the suppressed nature of its original divine identity. Finally, after desperate combat and many casualties, the God-Beast is slain.

The Mantis expedition led by Moshi Kalani finally arrives in the Ivory Kingdoms. They are welcomed by a small group of locals (including a boy who is apparently the half-gaijin son of Yoritomo Aramasu) and a massive fleet of ships that seem to be half-Rokugani in design. The locals claim the unmanned fleet is the "Fourth Storm" and say they have been waiting a generation for the Mantis to return. However, once the Mantis venture beyond the coastal stronghold of these newfound gaijin allies, they make a disturbing discovery: almost all of the Ivory Kingdoms' population appears to be missing. They have been sacrificed to Kali-Ma to create her Ironclad army and feed her power.

Year 1172, Month of the Rooster

The Dark Oracle of Fire, Tamori Chosai, once again unleashes the power of the volcanoes within the Dragon mountains. However, soon after he is located by Isawa Mitsuhiko and suffers a severe wound from the blade Judgment. Fleeing, he retreats to a volcano in the yobanjin lands to try to

recuperate. Without his guidance the Army of Dark Fire quickly diminishes as a threat to the Empire.

"The Disgrace" crosses the Spine of the World Mountains and the Two Sides River to invade the Lion lands. Zombies normally do not pass through water, but those following the Disgrace do so now, and a massive eruption of undead spreads deep into the Lion provinces, spreading plague and mayhem.

Year 1172, Winter

The Imperial Winter Court is held in the capital, Toshi Ranbo. The court is interrupted by a direct assault from the forces of Kali-Ma. A group of corrupted monks sacrifice themselves to create blood magic that bypasses the wards of the Imperial Palace, allowing a handful of Ruhmal assassins to attempt to kill the Empress. The attack is thwarted by the Empress' Guard and Bayushi Norachai, the Defender of the Imperial City. Norachai leaps in front of several blades aimed at the Empress and is grievously wounded, eventually dying. In the wake of the incident, Emerald Champion Shosuro Jimen proclaims the Winter Court closed.

With the Imperial Winter Court ended early, a number of smaller "Shadow Courts" are arranged by the Crane Clan so as to maintain relations between the clans while not directly contradicting the authority of the Emerald Champion. The effort procures considerable favor for the Crane.

The winter is unusually harsh, blocking further progress by the Destroyer armies and greatly slowing the spread of the plague. Many Rokugani attribute this to the wrath of the spirits against the forces of Kali-Ma, with some crediting the legendary Yuki no Onna for the respite.

Year 1173, Month of the Hare

As the snows finally melt, the Destroyers resume their advance and turn toward the interior of the Empire. Their advance begins at the ronin-dominated village of Kudo and moves northwards into the Scorpion lands. Despite strong efforts by the Empire's defenders, many strongholds fall quickly to the overwhelming onslaught.

The Scorpion, now led by regent Bayushi Miyako, pull back and protect as much of their population as possible, ceding much of their southern territory to the enemy. They hope to bring the Destroyers far enough into the Empire that Rokugan's combined forces can concentrate and then launch a decisive counterattack.

The Ebon Daughter is located by Kuni Kiyoshi, the daimyo of the Kuni. Using a modified form of the Phoenix Clan's ritual of Forgetting, Kiyoshi succeeds in severing the Daughter's connection to Kali-Ma. Freed from the dark goddess' influence, the former Iuchi Yue regains a small amount of her former consciousness, enough to surrender and go as a prisoner to the Imperial city. There she is condemned to death and executed.

Year 1173, Month of the Dragon

In the wake of the Ebon Daughter's defeat, another hint of hope arrives when scouts report the previously endless reinforcements of the Destroyer armies are, in fact, coming to an end. However, there are also rumors that Kali-Ma is now appearing personally on the field of battle.

The Empire wins a difficult and hard-fought battle at the River of Gold. After three weeks of fighting, two Imperial Legions led by Akodo Roemon succeed in repulsing the Destroyers. It is the first outright victory against the gaijin demons since their invasion began.

Year 1173, Month of the Serpent

The young samurai who have become Furumaro's protégés return to the Imperial city and present the Black Scroll they have found to the Empress. She recognizes that the scroll contains some of Kali-Ma's essence and orders them to keep it secret and safe (although she does not tell them why). She then commands them to deliver a message to Daigotsu himself. Shocked, they nonetheless agree and set out for Daigotsu's court at the Fingers of Bone – accompanied, as always, by Furumaro.

At the Battle of Three-Man Alliance Plain, a force led by Daidoji Kikaze, the daimyo of the Daidoji family, attempts to strike at the commanders of the Destroyer army. The attack is hindered by the presence of Jinn spirits under the command of the Destroyers, but Kikaze ultimately succeeds in severely wounding one of the enemy commanders, a demon called Kheth-Tet, in exchange for a crippling injury of his own.



Year 1173, Month of the Horse

- The Mantis forces under Moshi Kalani's command set out to wipe out the remaining Ruhmal cultists in the Ivory Kingdoms in order to cut off the flow of sacrificial power they are sending to Kali-Ma. The cultists are led by a creature called Yuna, a servant of Kali-Ma who is almost a demi-god herself, and tracking her down is a difficult task. Finally, however, the Mantis are successful.
- Furumaro's young samurai band arrives at the Fingers of Bone. They deliver the Empress' message to Daigotsu. After reading it, he presents them with the original copy of the legendary Tao of Fu Leng to carry back to the Empress. He tells them she will understand the message it delivers. Soon after, Daigotsu himself sets out to a planned rendezvous with the Empress at Shinden Gyokei, a remote temple in the Scorpion lands.

Year 1173, Month of the Goat: The Battle of Kyuden Ashinagabachi

The combined armies of Rokugan confront the Destroyers near the stronghold of the Tsuruchi family. The battle rages for weeks, see-sawing back and forth between the two sides. Kali-Ma is not present – she is traveling north toward Shinden Gyokei, sensing the presence of the hated Empress. In her place the Destroyers are commanded by her Rakshasa general, and the seemingly indestructible demon proves more than equal to the task.

At a critical moment, however, the Rakshasa is baited into a trap by a Crab veteran named Hida Benjiro, who uses ivory weaponry to wound and delay the demon. Iuchi Katamari, the son of the famed Doomseeker Iuchi Karasu, uses secret rituals of the doomseekers to end the Rakshasa's immortal life.

Year 1173, Month of the Goat: The Final Confrontation

At the remote temple of Shinden Gyokei, the Empress Iweko treats in person with Daigotsu. He demands his followers be made a Great Clan in light of their service in the Destroyer War. Imperial Advisor Susumu – actually a former Spider – dies to avert a confrontation between Daigotsu and the Shogun. The Empress makes Daigotsu a counter-offer: if he commits seppuku, his people may become a Minor Clan with his son Kanpeki (purified of the Taint) as its champion. Daigotsu agrees, and kills himself before the assembled witnesses.

Even as this is occurring, Kali-Ma is approaching the temple. Furumaro convinces one of his protégés, Yoritomo Saburo, to unlock the Black Scroll they are protecting; this allows Furumaro to gain the last essence of Kyoso no Oni for himself, reacquiring his divinity as Fu Leng. He takes on draconic form and challenges Kali-Ma for supremacy over Jigoku.

The battle turns against Fu Leng, but at the moment of his death he passes on his demonic power to his 'brother', Daigotsu. Daigotsu returns from death as a demonic entity rivaling Fu Leng for power, and takes up the battle against Kali-Ma. Shahai, Daigotsu's widow, uses the Tao of Fu Leng to weaken the power of Kali-Ma long enough for Daigotsu to prevail. The Dark Lord draws in the power of both gods and becomes the first Dark Fortune, Lord of Jigoku. At the site of this event a new Festering Pit erupts.

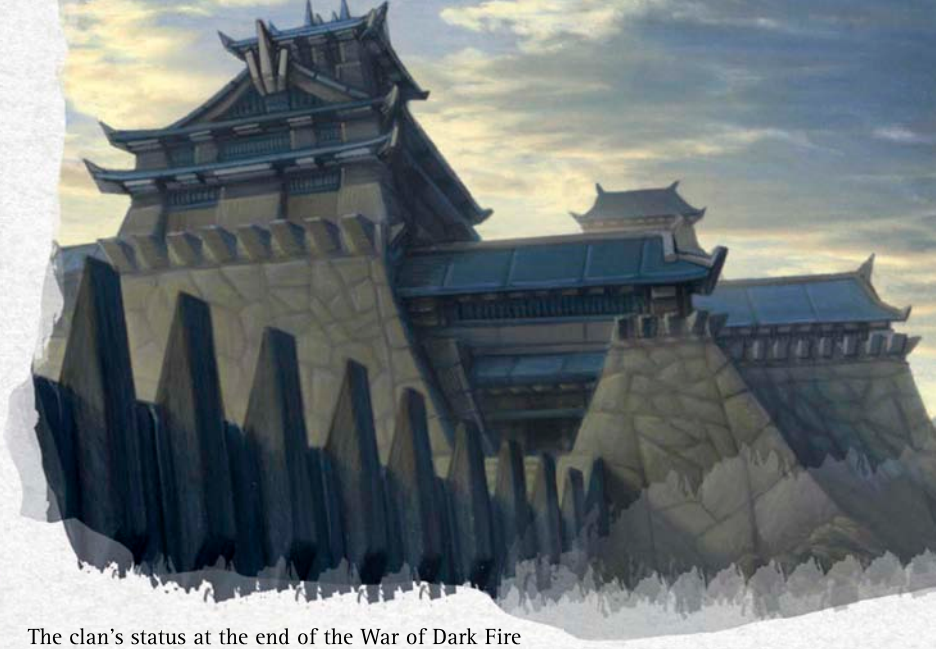
Daigotsu immediately creates several more Dark Fortunes, including Shahai, Susumu, and the Oni Lord Akuma. He sends Susumu to present a new counter-offer to the Empress: he will agree to restrict the Taint to only those who accept it willingly, if in return the Spider Clan becomes not merely a Minor Clan but an actual Great Clan, equal to the others. Believing this is the best she can get, the Empress agrees, and commands the Spider to travel to the Ivory Kingdoms and "conquer in my name."

With Kali-Ma slain, the Ironclads collapse into lifelessness and the Destroyer demons lose their intellect and savage focus. The armies of Rokugan systematically wipe out the remaining concentrations of enemy forces, although the sheer number of foes means the effort takes many months. It is not until the following winter, in the month of the Tiger, that the Empire restores contact with Shiro Hiruma, which has somehow endured a siege of over a year.

Responses throughout the clans to the fall of the Destroyer Army and the Empress' proclamations are mixed, to put it mildly. Many Lion commit seppuku in protest of the recognition of the Spider, including the legendary hero Ikoma Otemi.



There are instances of seppuku in other clans as well, but ultimately most of the Empire's servants, despite their misgivings, bow to the Empress' will. The Dragon are assigned the task of watching over the Spider in the newly established colonies in the Ivory Kingdoms. The Scorpion and Crab Clans work together to build a new Wall around the second Festering Pit, while the Crab also labor to repair the Kaiu Wall and Kyuden Hida before the Shadowlands can recover its strength. The future of the Empire remains uncertain, especially with the now-empty Ivory Kingdoms awaiting colonization.



The Clans and Factions in the Destroyer War

The Kali-Ma Invasion is one of the most devastating events in the history of Rokugan, worse in many ways than even the Clan Wars. Although the Clan Wars certainly caused great damage, they did not spread destruction across the entire Empire and every clan in the manner of the Destroyer invasion and corresponding plague. The Unicorn Clan, for example, escaped the Clan Wars relatively unscathed. Likewise, other crises such as Iuchiban's attack, the Maw's invasion, and the War Against the Darkness always left large portions of the Empire only tangentially affected.

The Destroyer War, however, stands alongside the First War as the only conflict in which virtually no portion of the Empire was free of danger and suffering. The three-front military conflict laid waste to all nine of the clans in many and various ways, and no clan's territory went unscathed. Several Minor Clans were devastated nearly beyond the point of recovery, and entire great clan families were crippled or, in the case of the Horiuchi, lost outright. Only the Mantis were spared the worst of the effects of the war, by virtue of most of their holdings being separated from the mainland, and even they incurred considerable losses in their Kitsune and Tsuruchi holdings.

It is important to understand this vast scale of loss when considering the fate of the individual clans. Before the official Destroyer War even began, the earlier War of Dark Fire had left the Phoenix, Unicorn, and Dragon Clans reeling, with numerous castles and holdings destroyed and thousands of lives lost. By the end of the Destroyer War, all the other clans had suffered comparably, and tragedy saturated the experiences of every family.

The Crab Clan

Arguably the Crab suffer one of the two most tragic fates during the Destroyer War, rivaling the Scorpion for the scope and extent of devastation endured in the conflict. The sheer magnitude of the damage caused by the Destroyer armies to the Crab lands had no true precedent in Rokugani history – only the attack of the Maw really came close.

The clan's status at the end of the War of Dark Fire was one of relative strength and stability. While there had been conflicts with the Crane and Scorpion over the last decade, with mixed results at best, the clan's own holdings were largely secure and the clan had worked hard to put the shame of the Clan Wars behind it. The Crab military was one of the three most powerful forces in the Empire, well-blooded from numerous conflicts, prepared for almost any foe, and feared by all potential opponents.

The fall of the Kaiu Wall was a huge shock both to the Crab Clan and to the Empire at large, and while the seppuku of Hida Kuon averted any political fallout from this defeat, it could not avert the horrified disbelief that ran through the Empire in the wake of the Destroyer invasion. It shattered all preconceptions of strength any clan could have. Neither the Crab nor their political rivals could have imagined a massive breach of the sort which occurred.

If anything, the later fall of Kyuden Hida was even more devastating to the spirit and strength of the Crab. The Wall, for all its formidable reputation, had stood only since the eighth century. Kyuden Hida, however, had been built at the Dawn of the Empire and was generally considered the closest thing to an impregnable fortress anywhere in Rokugan. Its loss was a harrowing blow, especially coming after the Crab had already suffered so many other defeats. Even the most detached courtiers of the Imperial City were shaken when they heard the news.

However, amidst all these catastrophes the spirit of the Crab was always displayed: indomitable, courageous, unrelenting, and unyielding. Even in the face of the near-destruction of their clan's homeland, the Crab fought on with a single-minded determination to never give in. Although many Crab armies suffered defeats during the Destroyer War – alone, or alongside their Lion and Unicorn allies – none ever lost heart or ran from battle. Of course, there was a high price to pay for such exceptional courage. By the end of the Destroyer War, the clan's numbers were at their lowest in centuries. Although the remaining troops were among the most experienced and well-trained in history, their numbers were pitifully few. The Crab would spend the subsequent decades just trying to rebuild to something resembling their former glory.

The Crane Clan

The Crane were not utterly devastated like the Crab by the arrival of the Destroyer armies. On the surface, they appeared to be one of the clans that was nearly unscathed by either the northern War of Dark Fire or the southern invasion. However, with the rise of the Destroyer Plague as a major element of the conflict, it quickly became clear that the Crane situation was as dire as any other clan's, if not more so.

The initial status of the Crane at the end of the War of Dark Fire was one of relative strength and political security. They were not at their most prominent, having attained no position of high authority within the court of the new Empress Iweko I, but they were still well respected and had many allies throughout the Empire. Their enduring political strength was demonstrated by their ability to host a series of 'Shadow Courts' after the official Winter Court was closed by Shosuro Jimen in 1172. However, the outward appearance of strength was in many ways a carefully crafted and well maintained fiction. In reality, the long series of conflicts over the last fifty years had taken a deep toll on the clan's economic coffers, political networks, and military strength. The Crane were still able to maintain the façade of power, but by the time of the Destroyer War it was often little more than that. And when the Destroyer Plague swept over their lands, it claimed with it many of their finest minds and warriors.

Even worse, the Crane were suffering through a series of leadership crises as well. The Daidoji family had been badly shaken by Clan Champion Doji Domotai's decision to disband the Harriers, and many within the Daidoji still worried that Domotai had been too strongly influenced by her youthful training with the Lion. The Kakita family, meanwhile, had no daimyo at all – its leader, Kakita Toshimoko, was in the midst of a bitter blood-feud with the Emerald Champion, Shosuro Jimen. Noritoshi departed on a musha shugyo in order to protect his only son from Jimen and free himself to maneuver against the Scorpion. Although there was no doubt Noritoshi's actions were honorable, they nonetheless left his family leaderless at a critical time.

By the end of the war, the Crane Clan was staggered and reeling, its numbers greatly diminished and its financial resources all but exhausted. Fortunately, its lands were still relatively intact. It had also gained fame for the labors and sacrifices of the Crane shugenja, who (along with Phoenix and Scorpion) had helped to secure the desperately needed cure for the Destroyer Plague. However, it would be at least a generation, if not two, before the Crane would be able to fully restore their position and authority within the Empire. They would tread carefully entering the Era of Exploration.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon Clan found itself in a curious and difficult position at the beginning of the Destroyer War. The clan's lands had been devastated, perhaps more than any others, by the War of Dark Fire, and its numbers were significantly depleted. The clan had been forced to resort to desperate maneuvers such as the deliberate destruction of Shiro Tamori just to protect a few of its other holdings and limit its loss of life. But at the same time, the clan – at least theoretically – had some of the greatest political assets imaginable at hand, since it not only controlled the office of Voice of the Emperor but in fact the Empress, herself, was a former Kituski.

The reality, however, was that the Dragon were not a clan capable of fully exploiting the potential political power available to them. Togashi Satsu himself was far too enlightened and far too devoted a servant of the Empress to abuse his authority in any significant fashion, and the Empress herself had been transformed by her Celestial endorsement; she had a far broader viewpoint than merely the needs of her former clan. While honor and consideration were given to the Dragon, they did not benefit politically in the ways some might have expected.

Perhaps it was this choice never to distract themselves with politics, or perhaps it was simply their unorthodox tactics (not to mention a willingness to put aside most of the bad blood of more recent years with the Phoenix), but the Dragon were able to react much more successfully to Tamori Chosai's second assault upon their lands. Clan Champion Mirumoto Kei proved quite effective at outmaneuvering the enemy despite learning she was with child midway through the war. As a result, the Dragon took comparatively fewer losses in the latter stages of the Destroyer War. They also suffered almost no damage from the plague, in contrast to the rest of the Empire.

At the end of the Destroyer War, the Dragon unexpectedly found themselves assigned by Empress Iweko I with the task of observing the Spider and watching over their loyalty. This gave the Dragon a solid position moving into the subsequent era of peace. Combined with the lighter casualties they endured in the war's final months, this left the clan as one of the strongest heading into the Age of Exploration.

The Crab's Lament

In the spring of the year 1172, a remarkable stone carving appeared in the court of Toshi Ranbo. None knew who had delivered it, or why it was placed in such a prominent location within the palace, but no courtier – indeed no samurai of any kind – could walk past it without stopping to look... sometimes for hours.

The statue depicted the figures of samurai warriors, bowed beneath the exhaustion of battle. Its technique was simple, even crude, and one portion was uneven and jagged as though the work had been left unfinished. Yet the simple stone carving stunned the mind and moved the heart of every samurai who gazed upon it. It spoke of despair and anger, but also of joy and sorrow and even love. None could doubt it was created by a Crab, and within a few weeks the court had named it Kani no Nageki... the Crab's Lament.

A Crab warrior had carved the statue over the winter while recovering from a severe wound. He used a block of stone from the fallen Wall as his material. None ever learned his name, and when he found in spring that his wound had healed he left for the front without a backward glance. There he died, leaving only the Crab's Lament as his legacy.

The Lion Clan

Where the stories of the Crab and the Scorpion were of tragedy and defeat, the tale of the Lion was simply one of vast sacrifice, losses on a scale that was truly staggering. At the time of Iweko I's ascension to the throne, the Lion were by most accounts the strongest military force in the Empire, and they were certainly in that position after the War of Dark Fire decimated the Unicorn Clan. Their troops were blooded, practiced, well-led and well-trained, and had expanded their expertise to include facing enemies of a supernatural sort the Lion had rarely been forced to engage historically. The clan's new leader, Akodo Shigetoshi, was a superb general and a man who embodied every virtue of their clan. Their political status was for the most part as weak as ever – the Lion had never been skilled at the games of court – but they received a quite unexpected boost when the Empress announced she would marry the Lion hero Akodo Setai.

However, with the advent of the Destroyer War, this dominant military status would change drastically. The Lion found themselves bearing the brunt of not one but three conflicts, for even the renewed northern front against Tamori Chosai would see significant Lion troops deployed to aid the Phoenix and the Dragon. The struggle against the plague became a vital one for them as well when the Disgrace led a massive force of plague-zombies across a boundary assumed to be impenetrable, erupting into the very heart of their lands. And above all else, the Lion would make massive troop commitments to support the brutalized Crab and Scorpion ranks in the south.

The costs to the clan were shocking. The Lion had always boasted of having one of the largest populations in the Empire, and certainly the largest armies, but their losses in the Destroyer War were correspondingly immense. No legion in the entire Lion army was able to escape constant and bitter conflict during the war, and the scale of casualties was so high as to leave the Lion struggling for a full generation just to rebuild to a minimal level of strength.

For all their military losses, however, the Lion at the close of the War found themselves in a position largely beyond any political reproach from the rest of the Empire. At least for the time being, the Lion's sacrifices were uniformly respected by the other clans, particularly after the mass seppuku protesting Iweko I's proclamation elevating the Spider. More than ever, the Lion were viewed as the ideal of the honorable samurai, the essence of what all the clans sought to be at least in some fashion. Their standing in the Empress' own eyes was also hugely enhanced, and of course it did not hurt that one of their greatest heroes was now her consort and would father her future children. For all their losses and suffering, the Lion could look forward to the next era of the Empire's history without fear, proud of their deeds and supported by many friends and allies – a most unusual position for the Right Hand.

Noritoshi's Fate

In the wake of the Destroyer War, Kakita Noritoshi finally confronted his nemesis Shosuro Jimen for the last time. However, it did not end as the Crane warrior expected. The Scorpion, weary of their long struggle, had become penitent of his many wrongs against the Kakita and sought to end their feud... albeit in a very Scorpion way. His agents poisoned Noritoshi the night before they met, but then Jimen took the same poison. When the Crane arrived, Jimen offered him tea – tea which contained the antidote to the poison. Jimen rejected the offer and cut down Jimen in a rage. Dying, the Scorpion revealed the truth, and the two foes perished together.

The Mantis Clan

Out of all of the clans the Mantis were probably the least affected by the Destroyer War. Their land-based holdings did suffer damage, sometimes severe damage, but the bulk of their wealth and population on the islands of Spice and Silk was largely unaffected even by the Destroyers' limited naval expeditions. Their political power, supported through their control of the office of Imperial Treasurer, likewise remained strong and they eagerly capitalized on the chance to host an Imperial Winter Court during the first winter of the war. However, this is not to say the Mantis did not have meaningful losses. The Tsuruchi family, the Moshi family, and the newly-absorbed Kitsune family all suffered considerable damage from fighting and plague, especially the Kitsune.



However, while the Mantis Clan did not suffer nearly so heavily as the other clans, it should not be imagined their contributions to the war were insignificant. Without the Mantis' naval power, the Destroyer War might have been lost to the enemy naval maneuvers. Thus the clan's aid was felt by all of the Empire, though by its nature it would never be praised so loudly as was the sacrifice of the Lion and Crab or the tragedy of the Scorpion.

The Mantis Clan also participated in the War in a manner which no other clan could, on a field of conflict far beyond the borders of the Empire. A large portion of the clan's best naval strength was sent to the Ivory Kingdoms, taking actions which the rest of Rokugan would ultimately know almost nothing about. Moshi Kalani's forces saw the potential threat in Yuna's cult and focused on ensuring that it would never again threaten the Empire after the fall of Kali-Ma. Once the cult was eradicated, the Mantis focused on the opportunities for the future of the Empire, laying the groundwork for the eventual colonization efforts whose benefits would not be seen until years after the War concluded.

Of course, true to their traditions, these efforts did leave them poised to later capitalize on the vast wealth of a new land.

The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix ranked alongside the Dragon as one of the clans most drastically harmed by the War of Dark Fire, but much like the Dragon they managed to escape the final stages of the Destroyer War with much fewer casualties and no further damage to their lands. Thus, while they entered the Destroyer War still struggling with the immense damage caused by the Dark Oracle's armies – including the destruction of Kyuden Isawa itself – they ultimately emerged from the second and larger conflict in a somewhat better position than other clans such as the Crab, Scorpion, and Lion.

During this era the Phoenix once again proved their position as the masters of all things relating to magic, the Elements, and religion. No other clan matched or even approached the mystical prowess the Phoenix demonstrated throughout the war. Most noteworthy among the Phoenix contributions to the conflict was the near ever-present efforts of the Elemental Masters, especially Isawa Mitsuko, to close the numerous spirit portals that opened around the Empire during the early and middle stages of the war. Likewise, the Phoenix Clan's Elemental Legions appeared on every battlefield, suffering gruesome losses in the effort to hold back the Destroyer Horde. And the Phoenix also assisted the war effort in a host of smaller ways, such as assisting the Asahina efforts to find a cure to the Destroyer Plague, and sharing their Ritual of Forgetting with Kuni Kiyoshi so he could defeat the Ebon Daughter.

The Phoenix were noted throughout the conflict for employing a measured response to each of the threats the Empire faced. They always used exactly the amount of force they believed necessary to each challenge, and this allowed them to husband their resources and ensure their assets were always present where they were needed most. This meant the actual losses they suffered were often significantly less than those of the other clans.

At the close of the War, however, the Phoenix found themselves in a uniquely difficult situation. Iweko I's proclamations concerning the Spider and the status of Jigoku forced the Phoenix to take the forefront in making sense of the new spiritual circumstances. The clan faced the unenviable job of coming to grips with changes in the established order of the Heavens, changes to the nature of Jigoku and of the Taint, and the advent of so-called "Dark Fortunes." Many believed the very notion of an Emperor making any sort of agreement with the forces of Jigoku was blasphemy, no matter how beneficial it might be to the Empire, and the Phoenix had to grapple with all the philosophical and religious implications of this... not to mention the further complications of colonizing a distant foreign land. Of course, the Phoenix did not shrink from these tasks; true to their nature, they considered themselves the only ones truly qualified for such duty, and took to it with singular zeal.



The Scorpion Clan

It is questionable which clan suffered the most devastation during the course of the Destroyer War, but clearly the two which paid the highest price were the Scorpion and the Crab. Although the Scorpion lost fewer holdings and did not see their primary castle taken as the Crab did, their population was slain in crippling numbers by both battle and plague, some of their most fertile lands were ruined, and their reputation was marred almost beyond recovery by the transformation of Bayushi Paneki into the undead monstrosity known as the Disgrace. And once the war was finally over, they faced the daunting and horrifying reality of a second Festering Pit within their lands.



At the end of the earlier War of Dark Fire, the Scorpion were in a state of relative prosperity and security. Though border conflicts with the Crab had not gone terribly well for the clan, they had suffered relatively few losses in those clashes. The famine and peasant revolts of a few years earlier had been overcome and their lands were stable and peaceful. The arrival of the Destroyer Plague eradicated almost all of these benefits seemingly overnight. Plague death tolls were among the highest in their lands, matched only by the Crane and Lion, and the Scorpion found themselves constantly in battle with plague zombies, as well as facing renewed peasant revolts due to these dire conditions. In some cases these problems actually lasted beyond the end of the Destroyer War.

The only asset of the clan which was not grievously reduced in this era was their standing in the courts. The skills and poise of Chancellor Bayushi Hisoka, in combination with Paneki's acumen (while he was still alive) and Shosuro Jimen's authority as the Emerald Champion protected the clan's political interests despite their massive material losses throughout the war. On the military front, however, the costs were nearly unsustainable. While the Scorpion Clan did try to protect its population as much as possible through tactical withdrawals, outright retreats, and evacuations, the loss of life was still immense. However, the single greatest blow was probably the existence of "the Disgrace," the monstrous horror which had once been Bayushi Paneki. Even after the war ended, the Disgrace continued to elude capture or destruction. While its capacities in fomenting plague were mitigated once Kali-Ma was defeated, it remained a terrifying threat and an ongoing insult to the clan's standing and reputation. Thankfully, relatively few outside the clan knew of its existence.

Once the War was over, however, the Scorpion challenges did not end. The advent of the second Festering Pit meant their lands would never be the same, even if their losses eventually recovered. The new Pit led them to build a unique alliance with the Crab, but it also served as a permanent reminder of the costs of failure, however unintentional that failure might have been. The Scorpion would, inevitably, become a far more militant clan than they had traditionally been, since the alternative was to leave themselves helpless in the face of the Pit's danger. Thus in many ways the Destroyer War left a deeper and more permanent mark on the Scorpion than on anyone else in the Empire.

The Spider Clan

The Spider survived the Destroyer War by the thinnest of margins, ultimately only enduring through the magnanimity of the Empress herself. No more than a single legion's worth of samurai survived out of those who claimed the mon of the Spider, making their population less than even most of the Minor Clans. Only because of the deal brokered by the new Dark Fortune Daigotsu was it possible for the Spider to survive as a faction and indeed be elevated to Great Clan status.

The Spider were already in a weak position before the Destroyer War began. After her ascension to the Throne, Empress Iweko I had ordered her new Shogun to kill all those Spider who were Tainted. By the time of the War of Dark Fire, more than half of the Spider Clan's forces and all but one of their holdings had been wiped out by the Shogun's army and his allies. Their only secure and undetected presence was in the Sparrow Clan, which they had been systematically infiltrating for over three years. Their sole "ally" was the Unicorn Clan, and even that was more a matter of passively leaving them alone than of any active assistance.

Nevertheless, despite this savage enmity from the Empire at large, Daigotsu chose to hurl the Spider Clan into the conflicts of the Destroyer War with an almost insane zeal. He remained faithful to his lord Fu Leng even after the Dark Kami was expelled from Jigoku, and he was determined that his son Kanpeki would someday rule the Empire... which made it unthinkable that Rokugan should be conquered by the upstart gaijin goddess Kali-Ma. His troops struck especially hard at those enemies which the Imperial forces could not reach, and many Destroyer infiltration attempts were cut off and annihilated by Spider troops while the Empire remained none the wiser. They also adopted a strategy of making sure that when they did appear on a battlefield alongside Imperial forces, the armies of Rokugan faced a painful choice: lose the battle while destroying the Spider troops, or spare the Spider and actually hold back the Destroyers for another day. These gambits worked sufficiently to allow the Spider to survive, just barely, through to the end of the War.

Nonetheless, the cost was gruesome, and Daigotsu's followers could barely assemble any kind of force at the moment Great Clan status was conferred on them. The deaths (and subsequent ascension to Dark Fortune status) of Daigotsu, Shahai, and Susumu left them without leadership and without any positions of influence within the Imperial government – although, on the other hand, they gained the Susumu family name in recognition of his deeds. Moreover, those of the Spider who were Tainted – the majority of the survivors – were immediately forced

to depart for the Ivory Kingdoms, under orders to conquer the gaijin land for the Empress. This meant the clan would never have more than a marginal presence within the Empire proper, and its activity would be largely at the discretion and forbearance of the Mantis and Unicorn (who controlled travel to and from the Colonies) and the Dragon (who were assigned to watch over them directly). Thus while the Spider Clan did seemingly attain its goals by winning recognition as a Great Clan, it entered the new post-war era very weak, lucky to have even survived at all, and with very few friends and a great many enemies, all of whom watched it with perpetual suspicion. Its only source of strength was its infiltration of the Sparrow Clan, which gave it a small base of power that remained hidden from the rest of Rokugan.

The Unicorn Clan

Of the three northern clans in Rokugan, the Unicorn were ostensibly the strongest at the beginning of the Destroyer War, but they were a far cry from the great strength they had boasted only a decade before. Moto Chagatai's ill-fated bid for power during the Race for the Throne had led to massive losses for the clan, and they had also been badly hurt by the War of Dark Fire, although they did not lost as many strongholds as the Dragon or Phoenix. Thus, the Unicorn were already in a severely weakened position when the Destroyers marched. They did not hold back from the call of battle, of course, but the troops that they could bring to bear were significantly fewer than might once have been the case.

The Destroyer Plague did affect the Unicorn badly in the early phases of the conflict, leading to the near-eradication of the Horiuchi family, but they suffered much less in the second half of the war. Although they faced battles on two fronts when the Army of Dark Fire attacked a second time, the Unicorn were spared the worst of the northern conflict. Tamori Chosai's elite forces were pitted principally against the Dragon and Phoenix. This allowed the Unicorn to keep their homelands intact and pit their best troops against the Destroyers. Utaku Yu-Pan, daimyo of the Utaku, served as their primary field commander and her skills proved critical in exploiting the Unicorn forces' cavalry advantage against the Destroyer armies.

Despite significant losses, the Unicorn ultimately emerged from the Destroyer War relatively strong and secure. The plague had been snuffed out after the sacrifice of the Horiuchi, their armies were heavily-blooded but still intact, and their lands were secure. They were able to rebuild their primary holdings to their former glory with relative ease. Politically, they enjoyed a period of relative success after the Destroyer War, capitalizing on their valor throughout the conflict and their continuing control of the office of Shogun. However, this political strength was somewhat off-set by their relationship with the Spider Clan. Although this had never really been a true 'alliance' it nonetheless led the other clans to cast suspicion on the Unicorn Clan's judgment for years to come.

The Imperial Families

The Imperial families suffered losses throughout the Destroyer War, but emerged from the conflict with their core power bases largely intact. The tireless efforts of the Great Clans ensured none of the invaders ever reached the Imperial Capital or any of the other major holdings of the Seppun, Miya, and Otomo. However, it goes without saying that the overall situation within the Empire forced many changes on the three families.

Each of the individual families did its best to carry out its duties and responsibilities during the war – especially the Miya, who labored to spread news and rebuild damage everywhere they went. However, there was no question that to many Rokugani the Imperial families were increasingly beginning to appear irrelevant, especially in light of the efforts and sacrifices of the Great Clans themselves. Likewise, the power and influence of the Empress' Chosen and the Jeweled Champions – none of whom were Imperials – seemed to perpetually undercut the importance of the Imperial families in general and particularly the Otomo.

At the close of the Destroyer war, the Imperial Families appeared outwardly strong, having lost no holdings and suffered no significant casualties. However, they now found themselves maneuvering to make sure they would have a foothold within the new Colonies in order to maintain their political relevance. The process was a mixed success at best, though they managed to avoid being shut out of the Colonies altogether. However, it seemed clear the Empire no longer looked to them for the sort of leadership and influence they once exercised. The Great Clans saw the Colonies as a place where they could make gains and win success without Imperial oversight and were eager to pursue such goals. Although Iweko I's dynasty still favored the three Imperial families enough to ensure their power would not fade away completely, it was clear they were facing a very different world than in former eras of history.

The Minor Clans

The Minor Clans as a whole suffered roughly proportionally to the Great Clans during the Destroyer War. The Badger took heavy losses during the War of Dark Fire but were largely spared during the later second attack by the forces of Tamori Chosei, and the Dragonfly Clan's location protected it from both the Army of Dark Fire and the Destroyer invasion. The Monkey Clan, whose lands lie near the Scorpion, fought bravely in the Destroyer War and suffered heavy casualties but was thankfully spared from direct invasion. The Tortoise Clan played no real role in the Destroyer War at all, although a few Tortoise samurai did appear on the field of battle.

The one Minor Clan who suffered an unusual and tragic fate during this era was the Sparrow. The Spider Clan had begun a subtle infiltration of the Sparrow a few years earlier, relying chiefly on the creature that called itself Suzume Chiaki – actually a samurai-ko who had been captured by the Spider and ritually transformed into a rare entity called a rokuro-kubi. By the time of the Destroyer War, Chiaki had worked her way into a position of advisor to the clan's ruler, Suzume Yugoki, and was bringing other Spider samurai into the clan under false names. Meanwhile, loyal Sparrow bushi were sent away on diplomatic missions or dispatched to fight in the Destroyer War (where they often died). By the end of the Destroyer conflict, the Spider effectively controlled the Sparrow Clan and significant numbers of their samurai were able to remain within the Empire under the false name of Suzume.

The Ronin

The Destroyer War era saw one of the Empire's rare upsurges of ronin involvement in major historical events. A ronin force known as the Legion of the Two Thousand, led by the warriors Kuronada, Tamago, and Utagawa, operated out of bases in the obscure fortifications known as the Palace of the Breaking Dawn and Lost Traveler Castle. Although they avoided extensive involvement with the actual Destroyer War (due to the small size of their forces), they put considerable effort into confronting various secondary threats within the Empire. Thanks to their efforts, a great many minor threats were never able to became major ones, and the Lion and Phoenix Clans were able to put more of their own forces into the main struggles against Kali-Ma and Tamori Chosei.

This heavy activity by the Legion also brought another benefit to the Imperial forces by drawing off the attention of the petty ronin tyrant called Karatsu. While Karatsu's ability to actually mount a full-scale offensive against the Empire was at best limited, nonetheless his forces could have wreaked much havoc in the lands of the Lion and Phoenix if he had not been distracted by his urgent need to destroy the Palace of the Breaking Dawn. (For more details of Karatsu's assault on the ronin stronghold, see the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*, page 43.)

Due to these actions, in the immediate aftermath of the Destroyer War those wave-men associated with the Legion of the Two Thousand were afforded a status within the Empire that in some ways exceeded even that of the famed Toturi's Army from two generations earlier. The Legion was allowed to join the Imperial Legions as a secondary force under Imperial command. This was a somewhat complex and politically tenuous position, but also one greatly beneficial to the Legion, and it served as an example to inspire and embolden ronin into the next generation. Of course, the emergence of the new Colonies also offered new opportunities to ronin, and many wave-men would migrate to the new land in the subsequent Era of Exploration.

Seppun Tashime and the Gray Woman

When a group of brave samurai succeeded in trapping Kyoso no Oni's essence in a Black Scroll in the year 1170, they were led by Seppun Tashime, a brave and honorable Emerald Magistrate. Several of Tashime's comrades perished in the battle, including a vivacious young Dragon shugenja-ko named Tamori Shaiko, and the aftermath of the fight forced Tashime and the other survivors to leave immediately without beheading the corpses. Tashime had loved the young Dragon woman, but true to his samurai heritage he did not allow himself to wallow in grief and continued with his duties once he returned to the Empire.

In the winter of the following year, Seppun Tashime was investigating the Order of Venom, a heretical branch of the Brotherhood which was actually aligned with the Spider Clan. While battling the twisted monks Tashime learned of the existence of someone called simply the "Gray Woman." She had an eerie similarity to his former love.

The following summer, Taishime finally met the Gray Woman, confronting her during an investigation into a village suborned by the Order of Venom. The undead woman, who now called herself Daigotsu Shaiko, disabled Tashime with a maho spell but, oddly, did not kill him – perhaps due to lingering fragments of her old personality. This drew the ire of Michio, the leader of the Order of Venom, who began to view Shaiko as a liability rather than an asset. When Tashime recovered he set out to track down Shaiko, determined to put an end to the abomination which had once been his true love.

The following year, as the Destroyer War was coming to its climax, Seppun Tashime finally confronted Daigotsu Shaiko and Michio once more. His aide Kuni Iyedo died in the encounter, but Tashime succeeded in slaying the Gray Woman at the cost of a heavy wound of his own. Michio, true to his peculiar faith in strength above all, allowed Shaiko to die... and let Tashime live.



Notable Figures of the Destroyer War

Much like the earlier Clan Wars era, the time of the Destroyer War was an age of great heroes in which countless Rokugani rose above themselves to perform great deeds for the Empire. The following section offers only a small assortment of the many notable figures of this time.

Hida Benjiro

Rikugunshokan of the Crab

The saga of the Destroyer War cannot be told without the deeds of Hida Benjiro. One of the most stalwart commanders of the Crab armies, Benjiro was always at the very front lines against the Destroyers, a bulwark against the most significant threats. He was named Rikugunshokan of the main Crab army after the death of Hida Kuon, and became almost singularly obsessed with the task of defeating Kali-Ma's invasion.

Benjiro was never the sort of man an honorable samurai could easily admire. Throughout his life he was deeply rooted in the ongoing struggles of his clan against the hordes of Jigoku, and this effort left him hardened, embittered, and stark. He was a man incapable of resting while the enemies of the Empire remained alive, and spent all of his long career in the very thickest of fighting. It was Benjiro who slew the corrupted Crane known as Tsukuro, one of the most infamous Lost generals. Benjiro was present at the battle of the Tomb of the Seven Thunders and carried the Tao of Fu Leng back to the protection of the Jade Legion; he commanded the Crab forces in the War of Dark Fire and also stood in the vanguard during Crab conflicts with the Scorpion and Crane. For over twelve years, wherever the enemies of the Crab were mustered, Hida Benjiro's indomitable and brutish face would appear. He became synonymous with the power and fear imposed by the Crab – as well as their complete lack of tact and grace.

Benjiro's efforts during the Destroyer War were among the most personally heroic of all the Imperial commanders. While he did not suffer any permanent debilitating wound (as both Akodo Shigetoshi and Utaku Yu-Pan did), Benjiro was personally responsible for the deaths of numerous key figures in Kali-Ma's army, and was nearly mortally wounded on several occasions. The most famous of these instances was his persistent feud with the demonic Rakshasa which led the Destroyer armies; there were numerous indecisive confrontations between the two. Near the end of the war, Benjiro began having visions of the ravings of an ogre he had once encountered in a trap beneath the Kaiu Wall. These convinced him it was his destiny to help destroy the Rakshasa, and this proved true when he managed to trap the immortal demon until Iuchi Katamari destroyed it using the rituals of the Doomseekers.

Although Benjiro was one of the most decorated heroes of the Destroyer War, he was never welcomed in polite society, and he lived out his life dedicated only to constant warfare against the enemies of the Crab and the Empire. To the Crab, of course, this was the highest goal a samurai could attain, and they revered him until his dying breath.

Hida Benjiro, Indomitable Crab Warrior

Air: 4	Earth: 6	Fire: 4	Water: 5	Void: 3
		Agility: 5		

Honor: 2.4 *Status: 7.0* *Glory: 9.1*

School/Rank: Hida Bushi 5/Defender of the Wall 2

Skills: Athletics 5, Battle (Skirmish) 7, Defense 5, Etiquette 1, Heavy Weapons 6, Hunting 4, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 5, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 5, Knives 5, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: Shadowlands 5, Lore: Ivory Kingdoms 1, Polearms 5, Spears 5, Stealth 4

Kata: Indomitable Warrior Style, Strength of the Crab

Advantages: Crab Hands, Paragon (Courage), Seven Fortunes Blessing (Bishamon), Social Position (Rikugunshokan), Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Obtuse, Sworn Enemy (Rakshasa General)

Isawa Mitsuko

Master of Air

Few among the Phoenix Clan's Inquisitors were more zealous than the Master of Air, Isawa Mitsuko. Mitsuko came into her post, along with her contemporary Isawa Kimi, at the earliest stages of the War of Dark Fire; prior to that time, she was known chiefly for her absolute and almost obsessive dedication to hunting maho-tsukai, a goal usually not found in such fervor among the disciples of Air. Her devotion to the eradication of these threats stemmed from the death of her betrothed shortly after her gempukku at the hands of one such criminal. She petitioned repeatedly to join the ranks of the Inquisitors until she was finally admitted.

It was a shock to Mitsuko when the previous Master of Air, Tamori Nakamuro, named her as one of his suggestions for a successor, and it was even more of a shock when the Master of Fire, Isawa Ochiai, personally selected her for the position based on that recommendation. Although Mitsuko wondered whether she was truly worthy of joining the Elemental Council, in the end she accepted the station – as much as anything in order to have absolute freedom in selecting the targets of her investigations. Indeed, that freedom was something she used aggressively (and some might argue abused) throughout the Destroyer War.

Mitsuko was perhaps the most pervasive and visible figure in the Phoenix armies during the Destroyer War. In the first years of conflict, spirit portals began to open in many parts of the Empire; Isawa Mitsuko spearheaded the efforts to locate and close these portals, using powerful Air magic to ensure she was present at almost every one of them. Indeed, she seems to have regarded it as almost a personal vendetta to cleanse these spiritual blights from the land. She also participated in the desperate struggles against Kali-Ma's God-Beast, and almost fatally over-taxed herself in those battles. And it was also through her efforts and those of the Master of Water, Asako Bairei, that the Phoenix Clan's Ritual of Forgetting was successfully modified for use against the Ebon Daughter.

Given her nearly fanatic dedication against all things of the Taint, it should not be surprising that Mitsuko was one of those most hard-pressed to accept the agreement Empress Iweko I struck with the new Lord of Jigoku. She believed the Empire had compromised itself by willingly cooperating with the powers of darkness. Although she did not ultimately disobey the Empress' commands, she vowed to watch the Spider with minute attention lest they become a threat to Rokugan once more.

Isawa Mitsuko, Master of Air

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

Willpower: 5

Honor: 9.2 *Status: 8.0* *Glory: 6.2*

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja 3 (Isawa Tensai - Air) / Asako Inquisitor 3

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Hunting (Tracking) 2, Investigation (Interrogation) 7, Jiujutsu 4, Lore: Elements (Air) 3, Lore: Law 5, Lore: Maho 4, Lore: Shadowlands 1, Lore: Shugenja 4, Lore: Theology (Fortunes) 3, Medicine 3, Meditation 4, Spears 4, Spellcraft 5

Kiho: Flee the Darkness, Rest My Brother, Silent Solace

Spells: As Master of Air, Mitsuko has access to any spells she might need, including unique and secret Phoenix Air magic focused on investigation, revelation and travel.

Advantages: Great Potential (Investigation), Magic Resistance (4 Points), Sacred Weapon (Inquisitor's Strike)

Disadvantages: Driven (Purge the empire of all Maho), Idealistic

Horiuchi Nobane

"Last of the Horiuchi"

Nobane was one of the last of the Horiuchi and one of the more famous Unicorn heroes in the Destroyer War; he became a rallying symbol for those who fought against Kali-Ma's legions, proof that there was always a glimmer of hope even in the blackest of days. However, Nobane was never a man who truly understood how other people viewed him, and it is perhaps his very lack of care whether he became famous or not that made him the hero he was.



Nobane's life before the Destroyer War had been successful and by some measures even glorious. He had participated in the so-called Blood Hunts against the cult of Iuchiban, acquired the legendary nemuranai known as the Daisho of Water, won command of the Eighth Imperial Legion, and proved himself time and time again against the enemies of the Unicorn. However, he never seemed to gain the same notoriety as other great Unicorn samurai. He was a man of renown, yet lived forever in the shadows of those of higher station and greater victories.

All of that changed with the fall of the Horiuchi.

When the Destroyer Plague ravaged the Horiuchi lands, Nobane was stationed at the Kaiu Wall, commanding some of the Unicorn forces sent to support the Crab. He was assigned the defense of Shiro Kuni, and that proved so desperate and challenging a fight that Nobane hardly had time to ever truly mourn or grieve for his lost kin, then or indeed during the remaining course of the war. Although he was severely wounded in the evacuation of the Kuni stronghold, he was afforded only a minimal time to rest, and thereafter seemed almost suicidally intent on further conflict with the Destroyers. He soon gained a further chance for glory in the battle against the God-Beast, where he played a major role in the battle which ultimately destroyed the neutered gaijin god on the outskirts of Ryoko Owari.

Nobane never wanted fame, nor did he appreciate his status as "the last of the Horiuchi" (which, in any case, was not literally true – although he was certainly among the family's very few survivors). His only goal was to avenge his kin, a personal enmity against the Destroyers only he could truly fathom. Late in the war his superior often had difficulty controlling him. He also found himself burdened with a subordinate of dubious sanity, Moto Kang, who ultimately proved to be under the influence of the Obsidian Dragon.

After the war, Nobane had one more duty to perform. At the command of Matsu Benika, the bearer of the Jade Hand, he watched over the Obsidian-marked sword of the late Kang, a task he carried out faithfully until his death of old age and fever many years later. It is said Benika visited him on the day of his death, declaring the time had finally come for him to be re-united with the rest of his family.

Horiuchi Nobane, Tormented Hero

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

Honor: 4.5 *Status: 7.2* *Glory: 6.0*

School/Rank: Shinjo Bushi 4

Skills: Animal Handling 2, Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Battle) 5, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Horsemanship 7, Hunting 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 4, Lore-Theology 3, Meditation 3, Sincerity 2, Spears 4

Advantages: Inheritance (Daisho of Water), Quick, Social Position (Shireikan)

Disadvantages: Brash, Driven (avenge the Horiuchi Family)

Daigotsu Susumu

Imperial Advisor

Susumu was the son of humble and disaffected ronin. The man who would become Imperial Advisor and eventually the Dark Fortune of Deception was an avid, loyal, and unquestioning servant of the darkest forces in creation, committing to Daigotsu's cause in his youngest years. He was trained in a thousand ways to destroy the reputations, the honor, the credibility, and above all the very souls of samurai throughout the Empire. At the same time, however, he was kept carefully free of the Taint, untouched by the power of Jigoku yet loyal to its causes and needs. This led to the singular event of his being chosen as the Imperial Advisor of the new Empress Iweko I. She knew full well who and what Susumu was (although she kept that from all but the closest of her other advisors), and it seems she chose Susumu for the role in part because it gave her a direct window on the Spider Clan's intentions.

No man who served the Dark Lord was trained to walk the impossibly fine line Susumu faced after he became Advisor. He was effectively a prisoner within the Imperial Court, and had to display absolute, unwavering loyalty to Iweko I even as the Dark Lord expected him to show the same loyalty to the cause of Fu Leng. Thus he was caught between the opposite ends of the Celestial order, seemingly an impossible position. Every piece of advice, every inquiry, every plot, plan, machination, and appointment he made was under perpetual observation from all sides.

Yet somehow, both Iweko I and her court and the Dark Lord Daigotsu were convinced Susumu was ultimately loyal to them. He always refused to favor one over the other save when explicit orders forced his hand. Even with the fragments of divinity both Iweko I and her Voice Togashi Satsu carried, neither could truly know the man's mind. His actions always displayed loyalty to both movements, but it was impossible for anyone to see beyond the veil of layered deception – including, perhaps, self-deception – Susumu concocted. When Susumu threw himself between the Shogun and Daigotsu, sacrificing his own life to stop them from trying to kill each other, he still with his dying breath professed loyalty to both sides.

Perhaps not even Susumu understood himself completely, and this may have been the secret to his strange dual loyalty. He dwelt for so many years in an eternal veil of scrutiny and layered deceptions that not even he could traverse the labyrinthine maze of contradictory demands and opinions within his own mind. It should not be imagined that Susumu was a virtuous man – he was vicious, dangerous, and cunning, willing to do whatever he deemed necessary for either of his lords – yet at times he displayed what almost seemed like affection for honorable figures such as Miya Shoin, the Imperial Herald.

Ultimately, when Daigotsu raised Susumu to be a Dark Fortune and made his name the start of a new family in the Spider Clan, it was clear the new Lord of Jigoku believed Susumu had proven worthy of his tasks – and indeed perhaps the only one who could have accomplished them.

The statistics here reflect Susumu once he became Imperial Advisor.

Daigotsu Susumu, Imperial Advisor

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

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

Honor: 0.0 Status: 9.0 Glory: 4.0 Infamy: 2.0 (Appears 7.0)

School/Rank: Daigotsu Courtier 5

Skills: Acting 5, Artisan: Poetry 3, Calligraphy (High Rokugani) 4, Courtier (Manipulation) 7, Defense 4, Etiquette (Conversation) 7, Forgery (Documents) 5, Games: Letters 4, Games: Shogi 4, Intimidation (Control) 7, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Kenjutsu 3, Knives 3, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Unicorn Clan 4, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Meditation 5, Perform: Oratory 5, Perform: Storytelling 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 7, Sleight of Hand (Conceal) 5, Stealth 4, Tea Ceremony 2, Temptation 6

Advantages: Allies (many, including Daigotsu and Iweko I), Blackmail (many), Dangerous Beauty, Perceived Honor (4 points), Social Position (Imperial Advisor)

Disadvantages: Dark Fate (Dark Fortune of Deception), Dark Secret (Spider), Driven (to Serve Daigotsu and Iweko I without fail)



The Black Scrolls and the Tao of Fu Leng

Black Scrolls are among the most unique inventions of Isawa, and their secrets were not replicated until the twelfth century. They are some of the most powerful artifacts in all of Rokugan, capable of sealing in the empowered energies of a living being or even a divine entity. A single scroll can seal the soul of a normal living person, essentially an advanced form of the technique which the Tribe of Isawa used to seal the souls of their own people into the walls of their city, Gisei Toshi. However, for the soul of a god more than one of these powerful artifacts was needed; for Fu Leng, in fact, it took twelve.

The Empire believed for over a thousand years that the method of these scrolls' creation was only known to Isawa and these artifacts were unique to the Day of Thunder. But as it turned out, the Empire was horribly wrong.

The technique was not unique to Isawa, nor was it limited to the Phoenix Clan. In the year 1168, a new "thirteenth scroll" was found in the Tomb of the Seven Thunders within the Shadowlands. The scroll's source was unknown; however, the Scorpion Clan (which retrieved the scroll) eventually named it "Essence of Jigoku" after it was opened and unleashed a portion of Kali-Ma's spirit trapped within. This presence of a gaijin goddess' spirit within the scroll suggested, unsettlingly, that it had been created in gaijin lands.

The Scorpion were still researching their discovery when the Phoenix Clan, in the course of laboring to purify the surviving original scrolls of Isawa, realized they could create new Black Scrolls. The scroll which they crafted in order to seal away the spirit of Kyoso no Oni came to be known later as "Essence of Destruction," and would be used by Fu Leng to regain some of his divine power at the climax of the Destroyer War.

What neither the Scorpion nor the Phoenix expected was a marked similarity between the function of Black Scrolls and Shahai's use of the Tao of Fu Leng to capture the essence and power of Kali-Ma during the final battle. Although the Crab had retrieved the mysterious document claiming to be the Tao of Fu Leng from the Tomb of Seven Thunders, they never studied it themselves, nor did they allow any others from the Empire to do so. The Jade Legion zealously guarded the text until it was captured by the Spider Clan. However, Shahai's use of the text suggested its powers were nearly identical to those of the Black Scrolls.

Underlying the mystery of both the Black Scrolls and the Tao of Fu Leng is the uneasy possibility that maho – blood magic – may be potentially far more powerful than once believed, perhaps more powerful than Elemental magic. After all, the original Black Scrolls were created by Isawa using "pure" blood magic, and while the Phoenix did not use maho to create the Essence of Destruction scroll, the ritual which allowed it to capture Kyoso no Oni's spirit was empowered by the deaths of the shugenja casting it.

Blood magic relies on life-force for its power – the life-force of the wielder or of another sacrifice. Life has incredible potency, and the loss of life unleashes for the briefest of periods a tremendous flare of power – the more important the life, the greater the destiny cut short, the more power is available. The life-force of a human being is sufficient on its own to overwhelm even the barriers of the spirit realms, breaking the once-thought unbreakable rules of the Celestial Order. "Fortune favors the Mortal Man," said Shinsei, and the sinister corollary to this is that it is also true in the creation of a Black Scroll or the wielding of the greatest powers of maho. In the case of a soul as powerful as Isawa, a man who possessed the greatest mystical power of his era and who was destined to defeat a god, the power was strong enough to transcend the Celestial order and trap Fu Leng. In the case of

Kyoso no Oni, two pure souls were lost forever for a similar purpose.

Lesser versions of this same power can be seen in the creation of the Bloodswords and their later imitations the Shameswords. The sacrifice of souls to create these items granted them incredible potency, and the Bloodswords had the further power to consume additional souls and grow in power over time. Likewise, the Cult of Ruhmal and its leader, Yuna, were able to use mass sacrifices to both empower their dark goddess Kali-Ma and to create the legions of Ironclads with which she invaded Rokugan.

The Tao of Fu Leng apparently possessed the power to entrap all (or at least most) of the divinity of a god. It is impossible to say why Fu Leng allowed such an artifact to be created and bound so closely to him, particularly given the risks involved in its very existence. Nothing in the Dark Kami's behavior suggests he was aware of how the book would eventually be used. And yet nonetheless the Tao did exist, so the dark god clearly felt it had some value to him. Regardless, the Tao was ultimately able to capture the full essence of both Kali-Ma and Fu Leng, passing them on to the Dark Lord Daigotsu. It might seem the amount of power needed to bind such entities would exceed even the Tao's capacities, but nonetheless it did so, and the implications are serious. Were other sorcerers to learn the nature of this power, however, the Celestial Heavens themselves might be threatened by the ability of mortal man to draw forth and entrap the power of the Fortunes themselves while they were present in the mortal plane.

Blessedly, the Phoenix Clan displayed no wish to further research the nature of the Black Scrolls after the creation of Essence of Destruction. Although it might seem the Black Scrolls offer a way of permanently defeating the other Oni Lords, the Phoenix refrained from further experimentation at the command of Master of Air Isawa Mitsuko, who was adamant that such magic should never be used again. However, the Dark Fortune Shahai also learned the secret of using such powers when she used the Tao to entrap Kali-Ma, and if she were to deem a mortal worthy of learning this type of magic the Empire might face a grave threat indeed. And there is still the question of who in the gaijin lands created the thirteenth scroll, and whether more such artifacts may be out there in the foreign lands, waiting to be found.



The Destroyers as a Military Threat

Any campaign set within the era of the Destroyer War will almost certainly involve military conflict with the Destroyers themselves. The legions of Kali-Ma are unlike any sort of threat the Empire has ever faced before. While they may seem similar to oni on the surface, they are created by a gaijin cult and operate with a single unified purpose, very different from the chaotic aggression of the hellspawn of Jigoku. A GM who wants to present the military threat of the Destroyers in an effective manner should make a point of understanding the nature of their armies and leaders.

Although the Destroyers have terrifyingly vast numbers and inhuman ferocity, over the course of the War the Empire comes to discover there are several distinct weaknesses to the methods the goddess Kali-Ma used to craft her minions. Persistent among almost all of the Destroyers was a general lack of individual identity. The Ironclads, who comprise the vast majority of the Destroyer forces, are little more than kansen-inhabited suits of armor, bound by some dark ritual performed by Yuna or perhaps Kali-Ma herself. (Some of the later versions appear to have been made by enslaved Ashalan, perhaps attempting to duplicate her rituals... with mixed success.) As bound extensions of Kali-Ma's will, the Ironclads simply collapse into corrupted metallic rubble when she dies.

The leaders and elites of Kali-Ma's army are the half-bestial, half-human demons known as Destroyers. These creatures possess self-will to at least some degree, albeit a will wholly subservient to Kali-Ma's demand for the conquest and destruction of Rokugan. Other such elite units include the mysterious Centuraie, who appear to have been created from captured Yodotai. However, even these creatures are as much an extension of Kali-Ma's destructive will as they are living beings. Without her, only a smattering have the power and sense of self to continue their existence.

The organization of the Destroyer forces is strict but also somewhat unimaginative and predictable, with a certain superficial resemblance to the gaijin legions of the Yodotai. They are organized into squads of ten Ironclads each, with larger formations built up from that basic building block, and led by the beast-headed demons known as Destroyers. Since these units had no real individuality, they always responded to orders in exactly the same way, without the slightest consideration for survival – but also without the slightest creativity or self-will. So long as an effective commander was on the field of battle, these forces can be used to maximum potential, but when un-led or in the hands of poor commanders, their effectiveness diminishes rapidly – something the Rokugani came to understand over the course of the war. When commanders are killed, their Ironclads stop pursuing specific tactics and simply try to destroy any Rokugani they meet.

All of this results in a widely variable performance by the Destroyer invasion. When commanded directly by Kali-Ma or one of her chief generals, such as the Rakshasa or

the corrupted Yodotai called Legulus, the army is almost unstoppable, particularly in the earliest stages of the war. Whether intentionally or not, the resemblance to Yodotai military organization makes Legulus extremely effective as a commander, while the Rakshasa has a millennia of experience to draw on. Other commanders, however, are less effective in these methods. Commanders who originated with the Ivory Kingdoms, the Senpet, or the Ra'Shari, such Kheth-tet, are generally less effective at manipulating the Destroyer forces to their fullest potential. However, it must be noted that none of the leaders, not even Legulus, show much concern over casualties or the fates of individual units, simply assuming their goddess will always be able to supply them with superior resources. This leads to a slow bleeding of numbers by the time the army arrives in Scorpion lands for the climactic battles.

At the end of the day, the greatest strength of the Destroyers greatest strength is also their greatest weakness: numbers. The Destroyers have a vast army, matching the three strongest military clans combined. Its individual soldiers are the equivalent of three or four normal samurai in terms of their lethality and toughness. The perception of a limitless horde invading Rokugan spreads fear and despair deep into the hearts of even the most stalwart of samurai. But this vast scale also causes the Destroyer commanders to be overconfident and to rely far too heavily on the sheer numbers at their disposal. Had the Destroyers shown finesse and tactical skill to match their numbers and ferocity, they might well have crushed Rokugan beneath their ironclad feet. Instead, their armies are significantly weakened by the time they face the final battles, and the Rokugani – especially the Lion – learn to counter their numbers with effective tactics.

The Ebon Daughter

"Feel the power of Kali-Ma, samurai. Taste the fragment she offers, and know absolute divinity."

– Rafiq the Jackal

The creature known as the Ebon Daughter was once a samurai of honor and renown. Iuchi Yue, the daimyo of the Iuchi family, lost a Black Scroll entrusted to her care. During her attempts to recover the artifact she came close to the hidden temple of the Kolat conspiracy; the Kolat captured her and kept her in a cell for years, deeming her useless as a potential agent since she was so resistant to their torture. After several years, they shipped her to their branch in the Burning Sands, the Qolat, where they intended to sell her as a slave.

Yue eventually wound up in the city of Medinaat al'Salaam, where a Kolat agent named Nakima traded her to Rafiq, a member of a strange local cult called the Jackals. Rafiq undertook a subtle deception of Yue, showing her many aspects of the city but doing so with clever deception. The Jackals were intentionally duping an honorable woman with the goal of getting her to perform an outright blasphemous act and thereby open herself to the power of Kali-Ma. The goddess was an agent of destruction, corrupted and twisted; she represented the destruction necessary before rebirth could occur, but without the other aspects of Shiva she was little more than a creature of absolute wanton devastation and corruption. The corruption of an otherwise pure and honorable soul of great mystical power through a heinous and blasphemous act would fulfill an ancient prophecy that would bring into being the Ebon Daughter, a direct avatar and agent of Kali-Ma into the mortal world.

The longer Yue remained in the gaijin city under the influence of the Jackals, the more she became convinced the city was in terrible danger and its people required some sort of aid. She could not bring herself to stand idly by and allow a city of innocents, even gaijin, to fall to the corruptions and wars that she had seen in other places. Wanting desperately to aid the people of what was swiftly becoming her new home, she was deeply distressed by her inability to wield traditional Rokugani magic in the Burning Sands. Rafiq and the Jackals slowly persuaded her to make a pact with Kali-Ma to gain the power to strike down the supposed enemies of the city – who the Jackals had identified as the Ebonites, a monastic warrior order. They promised her Kali-Ma was an agent of rebirth, a concept she closely associated with the Celestial Wheel and with Rokugani Fortunes such as Tsukune.

The reality was that by ritually killing a plague victim, Yue opened herself up to Kali-Ma's malign power. Her body became statuesque and demonic, covered in criss-crossing scars. Her mind was twisted and corrupted into madness and evil, while she gained powers that were a twisted mixture of gaijin magic and blood sorcery. She returned to Rokugan as a harbinger of destruction, spreading the Destroyer Plague.

The Fate of Fu Leng

One of the most disturbing prefaces to the Destroyer War was an event witnessed by no living samurai and known to only a scant few individuals. In the last months of the year 1169, Fu Leng was expelled from Jigoku and returned to the mortal plane. This event had been foreseen by the prophet Kitsune Naraku, but her enigmatic warnings went unheeded. Fu Leng's fate was known only to his most trusted servant, Daigotsu, and a tiny handful of people with whom the Dark Lord shared the secret. Initially, even Daigotsu did not truly realize what had happened, only that his master had ceased to commune directly with him. He initially assumed his love and union with the Dark Daughter of Fu Leng, Shahai, had caused Fu Leng's wrath to fall upon him in some fashion. Eventually, however, Daigotsu learned the disturbing truth.

Fu Leng's fall had been triggered when the thirteenth Black Scroll was opened by Soshi Natsuo the previous year. The scroll unleashed one of two disparate pieces of Kali-Ma's divine essence. The other, trapped within the nature of Kyoso no Oni by Agasha Kyoso's inadvertent use of gaijin magic, was as yet inaccessible and would soon be sealed within a

Black Scroll of its own. However, the return of a part of her essence made Kali-Ma strong enough to act on her own. Ultimately, she entered the realm of Jigoku to challenge Fu Leng for its rule.

The actual conflict with Fu Leng was brief. The fallen Kami had once held great power, but now he was reeling from his defeat in the Celestial Heavens during the Four Winds era. The realm of Jigoku decided Kali-Ma was a more suitable agent to extend its will, and took from Fu Leng all the power it had given him, reducing him once more to simply a Kami. Rendered mortal, though still powerful, he was easily defeated and expelled by Kali-Ma.

Furumaro

The monk who called himself "Furumaro" was little more than a ruse by Fu Leng, but it became one of the most successful ruses of all time. The Dark Kami, having survived his clash with Kali-Ma, undertook elaborate plans for revenge. The persona of "Furumaro" was a key part of his plans and a singular creation on his part, pursued with the same dedication as a Shosuro actor maintaining an infiltration role. Indeed, Fu Leng became so deeply entrenched within his role as Furumaro that he jokingly commented some of his older personality traits (such as his willingness to lie) were subsumed into the false persona and lost... at least temporarily.

Furumaro focused his attention on a small group of human heroes, using their relative inexperience as a means of duping and controlling them. At the same time, their connection to the prophetess Naraku and the favor of Iweko I herself made them very useful pawns, allowing him to use them with considerable latitude on several occasions. Where most samurai in the Empire would have been hampered by the orders and tasks of their superiors, this band of young samurai were often tasked with specific duties at the behest of the Empress herself, while the rest of the time they were at her disposal but inactive. This gave Furumaro plenty of time to ingratiate himself with them and suggest various courses of action.

Their relationship was a strange and confusing one, in some ways even to the Dark Kami who initiated it. It is difficult to say how much of it was part of his schemes and how much simply assumed a life of its own. Regardless, he certainly made a calculated choice to try to take the place of "Shinsei" with his own particular band of heroes, and ingrained in all of them a glorified sense of self-worth in the face of their trials, convincing them of the importance of their actions as a group and their 'destiny.' It is quite possible he did this in part as a deliberate response to his own two-fold defeat at the hands of the Thunders with Shinsei's aid. After all, if it had worked for them, why could it not work for him?

Ultimately, the Empire would never know his full intentions, nor would they know whether it was deliberate intent or mortal sentimentality that caused him to finally accept Daigotsu as his brother-in-arms and the heir of his divine power. Such secrets the Dark Kami carried to his final death.

The Politics of Total Warfare

The Destroyer War sees an increased amount of cooperation between the Great Clans. In this respect it is similar to earlier conflicts such as the First War, the return of Iuchiban in the eighth century or the Blood Hunt in the reign of Toturi III (and notably different from other crises such as the Clan Wars and the War Against the Darkness, where the clans remained disunited until almost the last possible moment). However, the depth and degree to which the clans were able to work together during the Destroyer War was without precedent since the first century, and was especially remarkable given that it took place at a time when the clans had all built up extensive long-standing feuds, usually spanning multiple generations. As recently as two years earlier, blood had been spilled on a large scale in major inter-clan wars. The extent to which these enmities were put to the side in the midst of the Destroyer War was as impressive as it was unique.

During the initial year of warfare, some holdovers of conflicts that preceded the War of Dark Fire still simmered, and a few new enmities and divisions flared. In the aftermath of Hida Kuon's seppuku, however, the Empire's political leaders found themselves in a world where nothing significant could be gained through traditional oppositional methods. By the time of the Imperial Winter Court at Kyuden Gotei, open conflict between the clans had effectively ceased. There was initially still plenty of individual rivalry between specific samurai, most notably the ongoing feud between daimyo Kakita Noritoshi and Emerald Champion Shosuro Jimen, but even this famous rivalry was chiefly a matter between those two individuals and





did not lead to an open struggle between their respective factions as it might have done in any other time.

On the field of battle, samurai fought predominantly in unified Imperial armies rather than separate clan forces. Commanders who had fought each other within the last five years now stood side by side, discussing the disposition of units and debating the most effective tactics to ensure a victory, often with little regard for their own glory. Indeed, the desperate nature of the Destroyer War meant the quest for glory in the field of combat became increasingly unimportant to individual samurai, and those who sought no repute were oftentimes awarded greater admiration by their fellow soldiers. Grand-standing and self-aggrandizement were viewed with disapproval by almost everyone by the third year of the conflict.

In an environment like this, the ambitious and power-hungry often found themselves swiftly isolated and friendless if their efforts did not directly support the war effort. There was enormous pressure to cooperate fully even with hated rivals. Even the Spider, putative enemies of Rokugan, made no effort to subvert the Imperial courts during this time.

What all this meant for politics was that for almost half a decade it was effectively taboo to try to cause any kind of harm – political, economic, military, or otherwise – to other clans. Requests for aid were always couched with the needs of the whole Empire in mind. Attacks against rivals had to be conducted with the utmost restraint and care. Courtiers and dignitaries walked with soft steps, while the careless and brash found themselves swiftly re-assigned to lowly posts. Normally divisive factions such as the Scorpion and the Otomo worked instead to unify all the forces of the Empire and sought out for punishment those who might be lining their own pockets. (One of the more noteworthy casualties of these efforts was the prominent nobleman Seppun Kyuwa, targeted by Shosuro Jimen for his selective favoritism that caused harm to the Emerald Legions.) Conversely, any samurai who appeared to complacent or overly prosperous was considered to be insufficiently dedicated to the Empress and the war, and was liable for re-assignment or censure.

One of the principle side-effects of these tendencies was an increased willingness for many samurai to put aside old feuds once and for all. Several blood feuds saw peaceful conclusions with little more than quiet apologies hastily accepted. Even in cases where much blood had been spilled, hated rivals managed to mend their differences; confronting far more monstrous and sinister foes caused samurai to view many of their old squabbles as petty and dishonorable. Most notable among these changed relationships was the alliance that formed between the Crab and Scorpion in response to the creation of the second Festering Pit. Many other such long-term hated enemies also found in the War a new shared fellowship, one which would endure for many years to come.

GM Options: Furumaro's Samurai

In the canonical history of Rokugan, Furumaro's "team" of naïve young samurai is a well-known assortment of characters, comprising Hiruma Akio, Kakita Hideo, Mirumoto Ichizo, Akodo Shunori, Yoritomo Saburo, Isawa Kyoko, Bayushi Kurumi, and Utaku Kohana – one from each Great Clan, as Furumaro was careful to point out. However, there was nothing inevitable about these particular eight samurai being chosen for this role – chance and accident brought them together at the right time (or perhaps, more accurately, the *wrong* time).

Thus, there is no reason why the GM cannot replace some or all of the original group with Player Characters. Nor is there any requirement for the group to comprise one samurai from each Great Clan, although that will certainly make it easier for Furumaro to convince them they are destined heroes.

However, there are two potential pitfalls for GMs wishing to have their PCs serve as Furumaro's pawns. The first is that the players may be familiar with the canonical storyline of the Destroyer War and thus have prior knowledge of Furumaro's true nature and intentions. This can be mitigated somewhat by having Fu Leng take on a different guise (a revered sensei, perhaps, or a ronin warrior). The second problem is that the players may feel 'cheated' when they reach the climax of the story and realize they've been duped and led around by the nose the whole time. Smart GMs will give the PCs a fair chance to see through Fu Leng's deceptions rather than forcing them to a pre-ordained result.



New Mechanics

The era of the Destroyer War did not see much opportunity for innovations in the way of new Techniques or spells. It did, however, see Rokugan face a terrible new opponent: the Destroyers themselves. The beast-man Destroyers and the Rakshasa are depicted in the L5R 4th Edition box set *The Second City*; here we present the Ironclads, who formed the bulk of Kali-Ma's army.

New Creature: Destroyers, Ironclad

There is perhaps no more reviled and hated symbol of conflict in the modern Empire than the metallic Destroyers who very nearly trampled Rokugan into blood-soaked mud beneath their feet. Initially, they were believed to be a new form of oni, but the Empire eventually discovered the Destroyers were in fact crafted metallic shells into which the souls of murdered citizens of the Ivory Kingdoms were placed by blasphemous and unholy ritual of the Cult of Ruhmal. Enslaved by the ritual that bound them within the metal shells, the imprisoned souls served both as an animating force and a rudimentary consciousness that guided the Destroyers in their march across the Shadowlands and into Rokugan.

Although the Ironclads are generally considered identical, in truth there is a great deal of variation in their physical appearance. They range between six and nine feet tall, and generally have blank features and vaguely glowing orbs for eyes (some have demonic facemasks intended to intimidate and demoralize opponents). One uniform trait is that the Ironclad Destroyers have four arms, apparently out of reverence for their dark goddess Kali-Ma. The color of the creatures varied somewhat, but was always in metallic hues. These variations were the result of hundreds of different cultist laborers creating the shells using a variety of materials and methods over the course of a generation.

Destroyers, Ironclad

Air: 1	Earth: 4	Fire: 1	Water: 2
Reflexes: 3		Agility: 4	Strength: 5
Initiative: 5k3			*Armor TN: 30*
Attack: Claws 7k4 (Simple), Weapon 9k4 (Complex)			*Damage: Claws 5k2, Weapon (varies)*
Reduction: 10 (reduced to 5 by jade, crystal, and obsidian)			*Wounds: 48: +5, 76: Dead*

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 2, Defense 3, Investigation (Notice) 1, Jiujutsu 3, any Weapon Skill 5, any two other Weapon Skills 3

Special Abilities:

Fear 3

Supernatural Vision: An Ironclad's vision is not impaired by darkness of any sort.

Unholy Stamina: As per the Shadowlands ability.

Vulnerable to Cold: Attacks against an Ironclad that utilize cold gain a Free Raise on either the attack roll or the Spell Casting roll, as appropriate.

New Creature: Yuki no Onna

The mysterious Snow Maidens are spirit creatures tied to the winter winds and snows of Rokugan. They are only seen in winter when there is snow in the air or on the ground, and usually only during snowstorms. The Isawa believe they live in the world between snowflakes, occasionally emerging to make mischief or to interact with mortals; some theories suggest they are created from the souls of young women who die of cold. They always take the form of an astonishingly beautiful young woman with long flowing hair, dressed in robes of pure white; their skin is pale and chilly to the touch, their eyes are icy blue, and their lips are bright red.

Yuki no Onna are unpredictable creatures, sometimes benevolent and sometimes hostile, and their reactions to mortals are difficult to predict. Sometimes they will save mortals who become lost in snowstorms, but on other occasions they will leech the warmth and life out of stranded travelers. There are at least some instances in which Yuki no Onna have fallen in love with handsome or courageous mortal men, and while such men are safe from the worst of winter cold while their inhuman lover watches over them, they must beware of anything which might lead the Yuki no Onna into jealousy and heartbreak – in such cases her wrath is terrible indeed.

Yuki no Onna

Air:	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2
		Intelligence: 4	Perception: 4

Initiative: 5k4	*Armor TN: 25*
Attack: Icy Touch 6k3 (Complex, see below)	*Damage: Touch 5k1 plus Icy Touch (see below)*
Reduction: 10 (bypassed by fire)	*Wounds: 32: +5; 64: Dead*

Skills: Hunting 3, Stealth 6

Special Abilities:

Creature of the Snow: During a snowstorm, a Yuki no Onna gains a +20 bonus to its Armor TN and a +10 bonus to its Reduction.

Icy Touch: A wrathful Yuki no Onna's touch is so cold that it leaches the very warmth of life out of the victim. This attack ignores the effects of armor on the target's Armor TN. Moreover, the Icy Touch not only causes damage (from frostbite) but also causes the victim to become sluggish and weak as the chill drains away his strength; in game terms, he suffers the effects of being Fatigued each time he is hit, and this is cumulative with each hit.

Spells: A Yuki no Onna may cast Air spells as though she is a Rank 3 shugenja with no Affinity.

Spirit

Vulnerability: By its nature a Yuki no Onna is vulnerable to fire – it has no Reduction against fire-based attacks, whether mundane or magical. Unless it is highly enraged at its target, it will usually retreat from anyone who confronts it with fire.

Wanderer's Curse: As a Complex Action, a Yuki no Onna may curse another creature to lose all sense of direction for 24 hours. For the duration of the curse the victim has no sense of direction and, as an effect of this, cannot make Hunting rolls.





The Age of Exploration

The man advanced slowly, carefully, crouching in the jungle, not making any sound. His hand was on the hilt of his blade, the cold metal's presence reassuring him.

He knew the jungle. He was born in it, raised in it. From the tigers and the elephants to the monsters like the Rakshasa and the Red Hunger, he knew every single danger lurking in it. In truth, he loved the jungle. Of course it was a place of great perils, between the animals, the ruins of the old Kingdoms, the angry spirits of the dead, and the treacherous terrain. But there was a beauty in it, a wonder in being surrounding by warm, pulsating life, in not knowing what lay behind the nearest tree, in the verdant green everywhere. There was a rhythm to it, a unique balance of nature which bristled with vitality more than anywhere else in the world.

And he was one of its most dangerous predators.

Those who approached were ones he had never seen before. But it did not matter; any who trespassed on the territory of his goddess would die under his blade, their blood feeding the ground and their corpses withering away. As they drew closer he tightened his grip on his weapon, his muscles tensing to pounce like a panther. He might well die, of course, but not before sending many of his enemies to the afterlife, securing his own reward from the goddess.

Suddenly a hand closed on his wrist, twisted it savagely. As he lost his weapon, a second hand grabbed his throat with the strength of a choking serpent. He tried to scream, from pain and anger both, but the air was trapped in his lungs.

"Well, what do we have here?" Daigotsu Bofana whispered. His eyes glowed softly with an unnatural light as he lifted the small man off the ground. "Ruhmalite vermin, no doubt. Don't you know? These lands belong to the Empress. You have no place here anymore." His teeth flashed in a monstrous grin. "Let me show you where you belong..."

Bofana closed his hand, and the man's world disappeared.

A Time of Change

The Age of Exploration depicts a unique era in Rokugan's history: the colonization of a strange new land. The defeat of Kali-Ma's horde of Destroyers (as recounted in the previous chapter) also left the former Ivory Kingdoms almost completely depopulated, and the Empress of Rokugan chose to set aside the Empire's former policy of isolation and dispatched her people to claim this new land in her name. In effect, this would create an entirely new society, a "second Rokugan," in the Colonies.

For GMs seeking a detailed recounting of the Colonies, their geography, their inhabitants, and the cultural and social changes which the Rokugani settlers undergo, we recommend the L5R 4th Edition supplement Second City.

That product includes a much more in-depth description of the Colonies' history and development, as well as a detailed description of the region's physical layout and climate.

This chapter recounts the broad course of Rokugani history over the colonization era, both in the Colonies and in the Empire, as well as exploring two new problems which arise to trouble both regions toward the end of that time.

Year 1173

- In the aftermath of the final battle of the Destroyer War, the Empress issues a controversial edict granting Great Clan status to the Spider, while simultaneously banishing all members of that clan with the Shadowlands Taint from the Empire. They are ordered to travel to the former Ivory Kingdoms and conquer in the Empress' name. Within a matter of months, the Tainted Spider mass near the western border and begin an overland march toward their destination.
- The clans start rebuilding from the immense destruction of the war. The Crab are greatly embittered by the Empress' decree but focus on re-establishing the Wall and cooperating with the Scorpion towards enclosing the new Festering Pit in their lands. The Crane decide to show support to the Empress and are instrumental in spreading her edict across the Empire. The Dragon accept the duty of monitoring of the Spider Clan, ready to teach them the true way of the Tao. The Mantis, who themselves rose to Great Clan status by their own strength, are the first to offer land for the Spider to build a monastery. The Phoenix ponder the theological implications of a human master of Jigoku and the existence of the new Dark Fortunes. The Unicorn escort the Spider to their new home (soon to be known as the Colonies) and hunt for the remnants of the Destroyer army. The Lion are the most deeply affected of the Great Clans, convinced the Empress has acted wrongly, and many in their ranks (including the famed daimyo and hero Ikoma Otemi) commit kanshi, the protesting form of seppuku.
- After a difficult journey, the Spider and their Unicorn escorts arrive at the northern edge of the Colonies. They establish a temporary stronghold there called Journey's End Keep. Additional settlers from the other clans soon arrive and they push south, looking for a place to establish a permanent settlement.

Year 1174

- The settlers in the Colonies locate the future site of their capital (soon to be called the Second City) and begin constructing a rudimentary fortification there.
- Months after the completion of the nascent Second City, an attack by infiltrators from the Cult of Ruhmal results in the destruction of several structures within the military encampment. The attack is rebuffed and the settlers decide to expand the perimeter of the city's defenses. This is the first of three major expansions the city will make during the course of the next two decades.
- Akodo Shigetoshi, the Lion Clan Champion, writes to the lord of the Mantis Clan, Yoritomo Naizen, demanding satisfaction for the behavior of the Mantis during the Race for the Throne several years earlier. Naizen refuses, dismissing the Lion accusations as unworthy of his time, and Shigetoshi demands a blood-feud. However, the Empress refuses to authorize the feud, declaring the tenuous state of the Empire makes such conflicts unacceptable.

Year 1175

- The settlers in the Colonies make the first successful river trip between the Second City and the Mantis strongholds on the coast.
- The Lion, embittered by their inability to conduct a blood-feud against the Mantis, respond by obstructing the Mantis in the courts whenever possible. Yoritomo Naizen concludes this will make the Mantis Clan's affairs untenable if it continues, so he arranges to fake his own death in a storm at sea.
- Learning of Yoritomo Naizen's supposed death, Akodo Shigetoshi announces his retirement and lives out his remaining life in a monastery. Rule of the Lion passes to his eldest son, sixteen-year-old Akodo Shinjiro.

Year 1182

- The Divine Empress issues a decree installing an Imperial Governor of the Colonies to oversee the Second City and its surroundings. Ikoma Karatsu, a young but well-known Lion officer, is appointed to the position. He orders an expansion of the fortifications protecting the city, the second and largest of the three expansions the city experiences.

Year 1189

- Unseasonable storms of tremendous power devastate the entire region around the Second City, destroying many buildings. Rebuilding begins almost immediately, and the Governor takes the opportunity to expand the city's military walls for the third time.

Year 1190

- In the Empire, a breach in the defenses of the Pit in the Scorpion lands takes place under suspicious circumstances, resulting in the deaths of a large party of Phoenix Inquisitors. The Phoenix send another party to investigate, but find their way blocked by the Scorpion. The Phoenix petition the Empress for permission to wage war against the Scorpion. As the first such war in the Empire in over a decade, the matter quickly becomes politically complex,



with the Crane and Dragon supporting the Phoenix in court (and occasionally on the battlefield), while Crab engineers assist the Scorpion, and Lion observers report to the Empress. The conflict, known as the War of the Twin, continues for over three years, with fighting in both clans' territories.

Year 1191

- The Empress decrees the creation of the Imperial Explorers, a Colonial branch of the Imperial bureaucracy that recruits young samurai from all the clans to explore and map the former Ivory Kingdoms. The clans are encouraged to send their finest young warriors, and are rewarded for doing so by claiming a portion of each Explorer's finds.

Year 1193

- The Imperial Governor of the Colonies establishes a compound away from the Second City for the training and administration of the Imperial Explorers. This ensures the organization cannot be manipulated for political gain. The move is not popular, but the Governor quickly rebukes any who offer dissent.
- The conflict known as the War of the Twins comes to an end when the respective Clan Champions, Shiba Tsukimi and Bayushi Nitoshi, agree to fight a duel in the Mountains of the Phoenix. Tsukimi hopes this will avert any further loss of life. She suffers a grievous wound to her eyes and nearly dies from infection (or perhaps poison), but is saved by the intervention of Isawa Kimi, the Master of Void. Due to this unusual treatment, Tsukimi gains the ability to see without eyes through the mysteries of the Void. Nitoshi is declared the winner of the duel, and the Phoenix withdraw their petition for investigation of the incident at the Scorpion Wall. Nitoshi cements a reputation as a dangerous young man, and is sometimes called the Poison Mask.

Year 1196

- Doji Domotai, the Champion of the Crane, retires and passes the rule of her clan on to her son Doji Makoto.

Year 1198

- Akodo Shinjiro, the Champion of the Lion, fights a duel of honor with Shinjo Min-Hee, whose father Shinjo Shono was slain by Shinjiro's father Akodo Shigetoshi during the Race for the Throne. Min-Hee wins the duel and Shinjiro is slain. Shinjiro's younger brother Akodo Kano refuses to accept the Clan Championship, and rule of the clan passes to his younger sister, Akodo Dairuko.
- During the early summer, a number of prominent members of Rokugan's older generation disappear under mysterious circumstances, including the woman named Akasha and Mirumoto Mareshi, both parents of their respective clans' Champions, and Hida Fubatsu, a legendary sensei and blacksmith serving the Crab. Unknown to the Empire, these events are coordinated by a mysterious entity known as the Dark Naga, who is attempting to purge all vestiges of the Naga race's association with humans while simultaneously destabilizing the Empire in preparation for an attack.
- The Dark Naga's plans escalate with more direct attacks, including the destruction of the Shinomen Tower, the Unicorn holding which monitors activity within the Shinomen Mori, and the assassination of the Imperial Governor of the Colonies within the Second City. When word reaches the Empire of Ikoma Karatsu's death weeks later, the clans immediately begin jockeying for position in an attempt to secure the extremely powerful position. Otomo Suikihime ultimately wins the appointment and departs for the Second City.
- Shortly after her arrival, the new Imperial Governor holds a contest among the samurai of the Second City, the winner of which is appointed as her personal champion and representative. This position, which she calls the Ivory Champion, is won by a young and relatively inexperienced Unicorn bushi named Shinjo Tselu.
- Conflict between the forces of the Dark Naga and the Empire begins. The so-called War of Serpents initially takes place around the fringes of the Empire's territory, as well as with the Mantis Clan on the open sea and with the Spider Clan in the most remote sections of the unexplored jungles in the Colonies.
- One of Otomo Suikihime's first edicts opens exploration of the Colonies to all clans, not just the Mantis and Spider. This results in a greatly increased flow of resources to and from the Colonies, albeit at the price of increased tensions and rivalries between the different clan settlers.

What Happens Next?

The Age of Exploration is the current era of the Legend of the Five Rings card game, and the course of its various storylines – the War of Serpents, the clashes within the Colonies, the tensions between the Colonies and the Empire proper – are still being told. We have deliberately chosen to present this era as an "incomplete" timeline in order to encourage GMs and players to undertake their own stories without concerning themselves too much with what is supposed to happen in the official canon. L5R is your game, and every era presented in this book and its predecessor is merely a starting-point for you to develop your own ideas.

The Clans and Factions in the Age of Exploration

The clans of Rokugan enter the Age of Exploration still struggling to recover from the devastation of the Kali-Ma Invasion. Although the Empire for the most part enjoys an era of peace, the damage from the attack of the Destroyers is so great that many clans are still not back to anything like full strength a generation later.

The Crab Clan

The sons of Hida have less overall interest in the Colonies than perhaps any other clan, distant as it is from their own lands and unimportant to the few matters they consider essential to their ongoing duties. The clan's focus remains precisely where it has always been: maintaining their lands and ensuring nothing from the Shadowlands can threaten the Emerald Empire. A secondary focus is assisting their new allies the Scorpion in defending the Second Pit in the Scorpion provinces. This alliance is solidified by Crab support of the Scorpion during the War of the Twins, although the Crab are never foolish enough to believe the Scorpion are sharing all their secrets.

The Crab spend much of this era rebuilding the damage from the Destroyer War, especially the Kaiu Wall and Kyuden Hida. They benefit greatly from the results of the Empress' bargain with Daigotsu, since the so-called New Taint (which no longer spreads in the infectious manner it did in the past) makes it far easier for them to fight the beasts and demons of the Shadowlands and greatly reduces their need for jade. However, the Crab show little gratitude for this change – as far as they are concerned, any sort of deal with the Dark Lord of Jigoku is deeply unwise, and they remain convinced that Daigotsu cannot be trusted to keep his word.

The Clan Champion is Hida Kisada, the eldest son of the great Hida Kuon, who at gempukku took the name of his grandfather, the Fortune of Persistence. This connection to the Great Bear, combined with his relatively short stature, leads his followers to call him the Little Bear; he tolerates this from Crab samurai, but woe betide the outsider who presumes to use the nickname. Kisada is acknowledged as one of the superior swordsmen of his time, and as his clan recovers its strength he increasingly longs for an opportunity to prove their mettle. He finds the continued existence of the Spider Clan a personal insult, a sentiment shared with his younger brother Kuni Renyu. Renyu, who married the daughter of the previous Kuni daimyo after his skills with the kami emerged, is not only a bitter foe of the Spider but also has an extremely negative view of the Colonies, which he believes are a corrupting influence on Rokugan. Nonetheless, the Colonies do potentially offer many exploitable resources that could be useful for the Crab, so Kisada sends Renyu there – much to his displeasure.

The Crane Clan

In the wake of the Destroyer War, the Crane face the task of rebuilding from heavy losses and restoring a greatly weakened political network. When Empress Iweko I chose a Lion for her husband, it was clear to the Crane she was not going to favor them as the old Hantei dynasty did, and once the war is over they redouble their efforts to ingratiate themselves with her dynasty in other ways. One of their key successes is securing the Jade Championship for a Crane, Asahina Nanae, who brings all of the clan's famous charm and political acumen to the position without forsaking its spiritual aspects.

After Clan Champion Doji Domotai retires in the year 1196, rule of the clan passes to her son Doji Makoto, a young man who manages to combine both affable charm and lethal dueling skills. Soon called the Smiling Blade in the courts, he proves the Crane are still both a great ally and a dangerous enemy.

The Colonies are not initially very appealing to the Crane Clan, given their distance from Rokugan and the clan's traditional sources of power. This is not to say they ignore the new lands; rather, they see the Colonies as a secondary focus, a place where they can safely experiment in new forms of political and economic warfare. They control the Aerie, the only major non-Mantis port on the Colonial coast, which they share custody of with the Dragon as a gesture of good will. They also gain a



dominant position in Twin Forks City, a river port located midway between the Second City and Kalani's Landing. This expanding role leads to many arguments and clashes with the Mantis over trade routes and tariffs, topics considered rather shameful in Rokugan but much more openly discussed in the Colonies. The Crane suspect this could escalate to war, and the Daidoji slowly increase their presence in the Colonies and especially their naval forces in response to the perceived threat.

The Dragon Clan

The Dragon Clan does not suffer as heavily as some of the other clans in the Destroyer War, and in the aftermath of the conflict they find themselves with an unusual new duty. As the favored clan of Empress Iweko I, they are entrusted with the task of monitoring and watching over the Spider Clan. As such, they are one of the first clans to develop a sizable presence in the Colonies, although they have less interest in the new land's resources than almost any other faction. They see this duty as offering them a chance to teach the Spider about the true Tao and the proper ways of samurai, and in fact a few Spider samurai do listen to the Dragon and leave their own ways behind. Each such individual is seen as a victory by the Dragon. Their natural curiosity and flexibility allow them to adapt more easily to the new environment of the Colonies than many other clans, and once the Governor announces open exploration of the new lands many Dragon eagerly join the effort.

After over a thousand years under the leadership of Togashi and his children, the Dragon Clan is now led by the Mirumoto family. The first Mirumoto Clan Champion, Mirumoto Kei (wife to the half-Naga Mirumoto Mareshi), eventually passes the rule of the clan to her son Mirumoto Shikei, who is trained not only in the Niten fighting style but also spends time with the Togashi sensei, learning contemplation, martial arts, and the ways of the tattooed men. This unique mixture of training and philosophies, together with his own hands-on approach to leadership, makes him something of a wild card in Rokugani politics, and few know what to expect from the so-called Laughing Dragon.

Soon after his gempukku, Shikei is betrothed to the Unicorn Clan Champion, Moto Naleesh. This has the potential to be a great boon for the Dragon Clan, but Shikei breaks the engagement for reasons he refuses to divulge. This leads to growing hostility between the two neighboring clans; the Dragon do not seek war, but will not let their lord's honor be questioned. Furthermore, their Champion's Naga ancestry involves them directly in the War of Serpents, causing them to become much more heavily involved in this clash than the other clans.

The Lion Clan

The Lion Clan suffered immense losses in the Destroyer War, and it took them several years to fully purge their lands of plague zombies and other lingering monstrosities. Due to the heavy damage to their croplands, Clan Champion Akodo Shigetoshi was forced to order a limit on the number of children each family could have to avert famine. Nonetheless, the clan enjoys great prestige (and a surprising amount of political influence) due to both its tremendous sacrifices against the Destroyers and the fact that the Empress' husband is a former Lion.

By the 1190's the clan has recovered some of its strength, although it is still a far cry from its glory days earlier in the century. In the year 1198, however, the Lion suffer an unexpected blow when Clan Champion Akodo Shinjiro loses a duel against the Shinjo family daimyo. Shinjiro's younger brother Kano, an oddly irreverent young man, refuses the Championship and passes it to his sister Akodo Dairuko. A dour, serious young woman whose hair is prematurely graying from stress and worry, Dairuko reluctantly accepts the duty and tries to ensure the Lion Clan continues its recovery and holds its proper place in the Empire. Nobody but herself doubts her abilities.

While the Lion are not very interested in the Colonies, they cannot turn a blind eye to the resources available there, nor does their position as the Right Hand allow them to leave the settlers defenseless. Both the first Governor of the Colonies and the commander of the Second City Guardsmen are from the Lion Clan, and they do their best to maintain Rokugani tradition in that foreign land. However, with the Governor's death at the hands of the Dark Naga and his replacement by an eccentric and innovative Otomo woman, the Lion find the Colonies quickly becoming an even more unsettling and changeable place. They are also irritated by the tendency of the Phoenix to constantly meddle in their affairs whenever anything remotely spiritual is involved, and they see this as an attempt to push them out of their role as defenders of the Empire. The Lion also have one concern they have not shared with any other clan: the lurking presence, across the Burning Sands, of the expansionary empire of the Yodotai, whose secrets the Lion have learned from the gaijin document called *De Bellis Yoditorum*.

The Mantis Clan

The Mantis Clan is in a uniquely powerful position during the Age of Exploration. Not only did they suffer fewer losses in the Destroyer War than any other clan, they also control the only sea-going routes to and from the Colonies, as well as almost every port located there. They allow the Crab to use their travel routes unmolested due to a long-standing agreement between the two clans, but others have no choice but to depend upon the Mantis for transport if they wish to use the sea route. The clan is able to gather massive resources and wealth during its two decades of exploration in the Colonies, elevating them to the undisputed position of the wealthiest Great Clan. The Mantis also transport enormous quantities of resources back to the Empire for the other clans, though of course they charge high fees for such services, and this makes them necessary allies for almost all the other clans. The Mantis also find it much easier to adapt to the new conditions in the Colonies and even make a practice of training their younger generations there rather than on their home islands, thus fully embracing the newest age of Rokugan.

The exceptions to the Mantis' position as frequent allies are the Crane and the Lion. In the Colonies, the Crane control the only major city along the Shinano River, which connects the Second City with the Mantis-dominated coast; they also control the Aerie, the only port on that coast not in Mantis hands. The bitter disagreements between the two clans over shipping and tariffs grow steadily more heated, and the Crane are expanding their fleet, a development the Mantis regard with deep unease. Relations with the Lion have been strained ever since Akodo Shigetoshi tried to start a blood feud with Yoritomo Naizen in the year 1175, and while Naizen's false death ended the immediate clash, hostility still simmers between the clans underneath a thin veneer of courtesy.

Clan Champion Yoritomo Hiromi, the son of Naizen, is known to his followers as the Growing Storm, and as the name implies he seems eager for conflict sooner rather than later. His twin sister Harumi is a skilled shugenja who relinquished her own claim to the Championship, but remains a powerful (if more peaceful) influence within the clan. This only drives Hiromi to prove himself more, making him doubly dangerous.

The Phoenix Clan

Although the Phoenix are not quite as badly damaged by the Destroyer War as the clans in the southern half of the Empire, their earlier suffering in the War of Dark Fire leaves them with a great deal of rebuilding work. They also find themselves caught up in the War of the Twins, the first major conflict after the Destroyer War, in which the followers of Shiba face the heirs of his twin brother Bayushi. Needless to say, the normally peaceful Phoenix are not pleased with the amount of violence they have seen in recent years, and after the War of the Twins they do their best to prevent any further clashes.

The Phoenix do benefit from the leadership of the most experienced Clan Champion in the Empire, Shiba Tsukimi, who is of course also gifted with the ancient guidance of the Soul of Shiba. The Elemental Council also boasts two highly experienced members: Isawa Mitsuko, the Master of Air and resolute leader of the Inquisitor order, and Isawa Kimi, the Master of Void, both of whom served in the Destroyer War. The rest of the Council is younger, having come of age in the relatively peaceful Age of Exploration: Isawa Koiso, the beautiful and dangerous Master of Fire; Isawa Norimichi, the steadfast and loyal Master of Earth; and Asako Chukage, Master of Water and – most unusually – also a member of the secretive Asako henshin order.

The Colonies present a fascinating enigma to the Phoenix, a place full of new and dangerous lore and magic, a place clearly in need of their unquestioned expertise in

all things mystical. The threats of unknown gaijin magic and potential spiritual contamination leads them to deploy a large contingent of Inquisitors to the Colonies and to demand they be given authority over any and all gaijin relics discovered there. They also view themselves as the proper clan to be handling all religious matters in the new land, building and operating many temples and libraries in the Second City and elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, this step on many other clans' toes, especially the Lion and Crab, but the Phoenix can point to many real dangers in the Colonies to back up their demands. By the time of the War of Serpents, the clan has even sent the Agasha daimyo to the Colonies to supervise the clan's efforts in exploration (as well as to try to mend relationships with the Lion). While Rokugan expands, the Phoenix want to ensure such expansion is not at the cost of its soul.

The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion end the Destroyer War in a state of near complete ruin, the southern half of their lands wrecked and a new Festering Pit in the heart of their farmlands. However, in the years afterward their fortunes begin to rise. They manage to win the War of the Twins (thanks to the skills of their young Clan Champion) and their alliance with the Crab Clan helps them to contain and secure the Second Pit. Although their political strength is still far below its peak from earlier in the century, a new generation of informants and spies is starting to bear fruit, and their undoubted sacrifices during the Destroyer conflict gives them a moral authority they are quick to exploit.

One continued threat and shame to the Scorpion is the ongoing existence of the thing known simple as the Disgrace: the undead monster which was once Clan Champion Bayushi Paneki. The clan greatly wishes to bring this creature down and lay Paneki's body to rest, but the Disgrace is unnaturally clever for a zombie and has thus far eluded pursuit. The new Clan Champion, Bayushi Nitoshi, is a young man of great promise, having inherited both his father's natural talents and his mother's charm and martial prowess.

The Scorpion Clan's expansion in the Colonies has been relatively measured compared to the more eager settlers like the Mantis and Unicorn, but they keep a close eye on the region, aware of both its many opportunities and of the many potential dangers there. The sensei of the Imperial Explorers, Bayushi Shibata, is one of their key sources of influence and information in the Colonies. They also pay particular note to the Spider Clan, monitoring them in secret. The Scorpion do not trust the Dragon to be up to the task of watching over the Spider, and they certainly do not believe the Spider are no longer a threat to the rest of the Empire. In particular, they have taken note of the very subtle renewed signs of Goju activity in support of the Spider, and in response they have deployed some of their most talented assassins to the Colonies to try to counter this threat.

The Spider Clan

Twenty-five years after they were officially exiled to the Colonies, the Spider Clan is slowly but surely prospering. Their actions in the Colonies have gained them the grudging respect of some samurai and a considerable amount of support from the commoner populace, while the few courtiers of the Susumu family and the monks of the Order of the Spider and the Order of Venom maintain a small presence in the mainland. The Spider have special permission under Imperial law to venerate Daigotsu and his Dark Fortunes, and continue to have Tainted and even Lost samurai in their ranks (although those of a more monstrous nature are usually kept far from the eyes of the other clans lest they destroy them out of indignation). And the successful Spider infiltration of the Sparrow Clan has given them (thus far) a secure base within the Empire that is to all appearances a secret from everyone, even the Scorpion.

Within the Colonies themselves, the Spider have come to represent a sort of dangerous second chance, since dishonored or Tainted samurai will sometimes try to join the clan. Only the strong survive, since Daigotsu Kanpeki leads his clan with an iron hand and the dangers of the unexplored jungles quickly cull the weak.

The only clan which can be said to be a real ally to the Spider is the Unicorn Clan, who went so far to craft a sword for the Spider as a symbol of their connection (with the requirement that it only be carried by un-Tainted samurai). But while the Unicorn respect the Spider's prowess, even they would balk if they knew Kanpeki has maintained his father's secret alliance with the Shadow Dragon. The Shadow Dragon's servants, the Goju and Ninube, provide the Spider Clan with an asset for tasks even they cannot accomplish on their own... although there is no telling what the price of such an alliance will eventually be.





The Unicorn Clan

The Unicorn are another clan which suffers greatly during the Destroyer War, though their losses are not as grievous as the Lion or the Scorpion. After the war, the Unicorn – with their history of exploration and their knowledge of the lands outside Rokugan – are in a position to benefit greatly from Rokugan's expansion into the Colonies, although they do not exploit the situation with the same ruthlessness as the Mantis. The creation and control of the Ki-Rin's Path, the land route connecting the Empire and the Colonies, is entirely in Unicorn hands. While it is longer than the sea routes, and an unpleasant journey at the best of times, the Ki-Rin's Path is also considerably safer, since it stays well clear of the Shadowlands and avoids the dangerous storms of the deep ocean. (This is not to say it is entirely safe, since both gaijin and Rokugani bandits seek to profit from the passing travelers.) The Path sees considerable use, especially from those clans who do not favor the Mantis, and the Unicorn see to it that any bandits pay a high price in blood.

The Unicorn maintain a surprising amount of political power for a clan widely regarded as uncouth and somewhat barbaric. Both of the Shoguns to serve Empress Iweko I have been Unicorn, first Moto Jinn-Sahn and more recently the shrewd and capable Moto Taigo. In the Colonies, the Unicorn are fortunate enough to have one of their samurai occupy the new office of Ivory Champion, granting them considerable influence within the Second City. And most recently, Utaku Ji-Yun has won the Emerald Championship, giving them an almost unprecedented level of political influence.

Moto Naleesh, the Unicorn Clan Champion, is the daughter of the infamous Moto Chagatai and his wife, the Naga-touched woman known as Akasha. In childhood Naleesh was revealed to be the reincarnation of Shinjo herself, and the Unicorn Clan considers itself truly blessed to be led by her. She is a talented and compassionate young woman whose only apparent weakness is her love for the Dragon Clan Champion, Mirumoto Shikei. When Shikei broke off their engagement, he also broke Naleesh's heart, and since then tensions have flared between the two clans.

Nor are the Dragon the only clan with which the Unicorn have clashed in recent years. Shinjo Min-Hee, the daimyo of the Shinjo family, killed the previous Lion Champion in a duel of honor, an incident which has made her quite famous. It remains to be seen whether the Lion will seek vengeance for Min-Hee's victory.

However, the greatest threat facing the Unicorn in this era is the War of Serpents, which has targeted the clan heavily due to both its proximity to the Shinomen Mori and due to the Naga bloodline within Naleesh herself. The Unicorn may soon find themselves on the frontline of yet another great conflict.

The Imperial Families

Although the Iweko Dynasty has kept the three Imperial Families in their roles and duties unchanged, they have clearly felt a diminution of influence in recent generations. The appointment of Seppun Ritisharu, a brilliant samurai-ko, as Imperial Treasurer after the retirement of Yoritomo Utaemaro did allow them to regain some control over Rokugan's Imperial power structure, which had seemed to be slipping wholly out of their grasp in the Destroyer War era. More recently, the rise of Otomo Suikihime as Governor of the Colonies offers the hope of a resurgence of her family's influence.

The two most famous Imperial samurai of this age, however, are the Empress' sons. The oldest, Iweko Seiken, is trained by every Great Clan (except the Spider), but considers himself a Lion like his father Iweko Setai. He is a formidable warrior and finished second to Utaku Ji-Yun in the most recent Emerald Championship. The youngest, Iweko Shibatsu, is fostered to the Spider as part of a hostage exchange with Daigotsu Kanpeki, and grows up in the Colonies mired in the philosophies of the newest Great Clan. He does not lament this fact, seeing it as an opportunity to learn more – although his older brother feels differently. The two heirs' fates will surely influence the whole of Rokugan, and their actions are closely followed by all.

Minor Clans and Ronin

Several of the Minor Clans suffered heavily during the Destroyer War, most of all the Badger (whose lands were destroyed once again) and the Sparrow (who were infiltrated and all but subsumed by the Spider). The other Minor Clans were far enough from the fighting to avoid heavy losses, although they did suffer from the plague as did all in the Empire. The Minor Clans rebuilt only slowly, since the whole Empire was lacking in resources and they were generally at the bottom of anyone's priorities.

The notable exception to this generally dismal pattern was the Bat Clan, whose tiny territory lay entirely off the mainland and was thus untouched by both war and disease. Given their skills at magical communication and their close alliance with the Mantis, it is no surprise the small Minor Clan has prospered enormously in recent

years, attracting more than a few new adherents to its banner.

Apart from the Bat, most Minor Clans can only afford to send a handful of samurai to the Colonies. But while the Great Clans have a tendency to send second sons, odd or unhappy individuals, disgraced samurai, and other such riff-raff to the new land, the Minor Clans usually send their best and brightest, for they see the Colonies as a place for them to shine despite their modest numbers. As a result, within the Second City opinion on the Minor Clans tends to be more favorable, and the Minor Clan Alliance has begun to reap profits from this effort. The Alliance also enjoys one notable political success in this era when Toku Hikaru is named as Imperial Chancellor, proving the Monkey remain widely respected and making him one of the highest ranking Minor Clan samurai in history.

Ronin are relatively rare in the Age of Exploration, for the weakened clans accept many new oaths of fealty after the Destroyer War and disgraced samurai tend to go to the Colonies instead of being stripped of status. The Legion of Two Thousand, which played a modest but significant role during the War, becomes far less notable in the subsequent peace. Independent wave-men do notice the opportunities in the Colonies, but find the trip a daunting prospect given their lack of funds or outside assistance. More than a few ronin die trying to travel the Ki-Rin's Path on their own, or perish at the hands of unscrupulous smugglers who pretend to be able to ship them to the Colonies. However, those who reach the Second City find it is a place where every single man is needed, allowing them to find easy employment and even some acceptance, something they could look for in vain a while lifetime back on the mainland.

Notable Personages of the Age of Exploration

GMs seeking a thorough overview of the inhabitants of the Second City and the movers and shakers of Colonial politics should consult the L5R 4th Edition supplement Second City, especially its second book, The People. This section presents several individuals who are influential either in the Colonies or in Rokugan proper but are not part of the Second City's power structure.

Kaiu Onizuka

Advisor to the Emerald Champion

Despite his relatively young age, Kaiu Onizuka has risen to a position of prominence in the Empire at a prodigious rate. He is a winner of the Topaz Championship, and among those famed ranks he is perhaps the one who has most successfully parlayed the victory into greater status in his subsequent career. Ironically, he is also perhaps the Topaz Champion least interested in acquiring such status and prestige.

The son of Kaiu Genji, the man known as "the Traveling Crab," Onizuka grew up following his father around the Empire, acquiring more respect for other Rokugani than most Crab do. Travel finally ended when he enrolled in the Kaiu dojo, but his father had nurtured a powerful sense of duty in young Onizuka, and he pursued his lessons with the same eagerness as he had followed his father across Rokugan. His highly orthodox views on Honor led to several disagreements with fellow students, and as he matured Onizuka took up the practice of iaijutsu as a means to settle such disputes. This in turn led to his being selected to represent the Crab at the Topaz Championship, where he performed admirably and ultimately won the event.

True to his nature, Onizuka did not let his victory change his plans. Rather, he went straight back to Crab lands, where he further honed his skills as an engineer and supported the ongoing efforts to rebuild and fortify the land after the ruin of the Destroyer War. A year after the tournament, just before Onizuka relinquished his title to the next Topaz Champion, he was contacted by Utaku Ji-Yun, the newly appointed Emerald Champion. She admired his dedication and offered him a position as her advisor and personal aide. Eager to resume his childhood travels while also serving the Empire, Onizuka gladly agreed. Since them he has served the Emerald Champion on a variety of missions, both in the Empire and the Colonies, putting his numerous talents to good use. His knowledge of both architecture and geology have been very helpful with exploring the ruins of the Ivory Kingdoms, and Onizuka hopes to find something in them that will support the Crab in their eternal struggle against Jigoku.

Kaiu Onizuka,
Advisor to the Emerald Champion

Air: 2	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 4
Reflexes: 3		Intelligence: 4	Perception: 3	
Honor: 6.3		*Status: 3.5*		*Glory: 4.7*

School/Rank: Kaiu Engineer 2 / Topaz Champion 1

Skills: Battle 3, Craft: Armorsmithing 2, Craft: Weaponsmithing 1, Defense 3, Engineering (Siege) 3, Etiquette 2, Hunting (Tracking) 1, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation (Notice, Search) 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Lore: Architecture (Ivory Kingdoms) 2, Meditation (Void Recovery) 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 2, War Fan 3

Kata: Strength of the Crab, Striking as Fire

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Ally (Utaku Ji-Yun, 4/2), Paragon (Duty), Social Position (advisor to the Emerald Champion

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Wanderlust, 2 points), Idealistic, Sworn Enemies (Several)

Agasha Kurou

Agasha Family Daimyo

The position of Agasha family daimyo is not the easiest in the Empire, for it means inheriting the legacy of defection to the Phoenix after centuries as loyal Dragon samurai. For Agasha Kurou, born as a Phoenix from Phoenix parents, it was a hard reality to face, but his mother Agasha Chieh made sure he knew the full history of his family. While Chieh was a tempestuous and brazen woman, Kurou had the patience and resilience of the Earth. Chieh knew this quality would make him a good leader, and groomed him to be the man the family would need. Kurou became known as a gracious, knowledgeable host and a good conversationalist, creating a network of friends and favors for his family while also pursuing his own talents toward alchemy and Earth magic. The Elemental Council was impressed with him, and under Kurou's guidance the Agasha were allowed to become a slightly more public presence in the Empire.

So great was his success that when the Elemental Council decided to increase their presence in the Colonies, Kurou was the one they selected to go there. (This decision also stemmed from a desire to reign in the Asako family's influence, since they were very active in the region.) While he has accepted his duties, Kurou cannot help but feel out of place in the Colonies: the heat, the odd environment, the strange customs are all unsettling to a man with such a traditional education, and even the spirits themselves have a different tone. However, he is determined not to tarnish the Agasha name, so he works tirelessly towards making new allies and supporting the Phoenix efforts in the Colonies. And if it means suffering from suffocating heat all day long while averting his eyes from improperly revealing garments, so be it.

Agasha Kurou, Agasha Family Daimyo

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

Honor: 6.5 *Status: 7.1* *Glory: 5.7*

School/Rank: Agasha Shugenja 5

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 5, Courtier (Rhetoric) 4, Craft: alchemy 6, Defense 2, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Investigation 3, Lore: Ivory Kingdoms 1, Lore: Elements 5, Lore: History 3, Lore: Spirit Realms 3, Lore: Theology (Fortunism) 6, Meditation (Void Recovery) 5, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft 5

Spells: As the daimyo of the Agasha Family, Kurou has access to virtually any spell he desires, and usually favors Earth and Fire spells, especially those focused on Craft.

Kiho: Cleansing Spirit, Embrace the Stone, Song of the World, Touch the Void Dragon

Advantages: Balance, Elemental Blessing (Earth), Social Position (family daimyo)

Daigotsu Kanpeki

Spider Clan Champion

More than any other man in the Empire, Daigotsu Kanpeki can be said to occupy a truly unique position: the ruler of Rokugan's youngest and most tenuous Great Clan, only child to the Dark Lord Daigotsu and his lover Shahai. Whether the one some call "the Shadow Emperor" will achieve greatness or go down in history as another villain is anyone's guess.

It goes without saying that Kanpeki had a most unusual childhood, born with the Taint and having an ogre for his personal yojimbo, but with loving parents who instilled ideas of greatness in him. When Kali-Ma came, this strange idyll came to a shocking end. First his parents were taken away from him, then the Taint, then his clan as he was fostered to the Imperial families in exchange for the Empress' younger son. However, despite his sensei's hope that they might instill a sense of honor and purity in him, Kanpeki was a strong-willed child who refused to be tamed and held on to the childhood influence of his parents and the almost arrogant will to greatness they taught him. The only person worthy of his grudging respect was the Empress herself, who he knew to be both the one responsible for his predicament and the sole safeguard of his life. When he finally came of age, Kanpeki headed straight to the Colonies to take control of the Spider Clan, his birthright, overturning the council which had ruled in his stead for years.

Since then Kanpeki has developed into a formidable warrior, trained by the greatest of the Spider warrior-monks. He spends the majority of his time in the Colonies, making only a single yearly trip to Toshi Ranbo for the Empress to check on his purity and character. Thus far neither has been found lacking, and Kanpeki continues to provide the Empire with his unique brand of service, leading his clan against the dangers of the Colonies and hunting down the last remnants of the cult of Kali-Ma. Kanpeki hates the Ruhmal cultists bitterly, for he knows they were responsible for his parents' deaths (albeit indirectly) and he will accept no master of Jigoku other than his ascended father.

Kanpeki's reputation in the Empire is of a nightmare made flesh, a barely constrained demon in human form who serves the Empire only so far as the Empress forces him to do so. In the Colonies, however, he is viewed more as a necessary evil at worst, a man who has shed his own and his warriors' blood in defense of the Colonies and saved countless lives in the process. Few enjoy being in his presence, for his eyes show the dark nature of his soul and he has the awesome build of a warrior able to break a man like a twig. But there is no question some of the peasants in the Colonies silently give a prayer of thanks to Kanpeki, an evil turned toward their enemies.

Whether Kanpeki will remain always facing Rokugan's enemies is entirely his own choice. The Spider have never given up their dream of conquering Rokugan, and Kanpeki may yet take up that dream once more and become the hated foe of all that is honorable and pure... or he may live out his life in the Empress' reluctant service. Only time will tell.

Daigotsu Kanpeki, Spider Clan Champion

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

Reflexes: 5 Agility: 6 Strength: 6

Honor: 1.2 Status: 8.2 Glory: 6.3 Infamy: 9.2

School/Rank: Seppun Guardsman 1/Order of the Spider Monk 5/Obsidian Warrior 2

Skills: Athletics 5, Battle (Mass Combat) 4, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Defense 5, Iaijutsu 5, Etiquette (Courtesy) 3, Hunting (Tracking) 3, Intimidation (Bullying) 6, Investigation (Notice) 5, Jiujutsu 8, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Ivory Kingdoms 3, Lore: Shourido 5, Lore: Theology (Dark Fortunism) 5, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Meditation 4, Polearms (Bisento) 6, Stealth 3

Kata: Striking as Fire, Striking as Water, Indomitable Warrior Style, Reckless Abandon Style, Strength of the Spider

Kiho: Breaking Blow, Embrace the Stone, Fire's Fleeting Speed, Grasp the Earth Dragon, Root the Mountain

Advantages: Dark Paragon (Strength), Different School, Great Destiny, Hands of Stone, Multiple Schools, Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Disturbing Countenance, Hostage, Infamous, Obligation (the Empress)

The Dark Naga and the War of Serpents

Many campaigns set during the Age of Exploration will be focused on the Colonies (especially for GMs using the Second City boxed set), but there is also a conflict of significant importance taking place in the Empire proper at the close of this era, one which does spill over on a small scale to the Colonies as well. This is the struggle known colloquially as the War of Serpents. Although it is not a war on the scale of many past crises, it is still troublesome and damaging because the Empire has not yet fully recovered from the devastation of the Kali-Ma Invasion in the previous generation. Moreover, the elusive nature of the new enemy is quite frustrating and serves to fan the flames of latent hostility between the clans, both in Rokugan and in the Empire in the Colonies.

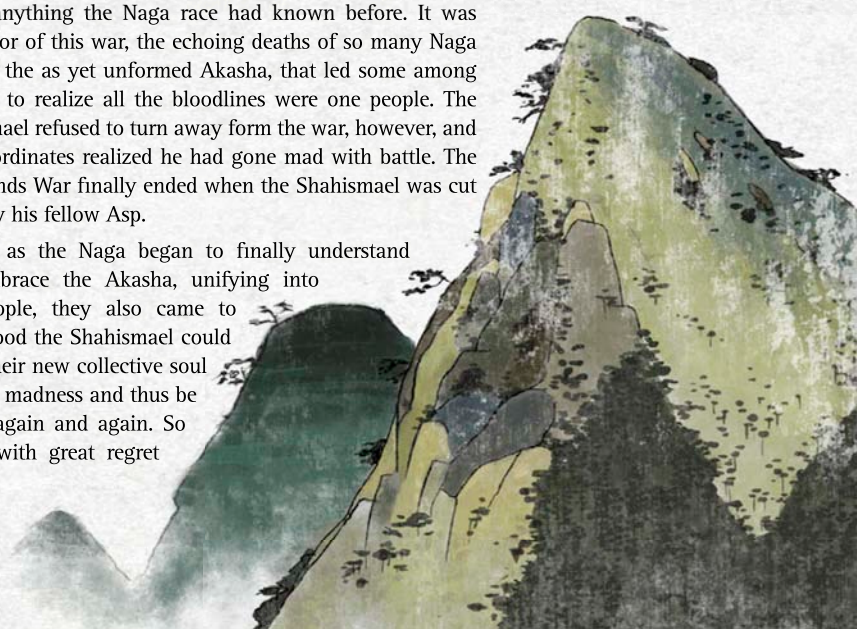
The new enemy is only poorly understand, and even then only by a small handful of individuals. The Divine Empress grants the clans permission to redress wrongs committed against them by these mysterious enemies, and to pursue justice in events such as the rash of kidnappings that mark their onset, but the full truth is not known to the Great Clans and, for that matter, may not be known to the Empress either.

The War of Serpents has its origins long before the first men ever walked the mortal realm. During the earliest days of the Naga race, a time not even the serpent men themselves can recall with any degree of clarity and from which no records have survived, the Naga were free to move across the world without restriction. Before the emergence of the Akasha, which unified them into a single people, their greatest strength was their amazing adaptability, which allowed them to adjust almost immediately to any environmental conditions. Whenever the Naga would reach a new part of the world, their physical bodies would undergo dramatic metamorphosis to suit their new home. When the serpent-men first reached the Burning Sands, for instance, their bodies became less serpent-like and more generally reptilian, with the ability to belch forth searing flames. (These forms were later referred to as 'salamanders' by the humans of the Burning Sands.) Likewise the Naga who reached the lands which would someday become the Ivory Kingdoms gained stronger upper bodies and shorter tails, more suitable for arboreal movement and activity. This was unquestionably the greatest strength of the early Naga, and it ensured their people would spread across the face of the world.

However, there were those who were jealous of the Naga's gifts. In particular the immortal and magically potent Ashalan race, few in number and limited in their ability to reproduce, took great issue with the Naga. They considered them vermin, unfit to rule the mortal realm. So it was that the Ashalan used their most powerful sorcery to curse the Naga, turning their strength against them. Whenever their adaptability changed their body, henceforth it would change their minds as well. Those who became salamanders were consumed with rage and bloodlust. Those who lived in the jungles of the future Ivory Kingdoms became bestial and feral, more like animals than intelligent beings. Those who took to the sea for too long became the Ningyo, and their minds were clouded so badly they forgot who they once were. Soon the Naga found they had no choice but to restrict themselves to the limited area that would one day become Rokugan. Because they had not yet attained the communal soul called the Akasha, they did not all share the same knowledge and memories, so when they were consumed with the conflict called the Bloodlands War they forgot about the curse of the Ashalan and what it had done to their kin.

The Bloodlands War was a terrible conflict in which the bloodlines of the Naga turned on one another due to the aggression and the hostility of the Asp. The Asp were led by a brilliant and charismatic individual known as the Shahismael, who took his people on a campaign of conquest unlike anything the Naga race had known before. It was the horror of this war, the echoing deaths of so many Naga through the as yet unformed Akasha, that led some among the Asp to realize all the bloodlines were one people. The Shahismael refused to turn away form the war, however, and his subordinates realized he had gone mad with battle. The Bloodlands War finally ended when the Shahismael was cut down by his fellow Asp.

Even as the Naga began to finally understand and embrace the Akasha, unifying into one people, they also came to understood the Shahismael could infect their new collective soul with his madness and thus be reborn again and again. So it was with great regret



and sorrow that the first vedics among the Naga imprisoned the spirit of the Shahismael deep within the Akasha where he could never escape, never be reborn, his screams of rage echoing faintly for all eternity. Or so it was believed at the time.

Thousands of years passed. The Naga civilization rose and flourished, then went into decline, and finally fell as they entered the Great Sleep. Eventually they awoke and fought alongside humanity during the Clan Wars and the War against the Darkness, only to return to sleep once more. As the Naga prepared to enter the Great Sleep once again, the effects of that supernatural state upon their race became apparent when an enigma beyond all understanding emerged from their ancient pearl beds (jointly maintained by the Ningyo and the amphibious members of the Cobra bloodline): two massive pearls, one of the most brilliant gold and the other of the deepest black. The pearls were presented to the Qatol, who was perplexed by their existence, as were his advisors among the jakla and vedics. The purpose of the pearls could not be divined, but their inherent nature – one pure, the other malignant – was clear to all.

After much debate, the golden pearl was given to the Unicorn Clan humans as a parting gift from the Naga people. The Qatol believed its purity and nobility would serve as a bridge between the two races for all time. The sinister black pearl, however, was cast back into the sea. There, unknown to the Qatol, it was retrieved by the Ningyo and placed within an abandoned pearl bed, guarded quietly for decades.

In time, the golden pearl manifested its powers in a most unusual way. It 'hatched,' cracking open and releasing a seemingly-human occupant. This strange young woman came to be known as Akasha, and her unique gifts and talents, as well as her link to the Naga, led to her gradually gaining more and more prominence within the clan until she finally became the wife of the Unicorn Khan, Moto Chen. Since the golden pearl had encapsulated all that was noble and all that was human within the Naga people's communal soul, Akasha embodied those traits and served as the perfect bridge between their two races. Through her the alliance between them was preserved even while the vast majority of the Naga slept under Unicorn guard.

The black pearl had been all but forgotten, since only the Qatol, his advisors, and the Ningyo had ever known of its existence. Deep beneath the sea it remained under guard, apparently inert... until an event of unprecedented nature, possibly unique through all of history, occurred within the mortal realm. The Thunder Dragon, a divine entity native to Tengoku, sacrificed its divinity in order to grant the soul of the mortal Yoritomo a place within the Heavenly Court. This resulted in the Thunder Dragon's exile to the mortal realm, and its arrival resonated through all the Elements of the world, awakening the black pearl.

From within the pearl emerged a creature unlike any other. Just as Akasha had represented all that was noble and human within the Naga, this entity represented all that was sinister and inhuman. The thing had no name, but its soul was an



old one: the soul of the Shahismael himself. Casting aside his former identity, the creature simply referred to himself as the Dark Naga.

While Akasha's connection to the Naga communal mind was somewhat tenuous due to her predominantly human nature, the Dark Naga's command over it was nearly absolute. The Ningyo race had been severed from the Akasha for millennia, and indeed had forgotten they ever were part of it, but the Dark Naga instantly restored their connection and then used it to command them. Nearly the entire race bent to his will almost immediately, powerless to resist the enormity of his presence within their minds. By studying the Ningyo, the Dark Naga quickly understood the truth about the Naga race and the curse under which they labored. Using his incredible power, the Dark Naga extended his will to find the other cursed and mutated Naga who existed in the distant corners of the world: the Naar Tebaan in the Burning Sands, the feral Nagah creatures in the former Ivory Kingdoms. With their connection to the Akasha forcibly restored, these creatures also became his willing and devoted accomplices. Even more sinister, however, the Dark Naga's experiments in commanding the abominations through the Akasha soon led him to the insight necessary to command the Naga themselves, even as they slept. Under his diabolical influence, countless Naga became literally sleepwalkers, obeying his every command.

The Dark Naga's initial actions against the Empire and the Colonies were meant to destabilize Rokugan while simultaneously eliminating those among its population he found most offensive: namely, anyone with blood-ties to the Naga. These unfortunates were abducted and brought before him for judgment. Among those taken Akasha herself, his spiritual counterpart and the mother of the new Unicorn Clan Champion. Other victims included the monk formerly known as Mirumoto Mareshi, father of the current Dragon Clan Champion, and Hida Fubatsu, a renowned blacksmith and sensei who was also the reincarnated soul of an ancient Naga hero. The Dark Naga also unleashed direct attacks against the Naga embassy in the Imperial City, the Shinomen Tower in the Unicorn lands, and the Governor's palace in the Second City. He rightly guessed the murder of the Imperial Governor of the Colonies would distract the people of the Empire from his other activities. He also used the Ningyo to unleash an orochi against a major Mantis merchant fleet, knowing the tempestuous Mantis would look for an easy target to blame.

Initially, the Dark Naga's machinations were successful. The Empire was thrown into disarray by his attacks, with the Great Clans casting blame on one another while the courts wrangled over who would become the new Governor of the Colonies and the Empress was besieged with requests for help regarding the disappearances and attacks. However, his plan is not without complications. Tthe Shahismael's burning hatred of humanity and poor understanding of their ways led him to drastically underestimate some of his opponents. The Spider, driven to prove their worth to the Empire, hunted down the temple in the most remote jungle of the Colonies which was the center of the Dark Naga's activities in that region; its destruction badly weakened his operations there. Likewise he reckoned without the cunning of the Scorpion, who quickly detected the pattern behind the attacks and abductions and raided one of the Naga's greatest temples within the Shinomen Mori. There they retrieved valuable texts that with Phoenix assistance eventually led them to some of the secrets behind the Dark Naga's origin and nature.

The secrecy surrounding the Dark Naga could not last indefinitely, of course. For a few months, confusion reigned and inter-clan tensions rose sharply, notable between the Mantis and Phoenix after the Dark Naga set them against one another. Eventually, however, one of the Dark Naga's captives escaped, and much of the Empire became aware of his intentions. The Dark Naga abandoned his distraction tactics and instead began a campaign of lightning raids with small groups of elite Naga warriors under his direct control. He hoped to keep the humans occupied long enough for his power to reach its full potential so he could awaken the Naga race as a whole and set them against the humans. Those who called the Naga their allies in the past fought to keep this from happening, knowing all too well that such a scenario would lead to either the eradication of all Naga or the extinction of the human race.

Escalating the War of Serpents

The War of Serpents in the canonical storyline, described in this chapter, is something of a "low-boil" conflict, always in the background and rarely taking center stage. However, there is absolutely no reason this must be the case in your own campaign. Many GMs may prefer to make this a more large-scale epic conflict that deeply embroils both the Empire and the Colonies. This can be accomplished in any number of ways, but the following may be considered as suggestions:

The Dark Naga's power may be even greater than suspected, allowing him to raise not dozens or hundreds of Naga, but thousands or even tens of thousands. This would allow him to present a significant military threat to individual clans or to the Empire as a whole.

The total population of the Naar Teban (from *Enemies of the Empire*) and the feral Nagah (from *The Second City*) has never been established. If they exist in significant numbers, they can pose a similar military threat to the Empire and/or the Colonies.

Most dramatically, if you wish the Dark Naga to be a truly existential threat, you can permit him to use his power to control humans in a limited fashion, perhaps using the Unicorn samurai Akasha as a medium for this purpose. This would permit him to wreak havoc on an unprecedented scale and could add elements of uncertainty and paranoia to the conflict, since one could never be sure if a particular samurai was controlled by the Dark Naga or not.

The Fudoism Heresy

The Brotherhood of Shinsei is a remarkably tolerant and open-minded organization, all the more so when considering the generally sequestered and inflexible mindset that typifies Rokugani psychology. Throughout its history the Brotherhood has proscribed less than a dozen texts, usually due to the authors later being proven to have been corrupted by the Shadowlands or some other nefarious influence.

Perhaps the most notable of all proscribed texts are those associated with the movement called Fudoism, named for the monk who created it, Fudo. Unfortunately, the purge of Fudoism from within the Brotherhood (and indeed from the Empire as a whole) was so successful that later generations were left with a very imperfect understanding of exactly what Fudoism was and why it was proscribed in the first place.

About Fudo himself virtually nothing is known. He appeared within the Brotherhood during the second or third century, and due to the nature of society at that time it is likely he was once a samurai in service to one of the clans. For whatever reason, however, Fudo appears to have been an intensely skeptical and perhaps bitter individual, extensively questioning not only the Code of Bushido but the very nature of Honor itself. His methods skirted the edge of what the Brotherhood considered acceptable, since it was a rather conservative organization during that era, and eventually he became a recluse in order to pursue his own thoughts on enlightenment without interruption. What transpired during this self-imposed exile is unknown, but Fudo returned to the Brotherhood some time later, a greatly changed man.

Where once Fudo had been abrasive and unpleasant, when he returned he was charismatic and enthusiastic. He claimed to have discovered a true path to Enlightenment and was eager to help others do the same. At first his efforts were lauded, but soon his teachings drew the attention of the Brotherhood's leaders, and they did not find favor with them. Fudo's principles revolved around discarding any previous philosophies to seek a new path, a path unique to each individual pupil. In many ways this was similar to the Brotherhood's precept of many different paths to Enlightenment, but Fudo supported and even encouraged the abandonment of every sort of ideal including honor, Bushido, and even the Tao itself, all of which he saw as limiting the perception of the individual. Some among his students became truly deplorable and depraved individuals, completely unconcerned with anything but their own perceptions of reality. The Brotherhood was appalled and acted quickly to censure everything associated with Fudo.

Fudo's ultimate fate is unknown, but it is clear from discoveries made during the exploration of the Colonies that either he or some of his students were exiled from the Empire and eventually reached the distant Ivory Kingdoms. The Ivinda, the people of the Ivory Kingdoms, were far less xenophobic than the people of Rokugan, and they permitted Fudo and his cult to establish small temples in their homeland. It was in these temples that Fudoism survived until, many centuries later, the Rokugani people claimed the devastated Ivory Kingdoms as their new Colonies. Samurai and monks discovered the texts in these ancient temples and embraced the philosophies they offered.

Fudoism in and of itself is not necessarily a deviant philosophy. Indeed, its emphasis on self-discovery closely mirrors several of the Brotherhood's oldest sects. However, the philosophy's blatant encouragement to disregard concepts the Brotherhood (and indeed the Empire as a whole) consider sacred is anathema to proper Rokugani. Unfortunately, the removal of Fudoism from the teachings of the Brotherhood and the libraries of the Empire was so completely thorough that modern Rokugani are not fully aware of its dangers, and it has quickly become popular in the Colonies. In fact, it is something of a fad there, with a prominent place in the discussions of the courts and among the higher levels of society. The Brotherhood has finally become aware of this, and is taking steps to try to curb it, but even the monks do not fully understand why Fudoism is so thoroughly dangerous.

New Mechanics

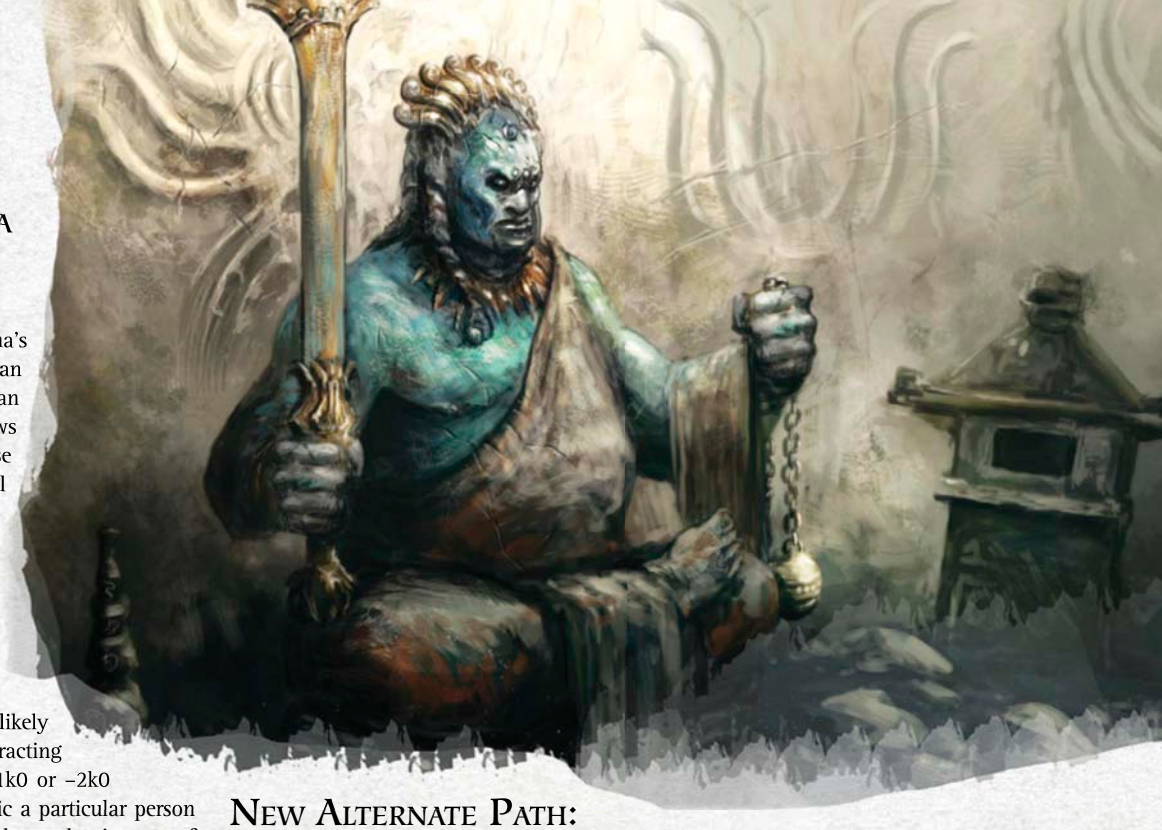
The following new mechanics are best suited to be used during the Age of Exploration era, and are generally more appropriate for the Colonies than the Empire at large. The accompanying descriptions reflect this. However, the GM may certainly choose to use these mechanics in the Empire proper, and they can be adapted to other eras of Rokugani history with relatively little effort.

New Spider Clan Family: Susumu (+1 Awareness)

The Susumu family was founded in 1173 after the Imperial declaration making the Spider a Great Clan. The family took the name of Daigotsu Susumu, who is considered to be its founder, even though he was never a Daimyo and the family didnot exist until after his death.

Daigotsu Susumu was well-known for his courtly abilities and natural charm. Many were disarmed by his easygoing manner and natural diplomacy. Yet he was also ruthless in the courts, more than willing to use every advantage he could get. Even so, he never fully exploited his position as Imperial Advisor to undermine the throne, for in his heart he served two masters: Daigotsu and Iweko I.

Daigotsu Susumu was a pioneer of the Spider's courtier techniques and made significant contributions to the school, in spite of the fact that he was not a Sensei. He shared many of his insights with his wife, Kakita Shizuka, and his daughter, Kuroko. Upon his death, Kuroko took her father's name and became the first Daimyo of the Susumu family. While the Susumu have no true dojos, Kuroko has shared her father's secrets with the clan's courtiers, all the more benefit to the Spider. The Susumu act as the Clan's liasons and diplomats, often becoming advisors to important lords of other clans. It is in keeping with the tradition of their founder; to this day, the Susumu often serve two masters.



New Advantage: Naga Ancestry [Physical/ Spiritual] (7 points)

Either through a quirk of the Akasha's strange powers, or perhaps due to an unknown dalliance between a human and a Naga, the blood of both races flows through your veins. You may purchase Naga-only Advantages at the normal cost, and you gain a bonus of +1k0 on all Social Skill Rolls made with members of the Naga race.

At the GM's option, characters with this Advantage may manifest physical signs of their inhuman ancestry, such as slit pupils or a faint sheen of scales on their skin. These effects would likely produce a social penalty when interacting with other Rokugani (most likely a –1k0 or –2k0 penalty, depending on how xenophobic a particular person might be), so if this approach is taken the total point cost of this Advantage should be reduced to 5.

New Basic School: The Fudoist Monks

The resurgence of Fudoist philosophy in the Colonies has given rise to a new generation of monks who subscribe to its ancient and forbidden texts. Many are benevolent and enthusiastic adherents of this mindset, but some among their ranks are beginning to display the sort of malevolent behaviors that doomed the first incarnation of the sect. (GMs may also use this School to represent the followers of the original Fudoist heresy from the early days of the Empire.)

New Basic School: Fudoist Order [Monk]

- **Devotion:** None
- **Benefit:** +1 Willpower
- **Starting Honor:** 1.5 or 4.5
- **Skills:** Courtier, Etiquette, Jiujutsu, Lore: Theology, Meditation, any two Skills

Technique: For Each, One Path

Monks of Fudo must choose their own path, and it can vary wildly from one to another. At the time of character creation, you must choose a low or high Honor Rank (as indicated above). Likewise, you must choose to specialize in either opposed Social Skill Rolls or in Attack rolls. You gain a bonus to your total in the selected roll type equal to twice the difference between your Honor Rank and that of your opponent.

New Alternate Path: The Serpent Hunters

Since the death of the first Imperial Governor of the Colonies, the variant of Naga unique to the Colonies have presented an increased threat to the citizens of that region. Prior to that time the beasts were dangerous but essentially little more than powerful animals. With the influence of the Dark Naga, however, the creatures became more cunning and capable of acting in groups, albeit in a limited capacity. This made them a significant problem for travelers in the remote regions of the jungle, and the Mantis and Spider Clans in particular had difficulty with the Nagah.

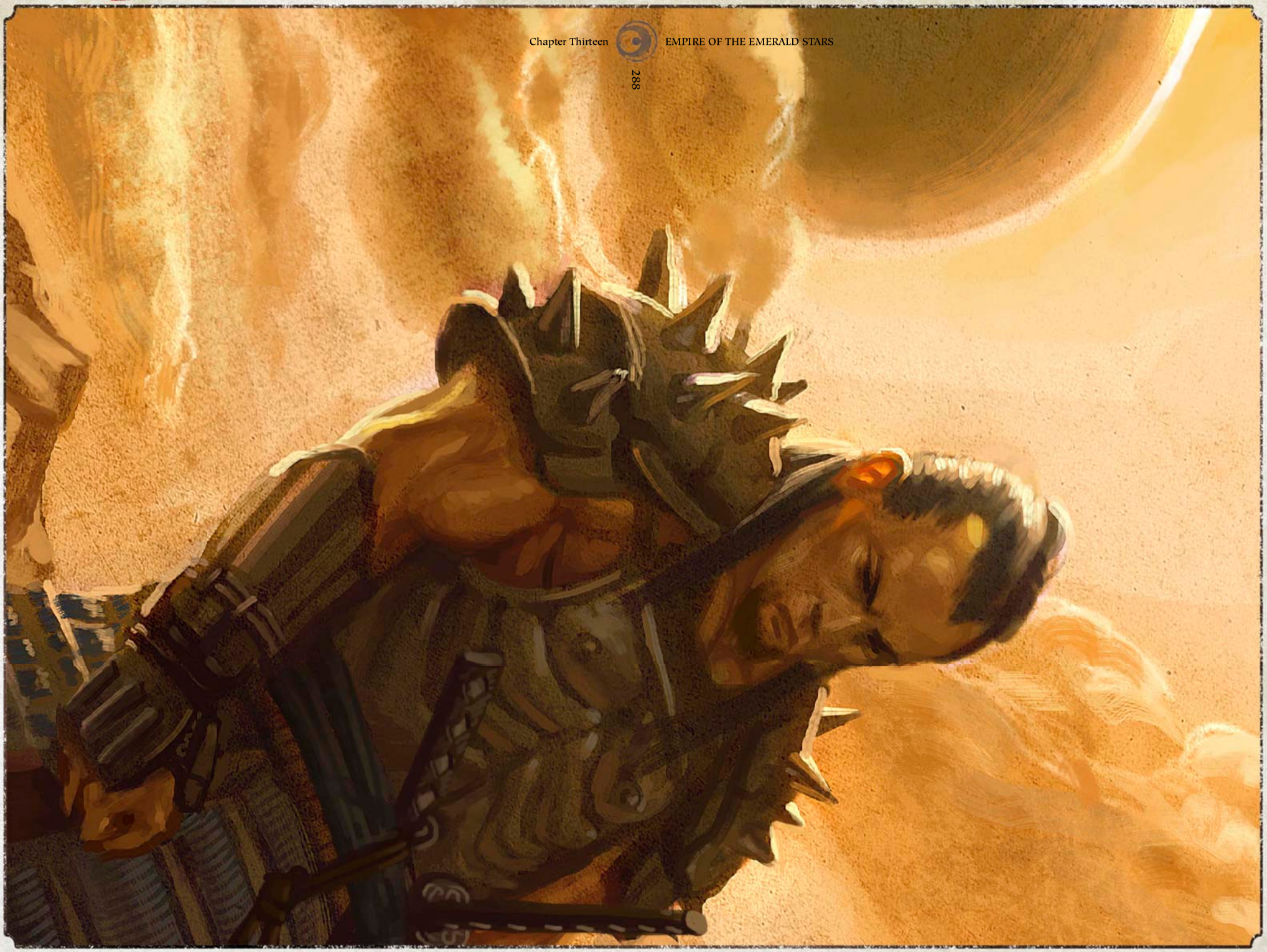
As a result, a small sect of warriors has sprung up within the Colonies, men and women dedicated to the eradication of the Nagah at all costs. These individuals are frequently sought out by explorers and merchants who require protection while traveling in lightly populated or unexplored regions. These so-called Serpent Hunters are skilled not only in the combating of such foes but also in tracking them, as well as knowing the basic aspects of Naga culture.

New Alternate Path: Serpent Hunter [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** Variable
- **Replaces:** Any Bushi School Rank that awards an attack as a Simple Action
- **Requirements:** Lore: Naga 3, Hunting 3

Technique: Blood of the Serpent

The warriors who have made it their duty to hunt the feral Nagah of the Colonies excel in the execution of their prey. You may make attacks as a Simple Action instead of a Complex Action when wielding melee weapons with the Samurai quality. When facing a Naga opponent of any kind, however, you may make attacks as a Simple Action with any weapon.



Chapter Thirteen

Empire of the Emerald Stars

Isawa Tsutai fell, his mind lost in the void as he spiraled head over heels without any sense of direction. He could not remember how far he had fallen, or for how long, but it seemed an eternity, and he distantly wondered if he would die upon striking the ground... assuming he ever did.

The answer came in an impact that drove the breath from his lungs in a great gust, but he did not die. Instead he lay on the ground, wheezing and desperately trying to fill his lungs.

"Be easy, friend," an unfamiliar voice said. "Do not try to move too much. It will pass in a moment."

Tsutai's disorientation began to pass, replaced by panic. Why was he on a stone floor, or what appeared to be a stone floor? Who was it speaking to him? He tried to get to his feet, but could not gather the strength. "Where..." he gasped, then: "Who are you?"

"Where you are is not important at the moment," the voice said. It spoke Rokugani, but with a strange, lilting accent that Tsutai could not place. "We will discuss that in a moment. I am Shiba Dankaro. Is there anything I can get for you? Do you require medical attention?"

The phrase 'medical attention' was very strange indeed, but Tsutai did not have time to consider it. He remembered now. There had been some beast, some strange creature he did not know. It had pursued him, tearing at him with its talons. He had fled, and just when he thought his desperate flight had allowed him to escape, he had burst through some underbrush only to find himself plummeting over a cliff toward a lake impossibly far below. He remembered the pain where the thing had torn at his arm, and looked down... but his flesh was unmarked.

"What... what is this?" He looked around, finally seeing clearly for the first time since his fall ended. He appeared to be in a simple room with walls and floor made of stone, but he could not recognize the stonework. "What is happening?"

The man who called himself Shiba Dankaro sat next to Tsutai and smiled. He was dressed in a Rokugani kimono in Phoenix orange, but the clothing was slightly off somehow, as if small details had been misunderstood. And the material was very strange, slick-smooth, shiny. "You were exploring the Colonies," he said. The man's accent was still strange, still unidentifiable. "You were one of the clan's most promising young scholars, and wrote several very important works concerning the things you and others discovered within the ruins of that land. You discovered a group of as yet unidentified creatures, intelligent yet fierce, and were chased. You fell from a cliff into a lake far below." His smile became somewhat sad. "Your body was never recovered. It was assumed you were consumed by predators. But your work lived on for generations. You became one of the most celebrated scholars of your generation, even if only posthumously."

Tsutai looked at him in horror. "I... am I dead?"

"History considers you dead long ago," Dankaro replied. "Your loss, and the circumstances under which you were lost, is what allowed the ritual we employed to retrieve you. You are not dead, no. You yet live, and hopefully shall for quite some time. We need your unique talents, you understand."

Tsutai frowned and started to ask a question, then stopped. He peered at the floor beneath him. "What is this?" he demanded, glancing around. "This entire chamber is an illusion! You have entreated the kami to deceive me!"

"Yes," Dankaro admitted. "It was not meant to deceive you, however. It was done for your comfort. We have discovered it is better to ensure your surroundings are familiar. If you like, I can have the... illusion... removed."

"Yes," Tsutai demanded instantly. "I want to see."

"Of course," the other Phoenix said. "Please, try to remain calm." He turned and nodded as if to someone unseen, and there was a great shimmering in the air, matched by a low humming sound. The stone room that surrounded them vanished as though it had never been.

"Fortunes!" Tsutai swore, glancing all about him. "What is this? Is this metal? Some form of prison?"

"No, not at all," Dankaro replied. "It is metal, yes, but far from a prison cell. This is... let us call it an audience chamber. It was utilized for the ritual that brought you here. We require a smaller space for the proper preparations to be made, and I suspect you are not quite ready to see the other portions of the... the castle."

"You said you required my help," Tsutai said, his confusion and disorientation now fully giving way to anger. "If you expect anything from me, anything at all, then I demand you tell me precisely what is going on at once. At once, do you hear? I will not be made a fool of!"

"You are far from a fool, my friend," Dankaro said. "That is why we need your help, after all. Still, if you feel you are prepared, I will accommodate you. Try to remain calm, if you can." Again, he looked as if to someone else. "Open the viewing port, please." There was a loud noise, a sort of whirring sound, followed by a soft hiss, and then Dankaro smiled. He gestured behind Tsutai. "Please, have a look."

Confused, Tsutai turned... and then recoiled. There was a large window on the wall where a moment before none had been. Or at least it appeared to be a window, but what was beyond it made no sense whatsoever. Perhaps it was a painting? "What is this? What... what am I looking at?"

"You are looking at Rokugan, my friend," Dankaro said softly. "Imagine for a moment you are on board a ship, a ship that could sail through the skies themselves."

"Do you mean like the Heavenly Kobune of Suitengu?" Tsuati had studied the history of that relic, which had carried living shugenja into the Celestial Heavens.

"Yes, precisely," Dankaro said, nodding. "Now, imagine we sailed so far above the land it was revealed that the Empire was merely one part of a much larger world, and that world itself was shaped like a sphere that hung perfectly in a great void, bereft of the Elements themselves."

Tsutai stared. "What are those small lights?" he asked weakly. "Are they stars?"

"Some of them are other great ships like ours, sailing far above the Empire," Dankaro said. "The others are distant stars, yes. Sisters of the Lady Amaterasu, may her soul be forever at peace."

Tsutai was quiet for a moment. "Are you certain I am not dead?" he asked.

"Quite certain, yes."

"Then something has dramatically changed, and I have slept or perhaps wandered in the spirit realms for a long time," Tsutai said. "Please tell me, what is the year?"

"The year is 3,122 according to the Isawa calendar," Dankaro replied. "It is the eighty-fourth year of the reign of the one-hundred and twelfth Emperor of the Iweko Dynasty. And the Empire of Rokugan is in great danger."

Tsutai turned and looked at him. "From what?"

Dankaro's smile was very sad. "We are hoping you can help us determine exactly that," he replied.



Rokugan in Space!

This chapter is designed to show how far both the Rokugani setting and the L5R rules system can be pushed by those seeking unusual or alternate settings for their games. Instead of merely an alternate outcome to a canonical event, or a Rokugan sent on a different path at its origin, this chapter relocates L5R into a science-fiction setting, a hypothetical distant future in which Rokugan is a modern, powerful star-faring empire with a history stretching across more than three millennia.



Timeline of the Emerald Stars

A full timeline for thousands of years of history would take several books to detail, and in any case the focus of this chapter is future Rokugan's age of space exploration. Consequently, the timeline here focuses on events from the late 2700's to the 3100's of the Isawa Calendar.

Year 2765

- A scientist of the Phoenix Clan, Asako Netsuo, proves the existence of other planets in space through the use of powerful telescopes and specialized magic. He does not foresee the religious backlash which is triggered by the discovery, which seems to imply the existence of other worlds not subordinate to the Celestial Heavens. Tensions build throughout the Empire, with many decrying Netsuo as a blasphemer. The divisions eventually escalate into a military conflict known as the War of the Tao. The Emperor does not intervene to halt the war, possibly unwilling or unable to quell the dispute.

Year 2775

- Under the Emperor's sponsorship, the most powerful shugenja in the Empire complete a ritual which allows them to observe one of the alien worlds closest to Rokugan. It is a planet full of verdant jungles, and the shugenja conclude it is more strongly influenced by Chikushudo than Rokugan itself, but still very much tied to the Spirit Realms and the greater cosmology of Rokugani beliefs. This brings an end to the War of the Tao as the most religious Rokugani accept the existence of other planets as the will of Heaven, and the Great Clans begin to work together to visit and explore these new worlds.

Year 2797

- The Phoenix complete the ritual known as Opening the Way, allowing travel at faster than the speed of the Jade Sun's light. At the same time, the Unicorn complete construction of the *Shinjo*, the first fully operational starship. A joint mission of samurai from all of the Great Clans arrive on the nearest alien planet and dub it First Landing. The planet's life forms are broadly similar to Rokugan's, but there are many new species as well. Rare or entirely new materials found on the planet fetch astronomical prices on Rokugan's markets, and all the Great Clans start mounting space expeditions of their own.

Year 2812

- An Imperial survey team landing on a new planet is almost wiped out by a primitive native race called Ryunin, incredibly powerful warriors fueled by the rage of Toshigoku. After some deliberation, the Emperor decides the security of his citizens is the prime concern, far more significant than the existence of a new race of human-like creatures, and the armies of the Lion declare war on the Ryunin. It takes years to fully pacify the planet, but the Ryunin are ultimately destroyed and the Lion Clan keeps control of the planet under the Emperor's will.

Year 2817

- A team of Mantis explorers discover a world where a crust of ice hides colossal oceans, and detect movement below the ice. The Emperor inexplicably steps forward and gives stewardship of the planet to the Dragon Clan, who close it to exploration by anyone else. The Mantis are incensed, but obey the Emperor's edicts, and the Dragon never share word of what is on the planet. They do, however, keep a small but strong garrison on it at all times.

Year 2826

- As the number of planetary expeditions continues to grow, the Emperor founds the Imperial Exploration Corps, led by shugenja and tasked with exploring and sanctifying planets before allowing colonization. This ensures the Emperor has full knowledge of his Empire's expanding boundaries and the Imperial families gain the prime choice of sites to colonize.

Year 2828

- A Phoenix scientist named Isawa Kazuo discovers "radiant energy," which involves slightly awakening a material's spirit to coat it in a field of glowing, powerful warm light. This revolutionizes personal combat, as radiant rifles, armors, and swords are quickly produced; it also allows the development of weapons which function reliably in space. The Phoenix, quickly followed by the other Great Clans, start equipping their vessels with radiant shields and cannons.



Year 2829

- An argument between Mantis and Lion vessels over the control of a newly discovered planet turns sour when the Lion open fire, destroying the Mantis ship. The conflict quickly escalates and for the first time war takes to the stars. Other clans occasionally skirmish as well, and the Emperor allows such conflicts to continue so long as they do not expand to Rokugan itself.

Year 2831

- While most of the other clans are embroiled in wars, the Unicorn approach the Emperor with a bold petition. They ask for the remnants of the gaijin nations to be relocated to space, citing dwindling resources on Rokugan's home planet and the foreign cultures dwindling in the face of ever greater Rokugani numbers. The Emperor accepts the proposal. Although many gaijin chafe at abandoning their homes, they have little choice but to submit to the Empire's superior strength. The move allows them to expand again on planets reserved to their own use. Rokugan quickly fills the vacated space, and now rules the entire planet it calls home.

Year 2841

- The Lion field the first ever Katana-class battlecruiser, the *Akodo*, which brings unparalleled firepower to their fleet. The other clans quickly develop cruisers of their own, and war temporarily abates as the presence of such powerful ships prevents many small-scale conflicts from escalating or in some cases from happening at all.

Year 2872

- With the completion of the *Peaceful*, the Asahina family becomes the last Great Clan family to build a Katana-class cruiser, establishing a balance of forces in the known universe. Exploration continues while the clans carefully watch each other for signs of weakness.

Year 2901

- As the number of systems which can reliably be reached and exploited starts to dwindle, the Emperor commands no clan shall lay claim to an entire new planet or system anymore. Instead, new planets must be split between the different clans. This eases the strain of competition for entire planets and systems, and allows smaller players like the Minor Clan Alliance to compete for claims.

Year 2902

- The Scorpion open their largest planet to settlement from other clans, claiming this will allow for cooperation and trade in a place with low taxes (and lax law enforcement). This leads to a massive influx of population and capital, and the place is renamed the World of Dreams, the most populated place in the Empire of Emerald Stars.

Year 2911

- The Dragon Clan are the first to reach the 'eastern' nebula, whose emissions disable all electronic devices and effectively block further travel in that area. The 'western' and 'southern' regions of the Empire of Emerald Stars are vast fields of emptiness or are devoid of useful planets, so they focus on the denser 'northern' sector of the galaxy for further expansion and exploitation. The Dragon maintain a presence near the nebula, studying it in an attempt to understand its nature and function.

Year 2932

- A clash erupts between the Lion and the Crab over who should pacify a new planet, a world inhabited by large animals corrupted by the influence of Gakido. The clash soon escalates into an open war. The Crane, Scorpion and Spider support the Lion while the Mantis, Phoenix and Unicorn join the Crab, with the Dragon refusing to interfere. This massive conflict quickly expands and becomes known as the Alliances War. It lasts for over thirty years, with enormous casualties on both sides. New ship and weapon designs are developed during the war, as are new tactics and techniques dealing with all types of combat. Several planets and systems are severely damaged in the process.

Year 2967

- The Emperor officially calls for an end to the Alliances War, declaring the damage to the Empire is too great and now outweighs whatever insults prompted the initial conflict. Legends later claim the war interrupted shipments of his favorite tea from far across the galaxy and he could not endure such an imposition. Regardless, the two sides reluctantly agree to a truce; there is no clear winner to the War, and the clans retreat to their own worlds and lick their wounds. For several

generations afterward, fighting is limited to skirmishes and the Empire prospers again.

Year 3000

- Rokugan celebrates its entry to the third millennium, the Empire more prosperous than ever and enjoying a long period of relative peace. The celebrations are among the most lavish in recorded history. However, a number of self-declared prophets appear on different planets, many speaking of doom and destruction as the third Day of Thunder approaches, with about half of them claiming to be Shinsei's heir. Some of the most violent eventually have to be eliminated by Imperial security forces.

Year 3038

- Emperor Iweko CXII ascends the throne after his father dies peacefully in his sleep. He quickly establishes a distant but fair style of ruling, and relaxes the policies governing warfare between the Great Clans as long as they do not threaten the flow of commerce. The most aggressive clans, Lion first, start using this to justify new expansions in other clans' territories.

Year 3101

- The tournament of the Emerald Champion takes place after the previous Champion, Doji Nariko, retires. It is an exceptionally lavish event, the recordings broadcast all across the Empire's many planets, and features hundreds of participants from all the clans; although many aspects of the competition have changed, it still climaxes in the traditional iaijutsu duels. The winner is a masked man named Nazo, who defeats the favorite contestant and daughter of the previous Champion, Doji Naritako. Nazo keeps his allegiance secret, but immediately starts building his power base.

Year 3120

- A Lion Clan transport is attacked by a smaller Mantis ship commanded by a man named Yoritomo Osu; despite being less well-armed, Osu's vessel is able to overcome the Lion's defenses and carry away an important shipment. The Lion are incensed. The Mantis publicly disavow Osu and his crew, although rumor claims they are supporting him covertly. The Lion expand the escorts for their ships and search for Osu across the galaxy.
- After years of work and preparation, the Unicorn launch a revolutionary new ship called the *Ide*, built in collaboration with the Phoenix Clan. They hope this vessel will be capable of crossing the western border of the Empire. Despite being piloted by one of their greatest captains, Utaku Ji-Yeong, the ship disappears during its test flight. In the absence of communication it is considered lost. The Unicorn Clan launches an extensive investigation to determine what happened to the ship, and eventually learns a Phoenix Clan engineer had been stealing components, replacing them with lesser versions. Although the Phoenix Clan as a whole claims ignorance, the Unicorn are incensed and start preparations for war against the Phoenix.
- A Dragon Clan patrol finds a devastated world stripped bare of resources on the edge of the eastern nebula. Only one living creature is found, a member of an odd race called the Goryu, tied to Tengoku and Meido. While seemingly peaceful, he is unable to communicate or to explain what happened to his planet. In an effort to attain comprehension, the Dragon Clan Champion personally gives a tattoo to the last Goryu, who takes the name Togashi Jinsu and joins the tattooed order.
- Several attempts to arrest Yoritomo Osu end in bitter failures and even more cargo and ships are stolen. Lion Clan Champion Akodo Tsuroi personally takes command of the Lion Clan's First Army and undertakes the pursuit of Osu. Although the pirate still eludes his pursuers, Tsuroi wins several key victories against other pirates and forces of the Mantis Clan.
- Still distraught over her defeat at the Emerald Championship, Doji Naritako ascends to the position of Crane Clan Champion after her older brother retires. Her first act is to command her clan to investigate the identity of the Emerald Champion, Nazo. The Crane Clan finds itself at odds with the Emerald Champion and his legions several times as he quashes all of their attempts to learn who he is.
- Yoritomo Osu is finally located on the World of Dreams. Akodo Tsuroi prepares for a final assault, only to have his hips blocked by the planetary Governor, Bayushi Bakeo, backed by the considerable forces of all the different factions who have settlements on the planet; they refuse to see it engulfed by war. Tsuroi rages but cannot risk a war with all of the other clans. He maintains his fleet in orbit and slowly reinforces it over the ensuing months.
- A Crab Clan patrol exploring a rocky planet in the southern region disappears to a man. Unsure about the identity of the culprit, and wary of the heightening tensions in the galaxy, the Crab Clan mobilizes its forces. No further incidents happen... for now.
- While passing through a Dragon Clan station, a young Spider captain named Daigotsu Keneko recognizes Togashi Jinsu as a member of the race which attacked and destroyed a Spider outpost many years ago. She tries to destroy it, but Jinsu evades her and the Dragon defend their own. Keneko escapes with the support of her crew, and returns to her clan to warn them about the threat. Both clans mobilize for war.

Year 3121

- After his months-long blockade fails to gain cooperation from the World of Dreams, Akodo

Who Are Ji-Yeong's Aliens?

Although the Empire of the Emerald Stars is facing many lethal threats in the fourth millennium, the alien empire which lies beyond the vast gulf on the 'western' border does not have to be one of them. The exact nature of this empire is left unknown to allow the GM maximum freedom in developing this setting. It may be a benign kingdom that is a potential ally to Rokugan against other threats; it may be following its own agenda, one that may or may not be dangerous to humanity; or it may be malignant and dangerous, using Ji-Yeong as a spy or brainwashed agent to lull Rokugan into complacency.

Tsuroi's agents learn the location of Osu, and the Lion Champion leads a small cadre of elite warriors to the surface for a covert attack. The two men briefly fight each other, causing minor but noticeable damage to the city around them in the process, and Osu escapes, fleeing off the planet while the Lion give chase. Bayushi Bakeo lets both men leave his planet without intervening, and remains oddly silent on the matter afterwards. He sends an agent with Osu, masquerading as a member of his crew, in an attempt to find out why he despises the Lion so much he would risk the greatest planet in the Empire to do so.

- As the conflict between the Unicorn and the Phoenix escalates, a vessel commanded by Shiba Dankaro crashes on a small planet which was previously marked as a mining outpost. There, Dankaro and his men find only abandoned buildings. They come under violent assault from strange, previously unknown creatures: man-sized insectoids which display an eerie level of intelligence. Trapped on the planet, Dankaro and his men have no choice but to fortify themselves and hold out, hoping for reinforcements.
- The Dragon launch an offensive against the Spider Clan, pushing them back to their home planets. Desperate, the Spider decide to deploy their Undead Legion against the Dragon. Nazo, the Emerald Champion, decides this is going too far and intervenes with his powerful ship, the Emerald Blade. However the Spider find a surprising ally in the Crane, who claim to have proof that Nazo is secretly an enemy of the Empire. For the first time Nazo and the Dragon are forced to retreat, and the Crane and Spider remain allied for the time being.
- A Crab Clan patrol, investigating the death of their miners, stumbles upon Dankaro and the last of his men, rescuing them with massive firepower. Dankaro returns to the Phoenix Clan and starts researching the insectile creatures. The Crab unknowingly carry back one of the monsters, who hides in one of their ship's compartments. Once arrived on Hida Secundus, it begins infecting people, transforming them into similar beings. The Crab nickname these creatures Scarabs. In a matter of months, Secundus is lost.
- Utaku Ji-Yeong unexpectedly returns to the Unicorn Clan, on board a modified yet functional Ide. She explains her ship somehow reached a completely different part of the galaxy, home to a vast and highly advanced alien civilization. The realization that there are aliens more numerous and powerful than humanity comes as a great shock to the Empire. Ji-Yeong has learned much from the aliens (and even adopted some of their customs, which vaguely resemble those of the ancient Senpet Empire), including the danger from the Scarab creatures which have attacked the Crab and Phoenix.
- Although the Unicorn are still offended by the Phoenix Clan's industrial spying, the safe return of the Ide takes the edge off their anger and the war between the two clans simmers down to occasional skirmishes.
- The Crab Clan's attempts to recover Hida Secundus prove disastrous; the Scarabs have taken control of the fleet which was once based on the planet, and are now able to fight the Crab in space. A single Scarab is enough to take over a ship, as those it does not kill are quickly infected and turn against their own. The Crab only avoid a complete defeat through the actions of a hero named Hida Sanro, who rallies his men and destroys the infected ships before they can cause more damage. Sanro and his surviving vessels retreat to regroup elsewhere.

Year 3122

- Shiba Dankaro finds ancient records of creatures which closely resemble the threatening Scarabs. He learns of the story of Isawa Tsutai, a Phoenix Clan shugenja who seemingly disappeared after being chased by some of the monsters in the Colonies. With help from the Isawa family and Utaku Ji-Yeong, Dankaro is able to determine Tsutai actually fell into a spirit portal of some kind, and is able to arrange for the Phoenix scholar to be retrieved into the present time. Perhaps, just perhaps, he will be able to provide the knowledge that can help save the Empire.



Clans and Factions of the Emerald Stars

The nine Great Clans of Rokugan have changed a great deal in the many centuries that have passed since the days of the first Iweko sovereign, but they remain the driving forces behind the Empire's progress and the most powerful factions within its borders. Although technology and expansion have transformed all of the Great Clans, they still remain true to the core philosophies of their founders.

The Crab Clan

After the Festering Pit of Fu Leng was closed, the Crab Clan endured a spiritual crisis of sorts, having lost the primary focus of its existence. Soon, however, the children of Hida proved as pragmatic as ever, reorganizing around two areas of focus. First, with the growing importance of science and technology, the Kaiu family became an important part of Rokugan's development, and much greater resources were allocated to them in order to expand their operations, in mining and engineering particularly. Secondly, the opening of space exploration revealed many planets inhabited by strange and often hostile life-forms influenced by the more dangerous Spirit Realms, occasionally including Jigoku. This gave renewed purpose to the Crab, who took to the stars to fight against the most dangerous and inhuman species, as well as establishing gigantic mining and construction operations for weapons and defense development. Long used to hardship and difficult conditions, the Crab adapted very well to exploring strange new environments, and became a force to be reckoned with in the Empire of Emerald Stars.

Unsurprisingly, the greatest number of systems controlled by the Crab are at the 'southern' border of the Empire, where there are also many barren worlds where unfortunate incidents have happened. The ever-paranoid Crab maintain close watch over the area, wary of possibly sinister forces at work. Their core system, unimaginatively named Hida Prime, holds several moons and planets of great mineral value, which have been put to good use for the production of ships and weapons. Kyuden Hida Prime, a gigantic orbital stronghold located above the largest solid planet, is the center of Crab activities in the galaxy, and quite possibly impregnable. It orbits a planet known as Inferno, a place of extremely high temperatures and toxic atmosphere, populated by a variety of creatures which draw their influence from Gaki-do, Toshigoku, and more rarely Jigoku. The Kuni have developed a process which allows them to turn the already massive radiant cannons of Kyuden Hida Prime into orbital jade strikes able to annihilate all traces of corrupted life in a radius measured in miles. The fact that the creatures still keep fighting back is a testament to the danger they represent, but the surrounding moons are so rich with rare minerals that the Crab would never give up the place. Secondary systems include Hida Secundus, virtually identical to Hida prime if smaller in size, and Hiruma prime, which holds the busiest Crab spaceport in the northern section of the galaxy.

The Crane Clan

The sons and daughters of Doji have taken to the stars, but not in the same numbers as their rivals. Of all the clans, the Crane probably retain the greatest influence on Rokugan proper, staying close to the seat of power and letting other clans get the larger share of new land and new worlds while the Crane fill the void they are gradually leaving behind. This is not to say they have not explored space at all; they simply have done so more carefully and to a more modest extant. In modern times, the Crane Clan's economy is second to the Mantis Clan's wealth, but they maintain superiority over the arts and entertainment. The Crane are also the first to develop a real tourism industry, a natural outgrowth of their splendid palaces and beautiful lands; they have seized some of the most beautiful (and safe) worlds in the galaxy, where they build extensive resorts. While more warlike clans like the Crab and the Lion still mock the Crane for their 'softer' ways, the truth is everybody appreciates a beautiful sunset on a tropical beach, a concert from a popular band, or a delicious exotic drink, so the Crane still command a lot of power – albeit of a subtle kind. Those who believe the Crane are truly weak can be in for a surprise, since the Daidoji still provide the Crane with their military defenses and have become quite skilled in precision ship-to-ship boarding actions.

The jewel in the Crane's crown is a planet named Golden Mirror, the only inhabitable planet in a system they control entirely. The place is an almost perfectly idyllic version of Rokugan, devoid of large predators, storms, or other dangers. From large festive seaside resorts to bustling cities and 'traditional' villages to explore, the



entire planet is a giant attraction and fuels the clan's coffers with billions of koku. It is the center of the Empire's often-strange mix of modern and ancient culture, where galaxy-wide broadcasts can gain a young pop star or a talented iaijutsu duelist equal fame and wealth. Since Golden Mirror is so vital to the Crane Clan's fortunes, the clan makes sure security is paramount, and a large part of the Crane fleet is stationed around the planet to defend it from any threat of aggression. The only other major system they control, named Fortunes' Blessing, is much more open to all visitors, and the military presence more relaxed; it is a meeting place where pilots relax in between missions and diplomats from various clans negotiate with each other. Despite their limited number of planets, the Crane always make sure to send at least one person to represent them in every settlement of the galaxy, making sure their network of influence remains far-reaching.

The Dragon Clan

Having long lost the guidance of the Kami Togashi, the Dragon in the Empire of the Emerald Stars have managed to prosper, unshaken by the developments of technology and confident in their faith in both the Tao and the Iweko dynasty. They still maintain a close relationship with the Throne and are the favored vassals when a dangerous duty can be trusted to no one else. The strangest and most mysterious of the early planets were often conquered by the Dragon or even directly allocated to them by Imperial order. Many of these worlds are off-limits to the other clans, leading to many discussions of what secrets they may hold; however, the fleets of the Mirumoto and Tamori are powerful and well armed. These worlds certainly do not hold many resources, since the Dragon remain one of the poorest clans of the Empire, heavily depending on Imperial subsidies.



The home of the Dragon Clan among the stars is Dragon's Eye, a small planet orbiting a dual star system close to the mysterious eastern nebula. The planet is closed to other clans, but rumors abound of the Dragon working on secret new technologies to explore the nebula, as well as of the strange worlds orbiting the two stars. To deal with other clans the Dragon have built Kitsuki's Hand, an orbital station in an otherwise uninteresting system that is easily accessible to most of the clans. Another famous location controlled by the Dragon is Togashi's Rest, a traditional castle and monastery located on a remote planet with deadly snows and extreme weather conditions. The stronghold is located atop the tallest mountain peak discovered so far in the galaxy, and requires extensive life support systems and protections to allow human life. It is a place of pilgrimage for tattooed monks, for it is said the planet has received a touch of Tengoku's influence.

The tattooed monks themselves remain one of the peculiarities of Rokugani civilization. They seem to tremendously enjoy space exploration, both for the enlightening journey and because it can bring contemplative isolation to a whole new level. Imperial Explorers have been startled more than once to land on a new planet only to find a member of the Togashi family already in meditation there.

The Lion Clan

Expanding the reach of Rokugan to the stars also expanded the need for military protection of its assets and citizens. The Empire of the Emerald Stars is far from safe, given clan rivalries, pirates, and innumerable strange creatures on alien worlds. For the Lion this has often meant war on a heretofore unknown scale, and they would not have it any other way. More than any other clan, the Lion have had difficulty adapting over the centuries to the changes in society and technology, their traditional warrior mindset chafing at every new idea or disruptive invention. But the exploration of the galaxy has given them renewed purpose, and the other clans were surprised at how aggressively the Lion took to settling on new planets. It heralded a new era for the Lion, a time of glorious battles between the stars and across the surfaces of whole planets. In fact, the Lion are so busy fighting enemies of the Empire on various systems that they are no longer as aggressive toward the other clans as they often were in the past. Still, friction happens, and when it does the vast, near-endless fleets of the Lion answer. Their fleets number in the thousands and their soldiers in the millions, vastly greater than any other clan's forces.

The Lion control many star systems, probably second only to the Mantis. Their largest base of operations is a system called Shori which boasts several planets fit for habitation. One of these worlds has been turned into a gigantic military camp, with vast facilities for the training of new recruits, large-scale practice exercises, weapons production, and – in orbit -- ship manufacture and repair. Another planet, named New Rokugan by the Lion, is completely pacified and engineered to look like the Rokugan

of old, and is a popular destination for those with a strong taste for tradition. For samurai in the fourth millennium of the Isawa calendar, the sight of peasants toiling in the fields without machinery and samurai fighting each other with mundane bows and arrows is often more bizarre than soothing, but for many of the Lion it is a much-needed chance to experience the past of their glorious ancestors.

A famous point of contention between the Lion and the Mantis is the system known as the Osano-Wo Reach, whose precious resources have led the two clans to turn the area into a near-permanent battle zone. Another extensive operation of the Lion is currently on the world of Red Fields, a large planet dominated by a relatively advanced but cruel alien culture, which has responded very violently to attempts at pacification.

The Mantis Clan

The age of space exploration is, in many ways, the age of the Mantis. The clan's audacity, resourcefulness, and economic acumen ensured it was among the first to explore the galaxy and reap the profits of doing so. The richest of the Great Clans by far, the Mantis are also now the second largest clan, eclipsed in numbers only by the countless soldiers of the Lion Clan.

The Mantis Clan's initial strategy was simple: race to a new system, establish a base regardless of initial appeal, and then defend it tooth and nail. This proved effective, if costly – the Mantis control more systems than any other Great Clan, many of them of little value but others with numerous planets and resources to be exploited. The Mantis economy reaches into almost every market, but is most famous for rare and exotic materials and goods.

The samurai of the Mantis are an extremely varied lot, having merged with other families and groups many times over the centuries, and one would be hard pressed to judge an individual Mantis by his family name. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast expanses of the galaxy and the corresponding distance from Imperial authority has given the Mantis a splendid opportunity to once more practice their oldest pastime: piracy. Although anything from a technical mistake to crossing of economic borders can be used to justify or conceal piracy, the other clans are not dupes and most see the Mantis Clan as a bully they must try to keep appeased.

Many systems, planets, and locations bear the mark of the Mantis, and it is hard to find a real center of their activity, but New Kalani is often considered a favorite of theirs. Ninety percent covered by water, the world is a sailor's dream, dangerous for its storms and its native life-forms but almost infinite in resources. Underwater exploration is nothing new for the Mantis, and entire cities can be found on the sea floor. On the commercial side of things, Daikoku's Dice is a famous orbital station located in a resource-rich system, equal parts casino, stock exchange, and open market. The Watanabe Shipyards occupy a good part of a system with an ample supply of metals, and they house not only a fair share of the Mantis fleet but also sell ships of all sizes and designs. Other famous locations include the world of Yoritomo's Cup with its pirates and its legendary alcohol, the deep jungles and exotic animals of the world called simply the Nest, and the moon-prison of Onnotangu's Heart.

The Phoenix Clan

Space exploration only became possible through the efforts of the Phoenix Clan, who not only pioneered the ritual which allows faster-than-light travel but also discovered radiant energy and many other forms of technology which combine esoteric knowledge with mundane aspects. While Phoenix Clan samurai are not the richest or the most numerous, their equipment is quite often the best, and this gives them an edge in many confrontations. The curiosity of the Phoenix has led them to many strange planets, and they are heavily involved in the efforts to sanctify new worlds and study new life-forms. True to their nature, the Phoenix try to approach both alien animals and the far rarer sentient beings as peacefully as possible, assisted by the extensive use of magic. When peace fails, the Shiba step in with their small but powerful fleet and army, able to use radiant energy as a hammer or a scalpel depending on the need. The clan's largest cruiser, the Katana-class Tsukune, is rumored to have superior firepower to any other save perhaps the Emerald Champion's own Emerald Blade, although the Tsukune has rarely been deployed. The Phoenix seem content with exploring the galaxy and further advancing their technological and magical prowess for the good of their vassals.

The Phoenix Clan does not control many systems, having a lower population than any other Great Clan, so they instead focus on a select few worlds of great potential. The largest concentration of their forces can be found in the Tadaka system, where they have built numerous orbital stations to monitor the various planets located there. One world in particular, named Ujimitsu, is renowned for its many beautiful natural and magical phenomena, such as mountain ranges made entirely of jade or crystal, and geysers of water reaching seemingly impossible heights. The Phoenix have harvested much of the planet's energy while carefully preserving its balance and harmony. The only other system the Phoenix own exclusively is named Aikune, a relatively young system by their estimation. Its solid planets are all in their infancy, most of them still being shaped by the raw Elements, and the Phoenix – led by the Agasha – have started experimenting with large scale re-engineering on these worlds, hoping to create conditions similar to Rokugan on some of them and to enhance production of rare elements on others.

The Scorpion Clan

One truth the samurai of the fourth millennium have come to finally accept is that much power comes from money. While Bushido and glory are still important concerns, nobody ignores the primary importance of how much koku a clan brings in. And while the Mantis, the Crane, and the Crab all have many ways to make money, they do not have the one advantage the Scorpion Clan possesses: extensive connections with crime mobs.

With commerce expanding to levels never seen before, criminality has expanded to match, and the Scorpion have a hand in almost all rackets, smuggling operations, and similar activities – backing their efforts with the power of a Great Clan. Uncharted stations are one of the strengths of the Scorpion Clan, for they rarely wait for the Imperial Exploration Corps to establish new bases before creating their own in secret locations. The Soshi and Yogo shugenja have also developed the best cloaking devices available, although stories about the Ninja class of cruisers are met with as much disbelief in the rest of the Empire as their namesakes were thousands of years ago.

The Scorpion of course remain masters of unconventional warfare, and black ops and saboteurs can cause more havoc than ever before thanks to radiant weapons and other advanced technological equipment, making the Scorpion much more dangerous than their limited numbers might suggest. The Scorpion are the third-smallest Great Clan, exceeding only the Spider and Phoenix in size, yet no clan will confront them without great caution.

The Scorpion's main system orbits the gigantic red star for which it is named: Bayushi's Eye. A small planet in a habitable zone has become home to the largest city of the Empire, earning the name World of Dreams. With skyscrapers almost literally higher than the sky, and urban zones spanning the length of entire continents, the planet houses billions of people from all the Great Clans (and even a few from other cultures and races) but remains at least nominally under the control of the Scorpion. Low taxes and lax security have attracted investment from around the galaxy, and many consider the World of Dreams to be the true capital of the Empire, although more traditional citizens frown at such claims. The vast city has a culture of its own, and one would need several lifetimes to fully explore it, with many new buildings appearing almost daily. The World of Dreams draws so much attention that little else is known about the Scorpion Clan and its settlements, which is probably part of their intent.

The Spider Clan

The mix of influences from the Spirit Realms on various planets has occasionally created truly horrific animals and cultures, some with powers and abilities which defy the human mind's imagination. The Spider, whose minds are at times not quite human themselves, have often been the Emperor's favorite instrument to deal with such threats, continuing the Iweko Dynasty's tradition of fighting fire with fire. The Spider undertake such duties willingly, for they make sure to adapt and use the most powerful magics and techniques they encounter, particularly those which bear the touch of Jigoku. Thus while the Spider remain one of the smallest of Great Clans, they are also among the more powerful.

The Daigotsu family's lead battlecruiser, the Revenant, is a monstrosity of steel and flesh which very few samurai would wish to even see, let alone board. Distance from Rokugan and other inhabited planets allows the Spider to conduct many experiments with the Taint, and the Crab and Lion are both concerned at the speed with which the Spider Clan's power is growing. The Spider still claim at least nominal loyalty to the Emperor and keep the worst of their own nature out of view, allowing them to maintain their existence for the most part unharmed, their sinister but uncertain reputation more or less unchanged since their inception. Since no other clan save perhaps the Crab is willing to claim worlds overrun with undead or hungry ghosts, the Spider are able to slowly continue their territorial expansion.

The Spider Clan's main stronghold in the galaxy is called the Hive, a vast hollowed-out asteroid set in orbit around a gas giant. It is one of the largest space stations ever built, more like a continent floating in space than anything else, and the Spider always keep several cruisers in its immediate vicinity. In the same system, known colloquially as the Howling Marches, is the planet of Hellfall, a nightmare of influences from Jigoku, Toshigoku, and Gaki-do where every day is a battle for survival. The planet has vast reserves of obsidian and Tainted metals which the Spider use in their ships. Mining draws the attention of many predators, so the Spider also use Hellfall as a training ground for their warriors. Meido's Fields, another system with large asteroid belts, is the home of the infamous Undead Legion, a fleet which need not worry about pressurization, oxygen supply, heat, or any other such mundane concerns. The Susumu family, the Spider Clan diplomats, maintain their own settlement on the dark side of a nameless planet which does not revolve, plunged in permanent cold and night.

The Unicorn Clan

Exploration is what the Unicorn have always done, and after the Empire of Rokugan extended to cover the whole planet they were eagerly waiting for some new frontier to seek. The idea of exploring entire star systems could not help but attract them, especially coupled with their love for speed and travel, and the Unicorn were among the first in the race to the stars. At the dawn of the fourth millennium they maintain only a token presence on Rokugan itself, the vast majority of the clan having resettled on other planets or being permanently on the move. The Unicorn are one of the few clans (along with the Phoenix) who first try communication with alien cultures, resorting to violence only when that fails. They sponsored the relocation of the last gaijin nations from Rokugan to their own worlds, and maintain extensive contact with them. Much like when they first returned to the Empire in the early ninth century, their culture in the fourth millennium is a mix of the domestic and the foreign; where once a traditionalist might have been disgusted at a Unicorn samurai wearing fur, now he must also wonder what kind of creatures the fur could have come from.

Most modern Unicorn have forsaken horses to embrace almost any kind of vehicle, the faster the better; however, the more daring among them will also ride anything they can capture and (hopefully) tame on new planets, regardless of size or ferocity. The Unicorn also have the

honor of holding the first system colonized by Rokugan, known as First Landing, which main attraction is its jungle-covered planet, full of exotic animals and plants – all carefully studied, bred, and harvested by the Unicorn.

As mentioned, many modern Unicorn samurai have returned to their ancient nomadic traditions, and the Moto battlecruiser Chomchog is a perfect example of this. Fitted to be self-sustainable over long periods of time, it often orbits newly discovered planets, serving as a temporary station. It is lightly armed for such a large vessel, and as such is often allowed in other clans' systems, giving the Unicorn considerable advantages for their commercial and diplomatic efforts. The clan also dominates in shipping and transport times; anyone who needs to get somewhere quickly uses Unicorn transportation.

The Unicorn generally prefer to maintain orbital stations rather than extensive settlements on the ground. The largest system they control, the Burning Star, has the dubious honor of housing several of the relocated gaijin nations, including Medinaat-al-Salaam, which the Unicorn protect from more unfriendly clans. The clan also has deals in place with the Imperial Exploration Corps to explore and pacify new planets before relinquishing them to other clans. Many Unicorn samurai are part of the Corps itself, of course.

The Minor Clans

In the nearly two thousand years since the founding of the Iweko Dynasty, many Minor Clans have come and gone, but their Alliance remains. With the expansion of Rokugan across a whole planet and then across a large portion of the galaxy, many opportunities appeared for daring samurai to make a name for themselves and obtain their own family and clan. In the fourth millennium, there are dozens of Minor Clans in existence, so many that no samurai will raise an eyebrow at meeting someone who claims to be a member of the Salamander Clan or the Shark Clan. In fact, the large number of these Minor Clans is the only thing which allows the Alliance to have any weight relative to the Great Clans, who number in the tens of millions of samurai.

In the initial phases of space exploration the Minor Clan Alliance was mostly left behind, since they lacked the resources to compete, but the expansion off-planet did at least relieve some of the pressure on them at home. When the Emperor declared no clan could lay claim to an entire planet anymore, the Alliance finally launched its own colonization effort, since many Great Clans saw sharing with a Minor Clan as a better option than sharing a planet with a rival Great Clan. As such, the Minor Clans do not have exclusive access to any single planet or system, but have plenty of small holdings on planets, moons, and stations all across the galaxy, as well as a presence on the World of Dreams. While territories have been given to specific clans within the Alliance, their real strength is the network of influence they have established between each other, allowing goods and personnel to travel easily from one location to another.

The fleet of the Alliance is understandably hodgepodge, and has rarely been able to assemble in any significant numbers. Most Minor Clans do not have access to the largest types of battlecruisers, although the Alliance has built one Katana-class ship, the Defiant, financed by several clans jointly and deployed only when the majority of the Alliance votes for it. The headquarters of the Alliance is on the World of Dreams, and the Governor of the Alliance (chosen by the Champions of all the Minor Clans) lives there, acting on the Alliance's behalf but able to make major decisions such as war only when backed by more than half of the individual clans. This participative leadership is an oddity even in the fourth millennium, and draws a certain amount of mockery from the Great Clans, but the Minor Clans seem happy enough with the arrangement. The Governor is more often than not a Tortoise, since the Tortoise Clan has survived and prospered over the centuries and adapted very well to the new world of space exploration.

Notable Personalities of the Emerald Stars

Obviously, a setting such as the Emerald Stars is one demanding an almost infinite number of notable personalities to inhabit it. The following section is intended merely to supply a sampler assortment of NPCs to inspire the GM.

Akodo Tsuroi

Lion Clan Champion

Tsuroi is a direct descendant of Akodo One-Eye, the founder of the Lion Clan. He is undefeated in battle or personal combat, yet his greatest enemy keeps escaping him, a fact he finds both infuriating and fascinating.

Like many Lion Clan samurai in the present times, Tsuroi was born in the Shori system, far from the seat of Imperial power. He grew up enthralled by the tales of the Rokugan of old, the brilliant heroes of the Lion Clan such as Matsu and Toturi. His father was a true believer in the brotherhood of Akodo samurai, and made the unconventional decision to send his son under a different name to a nondescript dojo. The fact that Tsuroi still managed to rise through the ranks is testimony to his own prowess. Skilled with a blade as much as with battle plans, Tsuroi also grew to become one of the largest man of his generation, a fact some attributed to his Crab mother. Yet he did not forsake his literary education, and many are surprised at how many topics the tall, intimidating Lion warrior is able to discuss with ease. Only after his gempukku was his identity revealed, and he was quickly given command of a Legion to lead into battle with alien

cultures. No one could stop Tsuroi, and many enemies of the Empire fell under his fire or his blade.

When Tsuroi became the Lion Clan Champion after his father retired, it was a bittersweet moment. He had to abandon his legion, to lead millions of men instead of just a few he knew in person, and he knew he would see little personal combat thenceforth. He now inherited the largest fleet and army of the Empire, with few enemies able to stand against him. His men were content with the occasional skirmish and the pacification campaigns on remote planets, but Tsuroi wanted something more, a challenge to equal the heroes he read about in his childhood.

When the first report of Mantis piracy reached Tsuroi, he dismissed them as something other men should deal with. Yet time and time again, Yoritomo Osu evaded the Lion, stinging them at every occasion. When Tsuroi took the field in person, he expected to quickly eliminate Osu, but the Mantis proved too resourceful and clever. As he continues to chase his adversary across the galaxy, Tsuroi increasingly respects Osu as a talented warrior who seems to be driven by more than mere greed. Of course, this does not change the fact that if Tsuroi catches him the pirate can only pray for a good death.

Akodo Tsuroi, Lion Clan Champion

Air: 3	Earth: 4	Fire: 4	Water: 5	Void: 3
Reflexes: 4		Agility: 5		
Honor: 8.2		*Status: 8.3*		*Glory: 7.6*

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 5

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle (Mass Combat) 5, Courtier 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 4, Firearm (Sidearm) 5, Games: Go 5, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 5, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Lore: History 4, Lore: Theology (Ancestor Worship) 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 3

Advantages: Large, Sage, Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Bishamon), Social Position (Clan Champion)

Disadvantages: Sworn Enemy/Nemesis (Yoritomo Osu)

Yoritomo Osu

Mantis Clan Corsair

The most famous pirate at the dawn of the fourth millennium is a driven man who will have no rest until the Lion Clan is properly punished. The fact that the Mantis Clan profits from his actions is just a pleasant side-effect of his quest.

Those who knew Osu as a child would not recognize him now. Osu was a cheerful, easy-going boy, the sole son of a widowed samurai-ko, and he made friends wherever he went. The dojo was just one more occasion for him to expand his adventures and acquaintances, and he graduated admirably. However, a short time afterward his mother passed away from illness. She called him to her deathbed and told him something which shook him to the core. He never shared it with anybody, but that one piece of information turned him into a different man, a sour and driven warrior. Osu applied his considerable talents in the Mantis fleet until he obtained command of his own ship. Then he unleashed his fury against the Lion Clan, attacking one of their vessels and seizing their cargo. He personally led the boarding party which stormed the ship even as the vessels were still exchanging fire.

The results of his actions were impressive, but the Mantis Clan was not ready to go to war with their greatest rival. Osu was publicly disavowed, but the clan privately informed him they would grant him discrete assistance as long as he shared his profits. This was enough for him, and he embarked on an ever-expanding campaign of piracy and harassment against the Lion Clan. Osu's mix of skill, daring tactical genius, and charisma led many ronin and Mantis samurai to join him, and he became infamous throughout the galaxy for his actions. When the Lion Clan Champion publicly declared his intention to defeat Osu, it only further enhanced his reputation, and seemed to drive him to new heights of determination. If he could destroy the greatest warrior of the Lion, then at last he would have his revenge.

Yoritomo Osu, Mantis Clan Corsair

Air: 5	Earth: 3	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 3
Willpower: 4		Perception: 4		
Honor: 3.8		*Status: 5.1*		*Glory: 8.6*

School/Rank: Yoritomo Bushi 5

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 4, Commerce 5, Defense 5, Firearm (Sidearm, Rifle) 6, Hunting 2, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu (Improvised Weapons) 4, Kenjutsu 3, Knives (Kama) 6, Piloting 7, Sincerity 2, Stealth 2

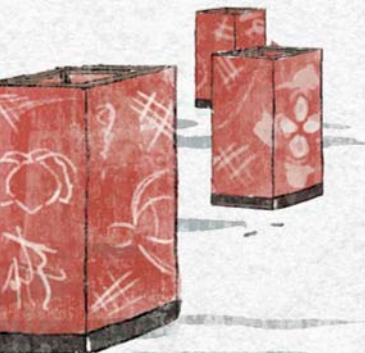
Advantages: Crafty, Daredevil, Heart of Vengeance (Lion Clan), Leadership, Quick

Disadvantages: Black Sheep, Driven (Punish the Lion Clan), Sworn Enemy (Akodo Tsuroi)

"Togashi Jinsu,"

the Survivor

When the Dragon Clan found the being who eventually became known as Togashi Jinsu, they could hardly believe their eyes. It was a tall, slender creature with chalk-white skin and a growth on its head reminiscent of coral rather than hair. The creature had no mouth, and so they could not communicate with it, but it was clearly intelligent. This mystery was even more puzzling given that the planet they found the creature on was a wasteland, devoid of any other life. The samurai brought the alien back with them, and soon came to realize it did not eat or drink and seemed to age only very slowly. Jinsun eventually learned how to write, which is how they learned its people were called Goryu, but it remained distant and hard to understand, with a strange but poetic view of the world through the Elements. The irony of the Dragon finding a being more cryptic than themselves was not lost on them. Jinsu seemed to have some sort of message to deliver, and in an effort to understand the Dragon he agreed to receive their tattoos.



Jinsun's sensei have been amazed at how the slender and usually peaceful creature has readily embraced his Jiujutsu lessons. In fact, only the greatest masters can stand against the alien's speed, precision, and strength, not to mention the razor sharp claws which end his fingers. Although Jinsu's control over himself prevents him from hurting anybody, even by accident, some have begun to realize there is tremendous potential for violence beneath his peaceful surface. The Goryu are birthed from Meido and Tengoku's union, and have a unique kind of connection to the Obsidian Moon. Once per year, this influence transforms them into furious, murderous creatures. In fact, this was the only thing keeping their population down, since the creatures had almost no need for resources and lived extremely long lives. These occasional rampages were an accepted fact of their lives, but in the presence of humans this behavior could lead to great carnage... a fact Jinsu realizes but is reluctant to communicate for fear of losing his new allies before he delivers his message. Jinsu meditates often on this problem when he is not trying to further his communication with humans.

Jinsu's secret is a simple one, though he is having great difficulty figuring out how to convey it: a time of great darkness is coming, and humanity – indeed all intelligent life – will have to call forth a group of great champions to oppose it. Otherwise, all the galaxy may share the fate of the Goryu.

"Togashi Jinsu," the Survivor

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 5
Reflexes: 7		Agility: 7	Strength: 7	

Honor: N/A *Status: 1.0* *Glory: 3.8*

School/Rank: Togashi Tattooed Order 2

Skills: Artisan: Bonsai 2, Athletics 5, Defense 5, Craft: Tattooing 1, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 5, Lore: Dragon Clan 3, Lore: Theology 6, Meditation 7

Advantages: Balance, Enlightened, Inner Gift (Empathy), Large, Magic Resistance (4), Touch of the Spirit Realms (Meido, Tengoku)

Disadvantages: Lord Moon's Curse (Special), Social Disadvantage, Soft-Hearted

Tattoos: Dragon, Void

Special Abilities:

- **Blessed by the Realms**: Goryu have the Touch of the Spirit Realms Advantage for both Meido and Tengoku.
- **Claws**: A Goryu's claws have a DR of 0k2.
- **Goryu nature**: A Goryu does not need food or drink, getting its sustenance directly from the air and soil. It can breathe underwater. All Goryu have Reduction 5 against all weapons except obsidian.
- **Lord Moon's Curse**: A Goryu's curse is only activated on the first day of the Imperial year, from sunset to sundown (as determined on Rokugan, not on whatever planet the Goryu currently occupies). During that time a Goryu loses the Balance advantage and Soft-Hearted disadvantage, instead becoming vicious and hyper-violent.

What is Osu's Secret?

Even in the fourth millennium, samurai are still driven by blood feuds and family honor. It is left to the GM what secret shame or insult drives Yoritomo Osu to carry on his endless vendetta against the Lion Clan. The most obvious choice would be that the Lion killed his father, perhaps in some shameful or dishonorable fashion, but creative GMs can come up with any number of other motivations that would be equally compelling.

The State of the Galaxy

The Empire of Rokugan in the fourth millennium is known by many names depending on who is asked. The most common variants are the Empire of the Emerald Stars and the Empire of the Celestial Heavens, although the various cultures Rokugan has encountered and defeated have much less flattering names for it. The Empire spans a substantial portion of the known universe, at present controlling fifty-seven ritually sanctified solar systems, with perhaps half that many again in as-yet-unconsecrated systems that are in the process of being settled. The era of history when Great Clans controlled simple provinces are long gone, and all clans control at least two solar systems completely, with some of the larger clans controlling many more than that. Some of the sanctified systems on record with the Imperial bureaucracy are small, with only one or two planets, devoid of life-sustaining conditions but rich in mineral resources, while others are enormous, with a dozen or more worlds, literally scores of moons, and multiple planets capable of sustaining life.

The Empire of Rokugan is sustained by an almost inconceivably vast administrative organization that is generally referred to as the Imperial bureaucracy. This organization is led and principally staffed by a half-dozen Imperial families, all of whom are blessed to serve the Emperor directly without need of a Clan Champion to stand as an intermediary. Millions strong, each of these families serves its own purpose within the bureaucracy, although crossover between them is common. The significant tithes supplied by the Great Clans and the Minor Clan Alliance ensure the bureaucracy never wants for funding, and indeed its employment of conscripts and volunteers from the ranks of the clans is entirely a matter of heredity rather than necessity; were it to prove necessary, the Imperial families could assemble a fleet capable of challenging even the largest Great Clan, although it would take time to accomplish such a thing and it has never been necessary to do so since Rokugan first took to the stars.

Who is Nazo?

One of the most influential and enigmatic figures in the Emerald Stars setting is Nazo, the Emerald Champion, masked of face and wreathed in mystery. No one knows who Nazo is, where he came from, or where his ultimate loyalties lie. There is no reason to suspect he is not loyal to the Emperor, for he has never done anything to suggest otherwise, but the Crane Clan claims to possess proof that he is an enemy of the Empire.

Nazo's true identity has deliberately been left to the discretion of individual GMs to let them shape their vision of the Emerald Stars to suit their campaign's needs. The following suggestions, however, are offered as sources of inspiration:

The Champion of Jigoku: Although only a few scholars realize it, the Realm of Evil usually maintains a champion in the mortal realm, an individual of great power and promise who perpetually threatens the links between the Empire and the Celestial Heavens. Previous entities who have embodied this position include the fallen god Fu Leng and the gaijin goddess Kali-Ma, among others. Needless to say, a Champion of Jigoku managing to secure the power and influence associated with the Emerald Champion is an astonishingly dire turn of events for the Empire. Whatever secretive plan Nazo possesses to bring about the death of the Empire on the next Day of Thunder, everything he does is for that sinister purpose.

The Reincarnation of Shinsei: As might be gleaned from the timeline, the increasing frequency and severity of portents appearing throughout the Empire preface the occurrence of another Day of Thunder. Unlike previous occurrences, this confrontation between the Realm of Evil and the mortal world will involve forces and weapons capable of devastating entire planets or even solar systems, resulting in unprecedented loss of life that could bring about Jigoku's victory despite all efforts to the contrary. For this reason Shinsei has returned in a manner completely different from his previous incarnations. Knowing what is to come, Nazo is enacting a secretive agenda intended to overcome the Great Clans' distaste for one another and force the alliances necessary for the Empire to survive.

The Scion of the Minor Clans: If the GM prefers a more mundane and political explanation for Nazo, he might be a samurai from the Minor Clans who has masked himself and concealed his affiliation in order to escape the stigma of his background and achieve great things. In this scenario, Nazo can either be a force for good, determined to save the Empire from the selfish agendas of the Great Clans, or a wrathful force bent on punishing the Great Clans for their ruthlessness and marginalization of the Minor Clan Alliance.

Emperor Iweko CXII has been upon the throne for eighty-four years, and despite his advanced years he yet appears relatively young. The most devoted among his subjects claim this is a sign of a strong manifestation of divinity within him, for his blessed ancestor Iweko I ruled for nearly a century before abdicating the throne. Others are more realistic, and refrain from referring to the advanced state of preservative medicine and the ministrations of shugenja out of courtesy and duty. Iweko CXII is a distant ruler, but his judgment is generally regarded as both wise and fair, and there have been no significant uprisings against his reign. He has a minimalist policy with regards to intervention in clan affairs, and on many occasions has permitted hostilities between Great Clans to run their course unless they reach the point of impacting the overall stability and prosperity of the Empire as a whole.

The Emperor is represented most often by his trusted vassal, the Emerald Champion. The man called Nazo is something of an enigma in Rokugani society since his ascension to the position of Emerald Champion some twenty-one years ago. He attended the Emerald Tournament under a veil of secrecy, and his true identity and clan of origin (if any) are unknown to all save the Emperor himself. Most assume he is of Scorpion birth due to his tendency to wear an all-concealing mask, but his reign has certainly shown the Scorpion Clan no favoritism. Described at best as meddlesome and at worst as tyrannical, Nazo takes an extremely heavy-handed and interventionist approach to the execution of his duties, in contrast to his Emperor. His tactics might be less troublesome to the Great Clans were it not for the incredible power at his immediate disposal in the form of his personal flagship, the Emerald Blade. A prototype constructed in absolute secrecy, the Emerald Blade is unique. It is half again as large as a Katana-class cruiser, carrying enough firepower to rival no less than three of those most dangerous craft. The forces of the Jade Champion are housed aboard the ship as well, and their power and magical prowess lend the Emerald Blade protective shields that are vastly superior to anything commanded by other contemporary craft.

Thus far, no intelligent life has been found within the Empire that is not ultimately native to or descended from the various Spirit Realms. However, this is not to say there are not populated unaligned planets on the periphery of the Empire's border. Some are filled with outcasts from the Empire, those who wish to find their own fate and to escape the rule of a distant and unknowing Emperor. For the most part, these individuals flock to planets of little value to the Empire, and as such they are usually left alone; the effort of returning them to the Empire would exceed any possible benefit for doing so. The handful of profitable planets that are not claimed by the Empire are those ceded to the other cultures from the homeworld of Rokugan in exchange for their vacating that world. The remnants of many cultures can be found lingering in these border worlds under the watchful eyes of the Unicorn Clan; they include what remains of the Senpet Empire and the culture of the ancient metropolis of Medinaat-al-Salaam, as well as a mere handful of surviving immortal Ashalan, among others.

The Empire of the Emerald Stars is a vast region of space, but there is an even greater expanse beyond its borders that has proven more difficult to explore. The entire 'eastern' edge of the Empire is dominated by an incomprehensibly vast nebula that wreaks havoc on the systems of any spacecraft that draws too near to it, much less actually enters its boundaries. Conversely, the 'western' border of the Empire is a strangely empty expanse of space bereft of star systems. The master navigators of the Moshi family estimate it would take enormous resources to allow a ship of any size to cross this gulf of space and reach whatever systems might exist on the opposite side. None have yet attempted this nigh-impossible feat, though there is currently a race of sorts between the Unicorn and Mantis to be the first to find a means of doing so.

It is along the 'northern' side of the Empire that most exploration continues. Because of the highly competitive behavior of the Great Clans in this regard, recent Imperial edicts forbid exploration of any systems that have not first been examined and properly sanctified by the priests of the Imperial Exploration Corps. Once systems have been opened to exploration, there is usually a brief but intense period of conquest by various clans, often with quite a bit of skirmishing between their expeditionary forces, before planets are fully claimed. In centuries past it was the custom for clans to be permitted to lay claim to entire planets or even whole solar systems, but the current process of exploration generally does not allow a clan to claim more than a single continent on a planetary body at a time, although smaller lunar bodies are allowed to be taken as a whole if the clan has sufficient forces present to defend its claim.

The systems beyond the Empire's 'southern' border are both widely scattered and largely dead and valueless. Few have any sort of sustainable atmosphere, and other than some meager mineral resources, nothing of any significant value has been discovered along the 'southern' border in almost a century. Exploration in this region has slowed almost to a halt, as none of the clans wish to expend resources that could better be spent seeking holdings of value on the 'northern' border instead. This point has been driven home rather forcefully of late due to the disappearance and destruction of numerous small expeditionary forces in the southern regions. No one is sure as of yet exactly what is taking place there.

GM's Toolbox: The True State of the Galaxy

While the state of affairs within the boundaries of the Empire is as good as can reasonably be expected, there is a great deal amiss beyond its borders, far more than any samurai truly realizes. The region of space to the 'south' of the Empire is stripped bare of resources because another alien empire has already laid claim to everything of value, leaving once-verdant worlds in a state of almost complete desolation. This empire is smaller than that of Rokugan, moving constantly and occupying only a single system at a time, but it is warlike in a manner the Rokugani have yet to experience in another culture. Ironically, it is their rampant warlike nature and raging xenophobia that is their greatest similarity to the people of the Rokugani Empire, yet it is also this which will set them against the samurai with incredible fervor and passion. In terms of setting and campaign structure, this alien empire can be seen as a replacement for the hostile gaijin of the canonical Rokugani setting. Alternatively, they can become a vessel for the power of Jigoku to wage war against the samurai, either as directly controlled vassals, willing accomplices, or simply dupes and distractions to avoid the Empire realizing that another Day of Thunder is coming. (If Nazo is being employed in a campaign as the Champion of Jigoku, he will almost certainly deliberately provoke a confrontation with these beings in order to conceal his true agenda.)

The power of Jigoku, the Realm of Evil, has been largely dormant since the last and definitive defeat of the Shadowlands some five hundred years ago when the Festering Pit of Fu Leng was sealed forever. The demons of Jigoku have been biding their time since then, waiting for an opportunity to unleash their Spirit Realm's war on the mortal world once again; the ancient Law of Daigotsu that restrained their actions has long since ended, of course. They have found a new weapon in a long-forgotten race of creatures: the Scarabs. The Scarabs were originally demons in the legends of the Ivory Kingdoms and the Senpet, encountered by Rokugan only in the Colonies of the late twelfth century and so quickly destroyed that they were but a footnote to the many other dangers of that place. However, their unique abilities make them far more dangerous in the fourth millennium. Scarabs look like humanoid man-sized versions of their namesake, covered in chitin and possessing large cutting claws at the end of each leg. They are surprisingly intelligent, and their complex mandibles give them fine manipulation ability. Their most dangerous aspect, however, is their ability to turn a human being into one of them in a matter of hours through a gruesome infection process. Considering the vast numbers of citizens in the Empire of Rokugan, the Scarabs can potentially spread at an incredible rate and pose an existential danger to all, even the Spider. Naturally Jigoku fully intends to unleash such a danger, and the loss of Hida Sedundus is only the first step in this campaign.



Finally, in preparation for the impending Day of Thunder, a terrible occurrence has taken place in an uncharted solar system far from anything the Empire has ever encountered. An ancient star on the brink of collapse has combined with a sinister ritual conducted by unknown parties (perhaps human, perhaps alien) to open a gateway to the Realm of Evil on a scale unprecedented in human history. The gateway is of such immense size that unthinkably large demonic entities, previously restricted to the depths of Jigoku, are now able to cross into the mortal realm. These creatures are as far beyond mere oni as the oni are above goblins, and they hunger for the destruction of all life, leaving only an empty universe ready to be filled with their spawn.

Personal Technology in the Era of the Emerald Stars

The only thing more surprising than the amount samurai culture has changed over two thousand years is the amount of samurai culture that has not changed. Most of the closely held beliefs samurai embraced during the dawn of the Iweko Dynasty thousands of years ago have changed somewhat, evolving in different ways to deal with the massive changes and new discoveries Rokugan has encountered in the intervening years... but few have disappeared outright. The Code of Bushido in particular has changed almost not at all, although the interpretation of the different Tenets of the Code are quite a bit different among certain clans. And of course warfare, the ultimate duty of all samurai, has changed immensely yet remained fundamentally the same.

At the start of the Iweko Dynasty, ranged combat was an essential aspect of all samurai training but was still considered largely secondary to the perfection of the art of melee combat (especially with the sword). In the era of the Celestial Empire, however, the balance between the two has largely reversed. Ranged combat is now an absolutely essential component of all forms of warfare, and of course the only means of combat when conducting fleet actions against enemies in space. However, the sacred status of melee combat still exists. Every samurai still carries a katana and wakizashi, the sacrosanct symbols of the samurai caste. The essential techniques used to fight with these weapons remains the same, but the materials and technology used to create them have changed dramatically, resulting in weapons that would seem godlike to the samurai of ancient Rokugan. Even an average samurai now carries a blade of steel encased in an aura of radiant energy, and the wealthiest and highest-ranking members of the samurai class wield blades forged from the metals found in the heart of collapsed stars, their incredible mass offset by magical blessings which make them as light as the average sword.

As weaponry has advanced with the development of metallurgy and the harnessing of radiant energy, so too has armor been forced to advance in order to maintain its usefulness. Ironically, the armor most widely used during the days of the Celestial Empire is only as successful at stopping melee attacks as it was in millennia past, but the ceremony of utilizing it remains. Most armor is composed of astonishingly thin layers of blended metals and ceramics, and often feels no heavier or more restrictive than a particularly heavy cloth. However, it is also encased in a field of radiant energy, making it more likely to deflect a direct shot or a katana blow. This alone is part of the reason why melee combat is still a part of Rokugani warfare, since ranged weapons are not guaranteed a kill against properly equipped samurai.



The Age of Space Exploration

The universe beyond the confines of the world of Rokugan is nothing like ancient samurai might have imagined. It is at once vastly more horrible and unimaginably more wondrous than any mortal mind could ever have grasped without experiencing it firsthand. Centuries ago, the discovery that other worlds existed beyond Rokugan caused enormous discord among the people of the Empire. The theological ramifications alone were almost enough to cause a complete breakdown of society, and a brief but very intense schism erupted between the various religious viewpoints. This conflict, known as the War of the Tao, might have raged on far longer than it did if not for the Emperor of that era. Unwilling or perhaps unable to quell the theological warfare taking place across the land, the Emperor instead funded advances in magical theory and technology that permitted the observation of these distant other worlds. Although this project took nearly a decade to complete, a decade in which war threatened to rip the Empire into many smaller nations, the endeavor was ultimately successful. The nearest planetary neighbor to Rokugan was observed clearly, and the most powerful shugenja in the Empire collaborated on a ritual that allowed them to make very rudimentary contact with the spirits of that world. Their conclusion was that this hot and verdant planet was closely tied to the Spirit Realm of Chikushudo, a reflection of that realm in a manner not much different from the most undeveloped regions of Rokugan such as the Shinomen Mori. This observation allowed the various theologies of Rokugan to accommodate the reality of other worlds with their theological beliefs, and the reigning theory that each alien planet is a manifestation of the Spirit Realms in differing proportions persists to this day. With this peace of mind (whether real or manufactured) attained, the Empire returned to peace and the Great Clans began looking outward in a policy of expansion that continues to this day.

The vast interstellar expansion of the Empire of Rokugan has been made possible by the development of an extremely powerful magical ritual, first created by the Phoenix Clan. Thousands of years ago, the rare precursor of this spell was known to many as Walking the Way, in which a single shugenja could create a tunnel-like conduit linking two physical locations and a traveler could walk through it, ensuring they were in no danger from environmental difficulties or enemy attacks during this travel. The current spell that operates on the same principle, known as Opening the Way, can require up to one hundred shugenja to cast depending upon the size of the vessel being affected. It opens a similar conduit, but one of vast size that massive spacecraft can enter. This spell allows for immeasurably vast distances to be covered in short amounts of time, essentially giving the Rokugani the ability to move their vessels at speeds faster than light.

The state-of-the-art spacecraft currently employed by the fleets of the Great Clans is without question the Katana-class battlecruiser. With its sleek lines and a shape reminiscent of the weapon whose name it bears, the Katana is present in the fleets of all clans, although the numbers fielded vary greatly due to the vast resources and manpower necessary to create and maintain such craft. At the bare minimum, however, almost every family in each Great Clan maintains at least one of these magnificent ships as its flagship. (A few rare exceptions do occur, such as the Tsuruchi family.)

If the Katana is the grand example of spacecraft prowess, it is only fitting that the Wakizashi-class light cruiser is the workhorse. Far and away the most numerous ship found in the fleets of Rokugan, the Wakizashi is slightly less than half the size of a Katana but requires only a fraction of its crew. They are exceptionally efficient vessels, able to traverse known space much quicker than other comparable vessels, and easily modified to serve a number of purposes. The Unicorn have several Wakizashi which serve as light carriers, for example, while the Crab reinforce them with additional armor and weapons to serve a heavier combat role than they normally fulfill in other fleets.

Beyond these two models of cruiser, there is a great variety of smaller ships that still generally fall under the category of cruiser. These vary widely in design and function, and many clans have their own particular ship types unique to them. One of the most prevalent is the Atakebune-class cruiser, a smaller ship utilized by the Mantis Clan. The Atakebune are the smallest vessel that can bear the name cruiser, and are remarkably swift craft capable of operating both in space and also in atmospheric conditions. In particular, the Atakebune excel at aquatic operations, and it is not uncommon for large numbers of them to travel through space together and then descend into the oceans of a distant world to harvest specific resources. At the other end of the frequency scale, the Scorpion are rumored to have a light cruiser with advanced stealth technology and unrivaled surveillance abilities, although this may be just a rumor to explain away the clan's superior intelligence-gathering.

The majority of spacecraft that are too small to classify as cruisers are simple transports, used to move goods throughout the many star systems of the Empire. Most are quite simple, little more than interstellar barges. Small single-pilot combat craft also exist and are a vital component of any fleet, and used to great effect during large-scale battles. Much as with cruisers, a great variety of these fighter-ships exist, with many unique models employed by individual clans. The most common form is the Tanto-class combat spacecraft, a ship used in one design or another in every known fleet in the Empire. These ships are unable to access faster-than-light travel and are generally dependent upon larger ships to ferry them through space to engagements. The sole known exception to this are the slightly larger vessels used by the Unicorn Clan. Nearly half again as large as a Tanto, these ships – the Baraunghar class – employ both a pilot and a single shugenja. The shugenja is able to use a variant of Opening the Way to allow these ships to make short faster-than-light jumps, which gives the Unicorn a distinct advantage.

Carriers are the least numerous of large-scale spacecraft, and most clans only employ a small number. Although they vary in size, carriers are typically at least as large as a cruiser, with the largest of them exceeding the scale of Katana-class heavy battlecruisers. These vessels are the Daikyu-class carriers, ships of such enormous size that many clans choose not to employ them at all. The Tsuruchi family of the Mantis Clan has one as their flagship in place of a Katana, and the Phoenix and Crane are known to utilize them as well. Each Daikyu is capable of fielding several hundred Tanto-class ships or the equivalent. Smaller variants of the Daikyu include the Yumi (the most common class of carrier) and the much smaller Hankyu, which can carry only a single squadron of fighters.

The void of space is an eerie place to the Rokugani, despite that the Ishiken of the Phoenix Clan insist it is distinct from the Void of the Five Elements. It is not occupied by spacecraft alone. Rare indeed is an inhabited world without at least one major orbital facility, and these massive constructs often fulfill the roles once taken by opulent ancestral estates or mighty war-fortresses. The largest stations, able to accommodate multiple cruisers simultaneously and with room for thousands of residents, are often referred to as Kyuden in imitation of Rokugan's past. It is exceptionally rare for a system to have more than one of these behemoths, and most systems have none simply because the majority of settled star systems do not see enough traffic to warrant such a massive facility. Much more common are the Shiro, smaller stations which can accommodate only a single cruiser at a time. The Shiro is the standard space station, and only the most lightly populated or tactically unimportant systems do not have at least one. Finally, there are numerous smaller stations which lack the capacity to dock a cruised, serving as monitoring posts or orbital defense platforms; these go by many different names, although Torid-e is the most common.



Rokugan in Space: New Mechanics

Obviously, a full-scale re-imagining of the L5R 4th Edition mechanics to accommodate this setting, including new Schools and new Skill lists, is an endeavor that could easily fill an entire book. The intention of this chapter is to inspire creativity and suggest ways in which L5R can be creatively modified and "homebrewed" to embrace new settings and new ideas.

If the GM wishes to run a campaign set in the Emerald Stars (or any similar science-fiction variant on L5R), each School being used should receive some attention to determine what changes, if any, should be made to its Techniques. Due to the nature of Rokugani culture, samurai will always place great value on the honor of melee combat, and as such most Techniques will retain that aspect of their mechanical design. However, the future culture of Rokugan has also embraced the virtues of ranged combat, and as such most Techniques should also cover basic ranged weaponry. Many of the weapons depicted later in this section have been afforded the Samurai keyword to reflect this. Some of them lack this quality to reflect the more specialized nature of their use and their lack of common employment in most Great Clans.

The Skill list for the game will also need some attention. A few suggestions are presented here:

- **Computer Use** (Research, Programming, Hacking). High Skill. The art of making computers do what one wants. Considered a Low Skill when using the Hacking emphasis. Suggested Trait is Awareness.
- **Driving** (Wheeled, Tracked, Air-Cushion). Merchant Skill. The ability to operate ground-based vehicles. Suggested Trait is Intelligence, although Reflexes could be used when avoiding sudden threats.
- **Engineering**. This Skill will acquire several new Emphases and will likely be much more widely used.
- **Firearms** (Sidearm, Rifle). Bugei Skill. The skill used when firing modern ranged weapons. Suggested Trait is either Reflexes or Intelligence, depending on whether the GM wants to depict accurate shooting as being dependent more on muscle-memory or mental focus.
- **Flying** (Fixed-Wing, Helicopter). Merchant Skill. The skill used when operating flying craft within planetary atmosphere. Like Driving, this Skill is probably primarily Intelligence-based but could use physical Traits during emergencies.
- **Kyujutsu**. This Skill will no longer exist except among traditionalist enclaves; otherwise, substitute Firearms.
- **Piloting** (Combat, Docking). Merchant Skill. The skill of controlling a spacecraft. Suggested Trait is Intelligence.



Standard Sidearm

The traditional sidearm conforms to a common pattern that is mechanically identical throughout the Empire, although there are many variations of outward design to suit the particular styles of a given clan. One of the most ubiquitous such weapons is the Mirumoto weapons called Twin Radiance, which are intended to be worn in pairs, and are freely sold to outsiders such as the Minor Clan Alliance and various ronin groups.

- **Keyword**: Samurai, Small
- **DR**: 3k3
- **Range**: 100'

Standard Rifle

The most common battlefield weapon (other than the katana), carried by virtually every samurai, is the standard energy rifle. The most common version is the Akodo Arms Indomitable X32, which has been in service for more than two centuries with virtually no significant changes.

- **Keywords**: Samurai, Medium
- **DR**: 4k4
- **Range**: 500'

Heavy Assault Rifle

Despite the significant power of the standard assault weapons carried by samurai troops, there are times when greater impact is required. Weapons such as the Kaiu Forge Devastator-class Siege Weapon are renowned for their ability to threaten the armor of even hardened targets such as armored vehicles. The energy generated by such weaponry is significant, and can even threaten those in the vicinity if wielded without proper training.

- **Keywords**: Large
- **DR**: 6k5
- **Range**: 400'
- **Special Rules**: The sheer force exerted by this weapon, not to mention its significant size and weight, means it requires Strength 4 to wield properly.

Marksman's Rifle

Certain circumstances require specialized weapons, and while there are a wide variety of these in existence, one of the most frequent is a rifle customized for long range sniping. The Tsuruchi are the natural masters of this particular art, and their Distant Thunder model rifle is widely considered one of the best such weapons on the market.

- **Keywords**: Large
- **DR**: 6k3
- **Range**: 1000'

Ranged Weapon Damage

Given the advanced state of technology in this setting, it is only logical to assume that ranged weapons in this era (which include both magnetically-propelled solid projectiles and outright energy weapons) should have a completely devastating effect on anyone unfortunate enough to be hit by one. However, scaling damage to suit this idea will render melee weapons completely obsolete regardless of their design improvements. Thus, GMs should decide whether they wish to focus their campaign entirely on ranged combat or maintain a more "samurai-esque" balance between ranged and melee combat.

If a balance is preferred, ranged weapons must stay at a reasonable damage level, as depicted in this chapter. One way to justify this is to assume that armor technology has progressed at a similar level and this is "built in" to the ranged weapon DRs. To represent this, in those instances where a target is struck by an advanced ranged weapon and is not wearing any armor the GM should double the damage (e.g. a standard sidearm would do a base DR of 6k6). This allows for a reasonable damage progression while still preserving some of the setting's cultural integrity.

Note that the ranged weapon DRs presented in this chapter assume the characters are adding their Perception to the DR as unkept dice, much like Strength is added to melee weapon DRs as unkept dice.

Index

A

Agasha Kurou 282
Agasha Ryuden 94
Akodo Dairuko 278
Akodo Shimizu 140
Akodo Shunori 269
Akodo Tsuroi 299
Amulet of the Veil 29
Ancestral Armor of the Lion ... 146
Asahina Yajinden 90–91, 131, 145–146, 232
Ashalan 14, 154, 190, 266–267, 283–285, 302–303

B

Bajozutsu 79, 80
Balance in All 53
Battle of Kyuden Ashinagabachi 254
Battle of Kyuden Tonbo 130
Battle of the Great Climb 131
Battle of the Thundering Shrine 133
Battle of the Tidal Landbridge .. 131
Battle of White Shore Plain 158
Battle of White Stag 10, 56–57, 204–205
Bayushi Kaukatsu 202
Bayushi Kurumi 269
Bayushi Nitoshi 279
Bayushi Ogoe 155–157, 158, 162–163
Bayushi Paneki . 202, 212, 229, 243, 252, 258–259, 279
Bayushi Yojiro 211, 218
Blessed Wind of Lady Sun 52
Bo-Hiya 78, 80

C

Champion of Jigoku 302
Chrysanthemum Conspirator ... 127
Chrysanthemum Court 126
Chukandomo 181, 217
City of Night 206
Clan Spells of the Early Empire 52–53
Command 53
Computer Use 306

D

Daigotsu 181
Daigotsu Kanpeki 279, 282
Daigotsu Susumu 264
Dark Covenant of Fire 241
Dark Naga 275, 283, 285
Destroyers, Ironclad 270
Doji Makoto 276
Doji Marines 196
Doji Taehime 142
Doji Yasuyo 181, 200, 205, 241
Dragon Teppoto 81
Driving 306

E

Earthen Wave 52
Elemental Crucible 52
Emerald Champion 34, 73
Engineering 306
Esteban Cornejo 239

F

Fall of Otosan Uchi 204
Firearms 22, 78, 80, 81, 306
Fire Arrows 80
Fire Lance 78, 80
First Dawn Scholars 29
Flying 306
Fortune of Torture 111
Fudo 286
Fudoism 286
Fudoist Order 287
Fu Leng 51
Furumaro 268
Fushin 220

G

Gorinno 96, 101
Gozoku 9
Gray Woman 261
Gunpowder 81

H

Hakai 221
Hanabi 79
Hand-Cannon 79, 80
Hantei Bushi School 27
Hantei Genji 46
Hantei Kano 74
Hantei Meisho 72
Hantei Naseru .. 200, 206, 214, 228, 238–239, 242–243, 245
Hantei Okucheo 106
Hantei XVI 119, 124
Hawk Purist 103
Heart Betrays Eyes 53
Heaven's Wing Kakiyari 81
Heavy Assault Rifle 307
Helm of Daidoji Masashig 146
Hida Benjiro 262
Hida Kisada 174, 175
Hida Kuroda 192
Hida O-Ushi 175, 180
Hida Tsuneo 119
Hiruma Akio 269
Hitomi 172, 178, 186, 191
Horiuchi Nobane 263

I

Imperial Advisor 62, 74, 96, 117–118, 120, 229, 264–265
Ironclad 270
Iron Dragon 76
Isawa Amaku 96
Isawa Kusaeri 24
Isawa Kyoko 269
Isawa Mitsuko 263
Isawa Seaguard 197

J

Jade Champion .. 16, 85, 92–93, 200, 231, 249, 276, 302–303
Jama Suru 130
jinn 14, 154, 190
Ji-Yeong 294
Judgment of Yomi 53
Junsui 146

K

Kaimetsu-Uo 34, 35, 45
Kaiu Norio 48
Kaiu Onizuka 281
Kaiu Shipmasters 197
Kaiu Thunderer 81
Kakita Hideo 269
Kakita Noritoshi 257
Kakita Toshimoko 176
Kakiyari 78, 80
Kali-Ma 154, 248–249, 254–255, 265–266, 267–268, 273–274, 282, 302
Kanashimi 222

Kaneka *179, 195, 213*
Kani no Nageki *256*
Katsu *240*
Kinjiro no Oni *147*
Kiri no Oni *148*
Kitsu Taiko *141*
Kuni Renyu *276*
Kyofu . *203–204, 205, 216–217, 222, 222–223*

L

Lying Darkness *187*

M

Mantis Civil War *187*
Marksman's Rifle *307*
Matsu Kiriko *47*
Mirumoto Ichizo *269*
Mirumoto Shikei *277*
Miya Karuo *120*
Moto Chagatai *202, 229, 231*
Moto Naleesh *277, 280*
Muchitsujo *223*

N

Naga Ancestry *287*
Naga-Nezumi War *13*
New Mechanics *26–29, 80–81, 102–103, 126–127, 168–169, 196–197, 220–225, 244–245, 270–271, 286–287, 306–307*
Nightmare of the Crab *222*
Nightmare of the Crane *225*
Nightmare of the Dragon *222*
Nightmare of the Lion *224*
Nightmare of the Mantis *224*
Nightmare of the Phoenix *221*
Nightmare of the Scorpion *220*
Nightmare of the Unicorn *223*
Nightmares of Jigoku *147*
Nikoma no Oni *131, 132–133, 135–136, 140, 144–145, 149*
Nikushimi *224*

O

Oni no Kinjiro *131–132*
Onisu *216, 220*
Order of the Five Rings *103*
Order of the Stone Crab *127*
Order of Venom *261, 279*
Otomo Banu *193*
Otomo Diplomat School *28*
Otomo Kaoichihime *122*
Owl Blade *29*

P

Piloting *306*

R

Race for the Throne *11*
railroads *76*
Rain of Blood *231*
Reichin *141*
Reincarnation of Shinsei *302*
Religion *49*
Rocket Festival *79*

S

Scion of the Minor Clans *302*
Scorpion Clan Coup *10, 193–194, 213*
Second Day of Thunder *173*
Second Gozoku Agent *245*
Sengoku Jidai *194*
Seppun Hanako *126*
Seppun Shugenja School *28*
Seppun Tadaka *73*
Seppun Tashime *261*
Seppun Yoshun *24*
Serpent Hunters *287*
Settozai *224*
Sezaru's mask *225*
Sezaru's Mask *215*
Shadow Court *242*
Shiba Tsukimi *278*
Shiba Tsukune *211*
Shimizu *133, 140, 160–161*
Shinjo Nishijin *154, 156–157, 163–164*
Shinjo Yokatsu *177*
Shinsei *41, 49, 96, 136, 242, 293, 302*
Shosuro *44*
Shosuro Jimen *257*
Shosuro Tsia *120*
Spells *52*
Standard Rifle *307*
Standard Sidearm *307*
Steel Magistrates *123, 124*
Sun Tao *36, 204*
Susumu family *286*
Suzume Kirako *121*

T

Tamori Shaiko *261*
Tanegashima *78*
Tao of Fu Leng *265*
Tears of Lady Doji *220*
Teppo *79, 80*
Teppoudo *80*
Test of the Emerald Champion *34, 36, 61, 200*
the Badger Clan *45*
the Bat Clan *280*
The Battle of Sleeping River ... *134*
The Boar Clan *94*
The Brotherhood *95*
The Cat Empress *13*
The Crab Clan *16, 38, 67, 89–90, 113, 135, 144, 158, 182, 208, 233, 255, 276, 295*
The Crane Clan *16, 39–40, 67, 90, 114–115, 136, 159, 184, 209, 233, 256, 276, 295*
The Crimson Kingdom *89*
The Dragon Clan *40, 68, 91, 115, 136, 160, 185, 209–210, 234–235, 256, 277, 296*
The Dragon Veil *9*
The Ebon Daughter *267*
The Hantei Family *26*
The Hare Clan *71*
The Hawk Clan *94*
The Imperial Families *23, 45, 95, 117, 140, 164, 190, 238, 260, 280*
The Jinn's Escape *14*
The Kolat *23, 46, 165, 189, 194*
The Lion Clan *17, 41, 69, 91–92, 115–116, 136, 160–161, 186, 210, 235, 257, 278, 296*
The Mantis Clan . *18, 187, 210–211, 235, 257, 278, 297*
The Maw ... *131, 132, 143, 144, 149*
The Minor Clans *22, 45, 71, 94, 119, 139, 164, 238, 260–261, 280–281, 299*
the Owl Clan *11, 21–22, 27, 28*
The Phoenix Clan *19, 42, 69–70, 92, 116, 137, 161, 187, 211, 236, 258, 278, 297*
The Ruby of Iuchiban *145*
The Scorpion Clan *19–20, 43, 70, 93, 116, 138, 162, 188, 211, 237, 258, 279, 297*
The Shadowed Tower *218*
The Shadowlands . *46, 140, 165, 191, 212, 239*

The Sparrow Clan 71, 119
The Spider Clan ... 22, 259, 279, 298
The Steel Chrysanthemum 112
The Tortoise Clan 119
The Unbroken 220
The Unicorn Clan . 20, 71, 163–164, 189, 212, 237, 260, 280, 298
The Usagi Rail Incident 63
The Yoshun Family 26
Togashi Hoshi 23
Togashi Jinsu 300
Toturi Kaede 200
Toturi Sezaru ... 201, 214–215, 225, 238–239
Toturi Tsudao 204–205, 216, 228
Tsudao's Legion 244
Twin Forks City 277

U

Unicorn Return 155
Utaku Kohana 269
Utaku Mounted Infantry 168

W

War of Four Winds 202
War of Serpents 283–285
War of the Tao 291, 305–306
War of the Twins 276, 278–279
Woodblock Printing 76

Y

Yasuki Hachi 203
Yattoko no Oni 148
Yokubo 225
Yoritomo Aramasu 187
Yoritomo Hiromi 278
Yoritomo Osu 300
Yoritomo Saburo 269
Yuki no Onna 270

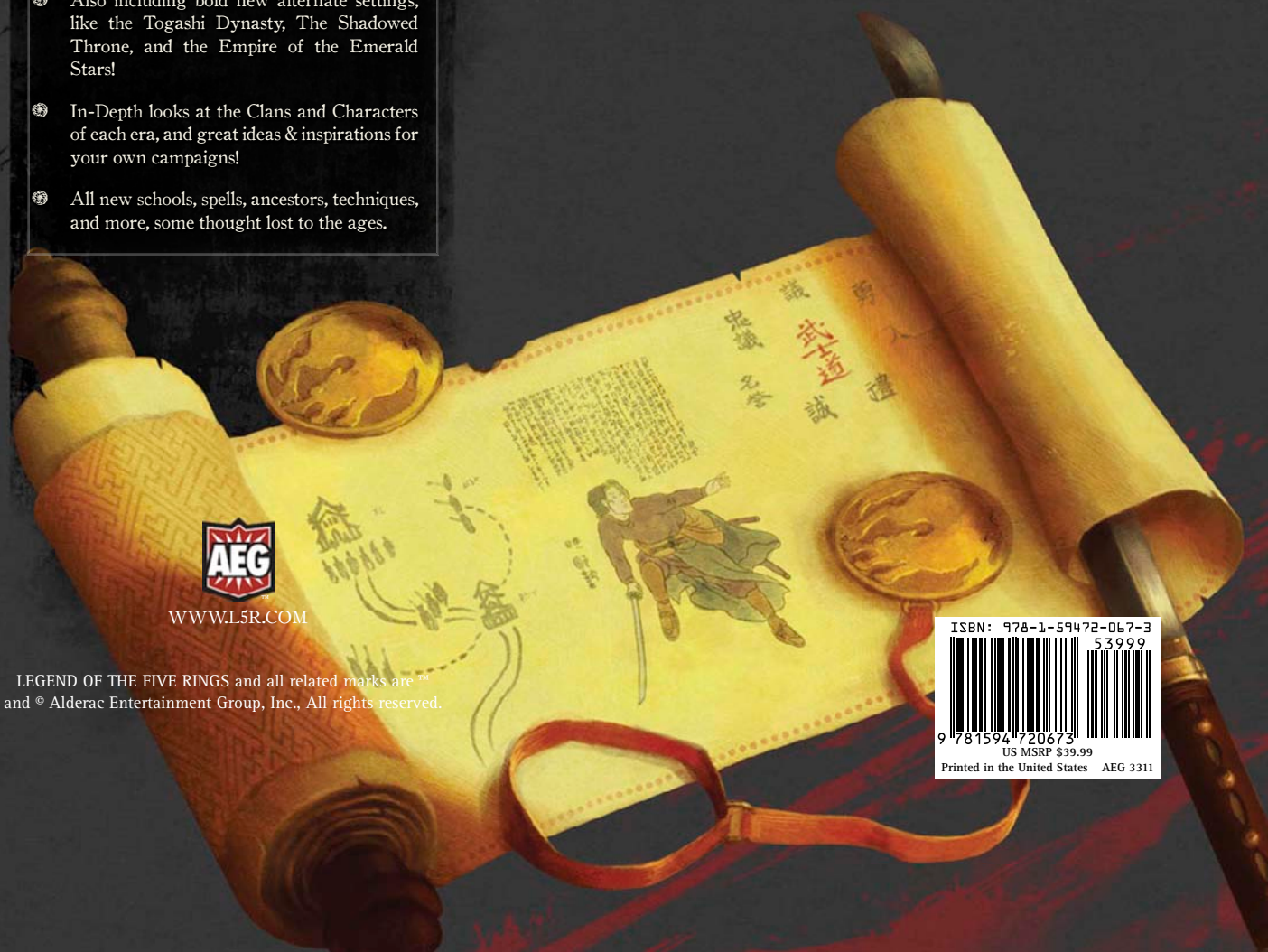
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- Tao of Shinsei

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