

## **NPC BIOGRAPHIES**

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### **THE IWEKO DYNASTIC FAMILY**

#### **EMPEROR IWEKO II**

The Son of Heaven is...not all he once was. He has been, in his years on the throne, a charismatic leader of men, a hero standing against an impossible and implacable foe, and an erratic and secretive manipulator. Now, though, he seems to be only tired and confused, his grip on what remains of the Emerald Empire loose and uncertain. While his loyal subjects will not speak of it, his occasional slips reveal that he seems to be missing not only much of his history, but also large swaths of his personality...and maybe even his very soul. He is, though, aware of his increasing psychological infirmities, and though he once was a foe of the overgrown Imperial bureaucracy, he has now come to heavily rely on it to cover for his weakness as he must be seen to be strong, or else his Empire will fatally falter in the face of darkness.

#### **IWEKO AYAMEKO, *CONSORT EMPRESS***

One of two members of the Imperial Court now seen as the "face" of the Empire, in light of the Emperor's increasing seclusion, the Consort Empress is largely but quietly considered the most troublesome of the pair, compared to the calmer and more circumspect Voice. Ayameko is, in a way, a true daughter of Hida, and as such, is a determined and outspoken enemy of the Kanpeki and those sympathetic to his cause. While her tendency to launch into fervent invective speeches against Kanpeki and the Spider, refusing even to openly acknowledge Kanpeki's self-proclaimed station, helps to drive some to unite against the forces of the Onyx Empire, she also has managed to alienate some of Susumu Shibatsu's loyal Spider, whom she distrusts, as well as members of her own Clan of origin, whom she expects to be nothing less than the vanguard against Kanpeki's forces.

### **THE EMPEROR'S CHOSEN**

#### **HIDA KOZAN, *VOICE OF THE EMPEROR***

The other major player on the Imperial stage aside from the Consort Empress, the long-serving Kozan serves as a call to moderation despite his distaste for the Tainted forces of the Onyx Empire, which easily matches Ayameko's. Kozan is, however, a more practical and pragmatic man, influenced as he is by the kami of Earth and their love of stability, the wisdom of the Void, and the pacifism of his Phoenix bride, the Master of Fire. As much as he can, the Voice calls for the Emerald Empire to stabilize itself before looking to handle the "Onyx Dilemma", as he calls it, lest the seemingly inevitable clash between the two leaves only ruins behind. Those who seek a firm foundation for the rebuilding of Rokugan will find an ally in the Voice, but those who seek peace at the cost of acceptance of darkness will find no greater enemy.

#### **TOKU HIKARU, *IMPERIAL CHANCELLOR***

How the Imperial Chancellor persists is a mystery none in the Empire can solve, as despite his age and failing health, he continues to perform his duties, albeit now assisted by a handful of trusted aides. While his body may be failing, his mind remains as clear and sharp as it was in his youth, a resource he draws upon heavily in his attempts to maintain something resembling order in the Imperial Court, even as its members threaten to tear it apart in their wildly differing approaches to the threat posed by Kanpeki and the Onyx Empire. If the rest of the world falls, Hikaru is

determined to be the last one standing, to make sure proper protocol is followed at the end of all things.

**YASUKI MAKOTO, *IMPERIAL ADVISOR***

To many, the Imperial Advisor seems enigmatic, rarely heard or even seen in open court, but her presence felt in every action approved by the Imperial Court. She is, of course, not inactive, but instead has proven herself a paragon of Crab pragmatism. Instead of debate and political maneuvering, she prefers to spend her time actively gathering information on the current state of both the Emerald and Onyx Empires, as well as providing guidance to those actively involved in the struggle against Kanpeki's forces. Some may dare to speak disparagingly of her, suggesting that she often bypasses the Emperor when implementing her strategies, but none would do so openly -- not for fear of official punishment, but instead that her all-seeing eye might turn toward their own failings.

**SEPPUN RITISHARU, *IMPERIAL TREASURER***

When she took over the office of the Imperial Treasurer, an event that seems like a lifetime ago, Ritisharu was an idealistic and highly capable manager of funding streams, as well as a skilled diplomat capable of weathering the difficulties surrounding the Crane-Mantis War in the Colonies as well as her own daimyo's displeasure with her colonial enthusiasm early in her tenure. While her skills remain, her idealism has withered away as the Emerald Empire has been driven to the brink of collapse. In addition to the difficulties with maintaining the Imperial economy through terrible war and impending famine, the growing darkness has taken a personal toll on the Treasurer, as her husband was lost when the Second Seal, as well as much of the Islands of Silk and Spice, were utterly destroyed by the Onyx Empire-driven Umikaiju attack on the hidden sacred site. Replacing her idealism, though, is a stubborn refusal to admit defeat. Among those still resident in the old lands of the Empire, she's become a dreaded presence who demands far too much from the shattered Clans and their ravaged lands, ready to lethally question the loyalty of those who fail to deliver. She cares about the well-being of the people, of course, but is all too aware that, if she lets up in the slightest, the greed inherent to so many will take over, and they will focus on their own gain while allowing their neighbors, friends, and even family to starve. Ritisharu has aged poorly, looking far older than she actually is, as such is the cost of a high-stress job in a high-stress period when coupled with tremendous personal loss, and many expect her to retire soon and pass her impossible job on to another, but that is something she will not allow herself to do until stability is once again achieved and the stage is set to beat the Onyx Empire back into the Pits that spawned them. Meanwhile, she has come to the lands of the Dragon not only because she was invited as part of the Imperial Court, but because she knows the Dragon have been gathering food and other resources that she expects them to put at her disposal.

**MIYA KIYOKAIZU, *IMPERIAL HERALD***

Unsurprisingly, at least to those who know him, the Miya daimyo and Imperial Herald has allowed himself to change very little over the years, despite the tragedies faced by the Empire. Those who do know him, though, know that he maintains this unaffected appearance specifically because he is so aware of how much the people absolutely need some hint of stability in times of great turmoil. This he learned well from his father, the legendary Miya Shoin, who led the family through the chaos of the Race For the Throne, the War of Dark Fire, and the Destroyer War, through it all keeping the Miya in the public eye as agents of peace and support. Kiyokaizu is determined to do the same now, maintaining an active network of *shisha* traveling constantly through the lands remaining to the Emerald Empire and offering aid where they can. The cost of that aid, of course, leads to a bit of

visible conflict between Kiyokaizu and the strict Imperial Treasurer, Seppun Ritisharu. All the while, these *shisha* project a calm, cool confidence that he hopes will keep those around him focused on their tasks rather than their fears for the disintegrating Empire. As the years have passed, though, he has become more concerned about his personal appearance, both out of concern that the people will be less easily influenced by an aging Herald and also a touch of vanity that he has not been able to shake. As a result, he has dedicated a great deal of resources to concealing the signs of aging such as hair dyes and rejuvenating ointments, and also to increasing his stable of "Kiyokaizu's Flowers" who are young, attractive, and highly capable women who serve as his aides and advisors. The result has...not been entirely effective, as many have begun to consider him to be a vain and ineffectual middle-aged man, discounting his efforts to maintain the Empire's infrastructure as being more likely the work of his subordinates than of the Herald himself. As a result, Kiyokaizu is actively looking for a situation that he can involve himself in directly, which will allow him to prove that he is as capable as he ever was.

#### **ISAWA KANAME, *JADE CHAMPION***

Only the Fire within the Jade Champion has managed to keep her spirit from being absolutely crushed by the darkness that has spread across the land since she took office. Since then, she has lost a trusted assistant, Soshi Yoshihara, who left her side to claim her place as the Dark Oracle of Air, watched as her Clan's western lands were trampled under the hooves of Unicorn war steeds following her attempts to inform them of the return of the Moto Curse, and seen the rise of the corrupted Onyx Empire, an affront to both her office and beliefs, and which has driven her Clan to such desperate measures that they chose to risk offending Tengoku by trying to enslave it. Despite these horrors she has witnessed, Kaname seems only to burn brighter. She has left the front lines for the Dragon mountains with the rest of the Imperial Court in the hopes of recruiting more members into the Jade Legion, which she is prepared to drive straight into the heart of the Onyx Empire as soon as the Emperor gives the command. She knows the battle ahead will be difficult, maybe nearly impossible, but she will accept nothing less than total victory against the enemies of the Empire. Kaname is an enthusiastic, idealistic, and capable leader, and the passion that keeps her vibrant through the years has served her well in motivating her subordinates. Her only fear is that the order she awaits, to attack Kanpeki and his monsters, will never come, and that the Empire will be consumed before they have the chance to really fight back.

### **CLAN AMBASSADORS**

#### **KUNI RENYU, *DAIMYO OF THE KUNI FAMILY***

If there is anyone that could be described as a reluctant attendee of the Imperial Winter Court, it would be the Kuni family daimyo, who seems to resent every moment that he doesn't spend in direct combat with the Tainted forces of the Onyx Empire. The strength of the Earth has kept him capable of such intense battle despite his advancing age, and the years have not mellowed him in the slightest. He is vocal in his distrust of the Scorpion and Spider, openly speculating that they are at best a security risk...if they're not traitors in flimsy disguises. While this may seem to make him a potential ally for the firebrand Consort Empress, Renyu in fact resents the weighty demands she places solely on the shoulders of the Crab, believing that all loyal samurai regardless of Clan should commit themselves entirely to the defeat of the forces of darkness.

#### **DAIDOJI NOZOMI, *SHIREIKAN OF THE IRON WARRIORS***

No one in the Crane Clan is more perfectly dangerous than Daidoji Nozomi. In less trying times, Nozomi would have never risen to such high a rank. But fire and steel have shed the Crane of their weaknesses and the brilliant ones shine as the Sun itself. Nozomi possesses a mind so absorbed in the tactical and strategic nuances, that her forces have successfully fended off a Spider Clan incursion for years. Her serene demeanor in the face of overwhelming pressure unnerves many opponents and allies alike. Only boredom seems to afflict Nozomi with any anxiety. She was none too pleased with the Spider's unilateral halt in hostilities and eagerly accepted the challenge when called to represent the Crane in court this year.

*TOGASHI NOBORU, MASTER OF THE TOGASHI ORDER*

The master of the Togashi Order has not been seen by any outside the order for seventeen years now, since the majority of the Dragon withdrew beyond the mystical Dragon Wall. His appearance this winter is, then, a surprise to nearly everyone except perhaps the Dragon themselves, with many wondering if his reappearance heralds some impending event that will change the course of the ongoing conflict with Kanpeki and his followers. For his part, Noboru says nothing save that he seeks to return to his role as one of the Emperor's trusted advisors.

*IKOMA HATTORI, DAIMYO OF THE IKOMA FAMILY*

Were a stranger to guess, they could not fathom that such an indulgent, bloated fop of a man had been the savior of the Empire's history. Born the youngest son of the Ikoma Daimyo, Hattori had few responsibilities and was easily overlooked by his family as he idled himself with seemingly trivial lore. Nonetheless, Hattori would on occasion unearth an old journal or produce tax records of samurai yet living who showed nothing but cruelty or disdain for the peasants serving underneath them. Hattori reported these disturbing issues and was greatly rewarded with requests for duels, duels that he aptly defended against. Still, such attention was enough to earn him a quiet place in an obscure corner of Kyuden Ikoma. Perhaps if it were not for the fact his father and siblings were not out at another court that winter, none would have made the call to transport the archives to Shiro Matsu. Fate has a way of making even the fool into a hero and Hattori has been its masterpiece. Delightful and personable, Hattori enjoys fine sake and expensive garments, but could just as soon discard those garments to spare a stranger the suffering of a winter chill. He would then share his sake in exchange for nothing but their story. Ikoma Hattori stands as no less than a gentleman with the heart of a Lion.

*ARASHI, WARLORD OF ZOGESU (THE IVORY NATION)*

Much can be said of the man who conquered the Colonies for his own in the wake of the Spider Clan's abandonment. Little, however, is truly known to the courts of even the Colonies. Rumors hold that he was a lover of Yoritomo Aranai who enamored his way into rule. Others believe he is another one of Kanpeki's double agents, meant to cause nothing but strife and division. He appeared as a simple mercenary with but a farm tool for a weapon, offering his services to whichever expeditionary crew would accept the services of a man with a useless left arm. He found his way to Aranai's legions and pulled himself up the ranks. However, as far as Rokugan is concerned, Arashi is a wild card in the power struggle between the Onyx and Emerald Empires. Both Empires publicly ignore his Ivory Nation while eyeing the vastness of his kingdom's resources with secret envy. For Rokugan, the Colonies are a symbol of their failure to civilize the outside world, while Kanpeki views them as a secondary objective to be reconquered under his own name. Arashi, though, has different plans. Plans that are far more ambitious than either of the squabbling factions can fathom. Those who challenge him will fall to become stepping stones and Yoritomo Ichido is his next mark. The Mantis Clan will unite under him and be a part of that vision.

**YORITOMO ICHIDO, *THE SAVIOR OF STORMS, MANTIS CLAN CHAMPION***

Daring, pragmatic, possibly reckless and dishonorable, Yoritomo Ichido had been the right person at the right time to keep the Mantis Clan from annihilation. Before the loss of their homelands, Ichido had been a firm believer in the Mantis Clan's tradition of piracy. He coordinated a network of pirate ships to harry the Clan's political enemies all while staying under the radar of magistrates, at least as long as he could convince his lord that such was in the best interest of their people. That charisma would later be tested to its limits with the destruction of the Mantis homelands. Stranded on a remote rock after a fierce battle with the forces of the Shadowlands, Ichido and the remainder of his crew had nearly died of dehydration. Only a prayer to the pale sky had spared them. With the blessings of Yoritomo, Ichido has pursued the rebuilding of the Mantis Clan with boundless confidence. Only the isolation from their forces in the Colonies prevents them from a full recovery.

**ISAWA NAIRUKO, *MASTER OF EARTH***

The newly-minted Master of Earth is perhaps one of the most contentious ambassadors in attendance this winter, with many recalling her for her role in destroying the possibility of cooperation between the Unicorn and Phoenix Clans via her discovery of the new Moto Curse, a revelation that drove two of the Empire's most potent forces into a conflict that distracted many from the growing threat posed by Kanpeki's darkness. She is a quiet and somewhat sad woman, grown wary of sharing her insight due to the incredible costs of her previous brush with fame, which, as many may forget, had a great impact on her personally as well. Since her appointment to the Elemental Council, she has pushed for the Phoenix to return to their role as a force for unity and peace within the Empire...but she can't help but wonder if it might, in fact, be too late.

**SHOSURO SAKURA, *THE DESERT AZALEA***

Shosuro Sakura remains as lethal as she was in her prime, seventeen years ago. Though she, like many of the Scorpion, fled into the Burning Sands to escape the wrath of the traitorous Scorpion Champion, the years in exile have been kind to her, thanks in no small part, according to rumors, to her study of alchemy, including strange arts she learned among the gaijin she lived among in the Jewel of the Desert. There, it's said, she served the leaders of the Clan in exile personally as part of the rout of the Qolat conspiracy that left the Dahabi Merchant Houses in shambles and assured the Scorpion exiles of a comfortable and safe home away from home. She returned, on orders from Bayushi Karyudo and Miaka, sister of the Emerald Emperor, with the Unicorn assault on Kanpeki's forces before being delivered to Dragon lands. There she represents the rebel Scorpion in the Emerald Court, harshly opposing the treachery of her former people.

**BAYUSHI TAKEHIKO, *DARK DREAD***

Trained in politics by a favored member of the Ivory Court and in swordsmanship by one of the most accomplished bushi sensei the Scorpion have produced in twelve centuries, Bayushi Takehiko is, in many ways, an ideal envoy from the Onyx Scorpion. Those who have crossed his path since his return from the Colonies have learned to fear his sharp tongue, which he readily backs up with an equally sharp blade, and he has left a trail of bodies and cowering would-be opponents in his wake. He has been kept from Kanpeki's Blessing and the touch of Shadow in order to make him somewhat more palatable to the few remaining Emerald courts, but he makes no secret of his loyalty to Bayushi Nitoshi and, ultimately, Kanpeki. He has come to the Imperial Winter Court with one open goal, which is to prove that the shattered remains of the Iweko dynasty are too weak to properly control the lands they claim, and in the end even too weak to survive.

SUSUMU SHIBATSU, *SPIDER CLAN CHAMPION*

The Emperor's brother has found himself doomed to follow in the footsteps of his new family's founder: though unquestionably loyal to his brother, with little thought given to his traitorous former friend Kanpeki, he must nevertheless walk a path rooted in darkness. He openly champions the self-focused path of Shourido, and supports a woman said to be his Lost friend's daughter, Haihime. He has turned the ruined city of Otosan Uchi back to a hub of trade and a beacon of culture for the remaining Empire, all the while doing what he can to advise his brother about the mind of Daigotsu Kanpeki and the Spider Clan's unnerving philosophy. While his seemingly divided loyalties may lead many to distrust him, Shibatsu will not hesitate to make it clear that he considers the way of the Emerald Empire to be the only clear and sane path, disavowing those who would trade their souls for a power that, in truth, is never their own. Whatever intrigue he weaves now, those caught in it will not be left unchanged.

DAIGOTSU KENDO, *THE ONYX HERALD*

While the Phoenix ambassador may be contentious, and the Spider Champion distrusted, it would be hard to find anyone present this winter more universally feared than Daigotsu Kendo. Not a courtier, but a military commander and veteran Conqueror with years of experience in both the conflicts with Kali-Ma's dark forces in the Colonies and with the Emerald forces, his presence seems to make it clear to the gathered delegates that Kanpeki's message is not one of peaceful coexistence, but inevitable conquest, and for his part, Kendo does little to challenge this assumption. He is not arrogant, but instead displays a confidence earned by his many victories. He is here not to negotiate a truce, but the eventual surrender of the Emerald Empire.

SHINJO SAEKI, *SHIREIKAN OF THE JUNGHAR ARMY*

Saeki has in her life been both an enforcer of the law and a leader of soldiers, but nothing has affected her more than her years spent defending the helpless and displaced people of Rokugan. Her youthful passion has developed into a compassion for those who have been crushed between the armies of two Empires dedicated to each others' destruction, and a drive to see that, whatever may come, the people of the Empire will not be the price paid for victory. She maintains a close alliance with Hikahime, leader of the Last Legion, with whom she shares a desire to protect the innocent at any cost, and steadfastly opposes any action that interferes with that goal.

## PROMINENT GUESTS

MIRUMOTO SHIKEI, *THE LAUGHING DRAGON, DRAGON CLAN CHAMPION*

Perhaps in another life Mirumoto Shikei could have lived with a lighter heart. Alas, he had chosen duty over a love long beyond his grasp and has seen his Clan through the tribulations of the Age of Ruin. The cost has been his good humor which has only grown darker in the passing years, dancing on the edge of cruelty. The Laughing Dragon laughs still, but years of managing the defense of his people against the forces of darkness may have taken its toll on his spirits. He turns to the Tao for guidance but seeks the *Little Crow's Perch* for comfort. Alas, none question that his management of Dragon lands has been anything but effective and any perceived flaws he has developed are quickly overlooked by his people.

MOTO CHINUA, *UNICORN CLAN CHAMPION*

The Unicorn Champion's presence this winter suggests that the Clan of Shinjo expects action, rather than talk. Word of Kanpeki's war on the Empire brought his seemingly implacable campaign against

the Phoenix to a halt as he declared that there would be a reckoning in response to the Onyx Empire's monstrous march, and the intervening years have done little to dull his resolve. Chinua is prepared to spend every resource he has to crush any who stand in his way on the path of war. He is, however, somewhat distracted by the presence of Isawa Nairuko, a once-hated enemy who even now he is not prepared to trust, blaming her for his family's misfortunes and all too ready to believe the worst of her and her Clan.

**SEPPUN RYUKEN, *THE EMPEROR'S BODYGUARD***

The de facto lord of the Seppun family is too busy coordinating the Emperor's personal defense to be distracted by anything else. What had once been an entire regiment at his disposal to delegate tasks has now withered to a handful of samurai. As monumental a task he undertakes, most in court ignore the fact that he focuses on nothing else, not even the welfare of his family, including his son, Seppun Riki, one of the few Imperial children remaining. Riki, at the mere age of nine, seems as disinterested in defending the Emperor as his father is engrossed. One could wonder how he will ever be expected to carry on his father's legacy.

**HAIHIME, *THE PRINCESS OF ASHES***

The very existence of the only child of Daigotsu Kanpeki is known to but a handful of souls. Kidnapped from her father Daigotsu Kanpeki at a very early age, the Princess of Ashes, grown into her teens, has known only the grueling life of a sohei of the Order of the Spider. Born of the blood of the Hantei Dynasty and the lineage of the Dark Lord Daigotsu, Haihime dwells surprisingly little on her own legacy. As an adherent to the philosophy of Shourido, she believes reliance on the names and deeds of others leads one only to a false sense of power. To her, true strength can only be found in establishing and affirming one's own identity. That is not to say Haihime completely denies the truth of her past. Rather, she is guided by her instinct to conquer and rule as her ancestors had before. To that end, she trains her body and mind relentlessly in her quest to become Rokugan's next ruler, not by right nor by might alone, but through every breath and step she takes until her last. Only time will prove whether her determination proves worthy or utterly naive.

**SORA, *MASTER OF THE ORDER OF THE SPIDER***

The student of the infamous Omigawa is now a loyal servant of Susumu Shibatsu and a ready example for how one can embrace personal strength and power successfully without the need to accept the Taint. Sora can normally be found near the Champion of the loyal Spider, acting as a silent, unofficial bodyguard for the only man who, he believes, can confront and defeat the traitorous Kanpeki at his own game. He is quite willing to preach his path to those open-minded enough to accept and learn it, but barely constrains his hostility toward those who pervert the purity of Shourido with the false strength of Jigoku.

**TADAO, *GRAND ABBOT OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF SHINSEI***

Little is known about the middle-aged, unassuming Grand Abbot, save that he claims to have been raised in the Brotherhood, and that he comes from a small, oft-overlooked sect known as the Order of Heroes, who venerate not only the Tao, but also the Thunder Dragon. Indeed, rumor has it that he was a close associate of Iuchi Namida, the Oracle of Thunder, and that he has come to the Dragon lands for the Imperial Winter Court at her urging. Some in Shiro Mirumoto whisper that he has come to find those of great spirit and potential, who might be the key to putting an end to the ambitions of the Onyx Emperor, but so far Tadao has neither confirmed nor denied these claims. Those who meet with him, as he makes time to see any who seek him out, find him genial

and helpful, but speak more of the effects of his inspiring presence on their own pursuits than about any solid qualities of the man himself.

**MIRUMOTO RENGA, *CAPTAIN OF THE MIRUMOTO HOUSE GUARD***

In his relatively young life, being in his early twenties, Renga has known little but war and the constant demands placed on those tasked with maintaining the security of the Dragon lands. This burden was placed on his shoulders from an early age, when he inherited his current office from his father, Mirumoto Higashi. While some may have grown bitter as a result of the strain of duty, as well as the growing darkness surrounding his homelands, Renga is considered an oddly tranquil man, even by his fellow Dragon. As devoted to the Tao as he is to his duties, Renga approaches his tasks with clear eyes and a mind free of distraction. While somewhat taciturn by nature, as trying to get him to say more than two words at a time is considered an amusing, if hopeless pursuit by his fellows among the Guard, he could not be easily mistaken as unfriendly, as he is quite accepting of any who might approach him...even, it is said, the servants of the Onyx Empire. Only those who would disturb the peace of his lands draw his true wrath...

**HIKAHIME, *GENERAL OF THE LAST LEGION***

Outside court, few would suspect that a small peasant woman with a motherly face is actually one of the best battle commanders in the Empire. Nonetheless, ever since the start of the war, the woman who calls herself Hikahime has insisted that who she was no longer really matters. Some claim that Tengoku whispers through her, channeling the untapped spirit of the peasantry, a claim that is considered blasphemous by a sufficient number of people to have already resulted in multiple vicious brawls. Only the strength of the sword arms pledged to Hikahime keeps many from attempting to slay her for affronting the social order. For her part, Hikahime has been content to let her work do the talking as villages have been saved by the agricultural knowledge of the Legion as much as their military prowess, and the sheer passion this inspires means that she has her pick of ashigaru volunteers. Hikahime's indefatigable nature means that she is the first to take the field, the one who personally faces the worst attacks by enemies convinced that her death will break her peasants, and the last to leave. Her personality is even larger than her legend, and rumor has it that she can drink as well as any Crab when she celebrates the Legion's victories, yet her soldiers outright revere her as one of them, a peasant who is literally saving the Empire from its worst tendencies. Her public face is that of the symbol, someone who is standing up to oppression and getting others to do likewise. But who knows what she truly believes?

**MIRUMOTO HATSUTO, *MASTER SENSEI OF IRON MOUNTAIN DOJO***

Those who cannot do, teach. Mirumoto Hatsuto is a man of boundless wisdom and a priceless asset to his Clan. It is said that he once felled three men before any could draw their blades, a story he leaves others to spin tales about. The Master Sensei of Iron Mountain carries himself with an abrasive temper, questioning his students' every action and belief. He tests their nerves, forging souls into steel with searing words and cold mountain air. A man as harsh as the land itself and as brutal as Mirumoto was in his own time, Hatsuto would have the world think of him no other way.

**HEJMJN OF THE CASTLE**

### **KYUJIN, *THE RYORISHI***

The so-called "Master of Flavor" is not only an accomplished chef, with a seemingly endless variety of recipes all made with his unique and secret blend of herbs and spices, he may also be the most accomplished healer in Shiro Mirumoto, possessing as yet unsurpassed knowledge of herbal remedies and antidotes. His skill with the latter has drawn the attention of the Dragon Champion to him, as Mirumoto Shikei is determined to ensure the safety of the Clan's food stores. While the Ryorishi may resent being pulled from kitchen duty, where he feels most at home, he also understands how precarious the Dragon's situation is in these troubled times where a single successful attack could doom thousands to starvation...or worse, a lingering, poisoned death delivered by an attacker who remained completely unseen. He can't protect the stores against an open attack as he claims to be an artist, not a warrior, but he'll do all he can to prevent the poisoning or corruption of the food his lord has stored. As such, he has developed a number of tests, the effectiveness of which is a common topic of discussion among the samurai healers of the palace, that he claims will ensure that the food delivered to the plates of the guests of the Dragon is not only of the highest quality available in these dark times, but also remains clean and safe to eat. He is, however, increasingly concerned about the rumors regarding Tainted stores throughout the rest of the Empire, and is keen to seek the Crab's expertise on the matter...although, of course, he would not allow even the purest Witch Hunter to actually enter the stores. As fastidious and methodical as he is prideful and flamboyant, he will do absolutely everything in his power to keep the stores as safe as they can possibly be.

### **MIDORI, *THE GARDENER***

The gardens of the Mirumoto are simple and plain compared to those owned, or formerly owned, in some cases by the other Great Clans, and their keeper is no less simple and plain. Easily overlooked and generally silent, Midori lives for her work. The garden is the entirety of her world, and if forced to admit it, she cares little for what goes on outside of it. Some may even say that she cares more for the plants than the people who walk among them, and while this is not strictly true, she is certainly more comfortable with the plants than with people. The only real exception is Kyujin, her childhood friend and the palace's ryorishi, who has her maintain an array of herbs in the very practical gardens for his use. She may also allow herself to be engaged by those visitors who share her interest and skill in caring for plants, but for the most part she speaks only if spoken to, and keeps her responses to the minimum required by politeness.

### **KOUMA, *THE STABLEMASTER***

Shiro Mirumoto's aging stablemaster was once a resident of Unicorn lands, until his home, a small village called Yashigi in Tsuriai province controlled by the Utaku, was overrun by Kanpeki's army. His family had previously been forced to leave when the village was burned by the Army of Fire, in Kouma's youth, and had returned when the Dark Oracle's forces were driven out. This time, though, there would be no return, sadly, at least not within Kouma's lifetime. With the Unicorn scattered and returned to their old nomadic ways, he found the Dragon welcomed the experience of one who had served in the legendary stables of the Utaku. He can't pretend to be entirely satisfied with his new home, though as the mountains have no place for horses, and Kouma is as uncomfortable among them as any horse would be. In order to cope with his situation, he's created a project for himself, using those horses entrusted to him by the Dragon as the stock for a new breeding program, in which he pairs them with smaller but surer-footed mountain ponies. Though he knows the project won't begin bearing fruit until long after he's gone and he intends to pass it on to his son, also called Kouma, who'd rather tend the many temples in the castle, but he hopes to produce a tough and careful breed that will thrive among the mountains of his new masters. In the meantime, though, he takes excellent care of any other horses entrusted to him by the few visitors

that appear in the area, and is quite friendly toward those who share his appreciation for his majestic beasts.

**SUMI, NORIKO, AND REI, *THE FOLKS WHO DO THE LAUNDRY***

Perhaps no better mill exists for rumors, anecdotes, and tall tales than a place where multiple people gather, doing repetitive and menial labors with their mouths free to take on other pursuits. The three sisters tasked with washing the clothes of the many guests of this winter court are complete strangers to the variety of colors and patterns presented by so many courtiers. Curiosity, fear and quite possibly envy paint their conversations. Sumi takes a keen interest in wrinkle patterns and small details while Noriko tries to puzzle out the reasons why someone would wear a particular pattern. Rei speaks the least but attempts to put situations in context whenever she has something to say.

**TWO HEAVENS VILLAGE**

**KITSUKI CHIHIRO, *MAGISTRATE***

The very portrait of a bored paper-pusher. Chihiro is certain that her assignment as the magistrate of Two Heaven Village must be a punishment of some kind, as the only matter she ever has to deal with is breaking up the occasional conflicts between noodle cooks Gorobei and Kayo when their competition gets out of hand. Otherwise, even as the world burns, Two Heavens Village remains quiet and as close to normal as can be found anywhere these days. Only a few years ago, just past her gempukku, she thrilled at the idea of becoming a magistrate, seeing herself riding forth to right wrongs and triumph over the growing darkness that spreads over the land...only to find out that what the job mostly consisted of was assessing and collecting provincial taxes, receiving and proclaiming orders sent from the Mirumoto court, and endless, useless documentation of the day-to-day drudgery she's found in her new home. Consumed by boredom, she craves novelty, and is often the first, even beating out the village's headman, to come forth to greet new visitors, hoping that they bring interesting stories to entertain her or troubles she can make excuses to involve herself in. Some may find her nosy or think her an interfering busy-body, but she's far past caring about what other people think about her. What Chihiro doesn't know, and can never be told, is that her assignment here was the result of a cryptic comment issued from the Togashi of the High House of Light to Mirumoto Shikei as she apparently has some great purpose to fulfill, and doing so means being in Two Heavens Village...

**TAMORI MEI, *MAGICAL FLOWER MERCHANT***

Do you need an anemone to convince your would-be paramour or your sincerity? Or perhaps one requires a cactus flower when a red camellia just does not titillate nerves in that same alluring manner that goes with your poem? Is it the dead of winter and none of those flowers are in season? Tamori Mei has just the solution. A somewhat eccentric priestess, Mei offers her services in exchange for peculiar favors that would only make sense to one who speaks with the kami more than people. She listens to her patrons with half-interest and often requests anecdotes or seemingly trivial items for the blossoms she cultivates. Though her mannerisms could be interpreted as aloof, she has displeased very few and has garnered the respect of many courtiers who visit this far into the mountains.

**HIROKI, *VILLAGE HEADMAN***

Two Heavens Village's young headman is new to the job, having only claimed the position within the past few months from his recently-deceased grandmother. Hiroki still wears white in mourning, and the people of the village understand as his grandmother's wisdom was renowned throughout the region, and neither he nor anyone else thinks he can come close to matching her. As a result, he goes out of his way to ensure the well-being of his people, even if it means hurting himself, in the hopes that he will be able to earn the respect due to his position. As a result, Hiroki is often injured and exhausted and, in contrast to the norm found elsewhere in the Empire, lives just as simply as his people, if not even more so, as he is always ready to spend what money he has to better someone else's life. Perhaps his one real failing is his distrust of samurai as though he shows proper respect toward them, of course, he is quite aware that while the social order is collapsing, there is still a gap between "samurai problems" and "the problems of the people", as he puts it. He is, quietly, an ardent supporter of the Last Legion, and hopes that their successes will eventually force the upper classes to take notice of the common folk and to care more for their needs.

#### *KINCHO, THE INNKEEPER*

The proprietor of the Laughing Badger Inn keeps a jovial manner towards all of his guests, even in such a bleak age. Perhaps easy enough for him to claim, his establishment came to being only a season before the Spider Clan's initial assault and has never suffered hardship. Many in the village consider Kincho blessed by Daikoku and the opulence of his accommodations do nothing to hide such. He flaunts his wealth as much as he is willing to share it. He also gives strange address to his guests, referring to them by descriptors rather than names. The only matter he appears to take with great seriousness is his strange assortment of sake which he is very particular about. Oddly enough, he has never appeared drunk, which the people chalk up to as just another eccentricity of his they are perfectly willing to tolerate.

#### *DAREMO, SUSPICIOUSLY WELL-SUPPLIED MERCHANT*

Need a letter sent? Ask after Daremo. Looking for a hard-to-get ingredient for your meal? Check Daremo's cart. Perhaps you want some Kaiu steel, or Ivory from Zogeku? Shards of stone from the Shattered Archipelago? Or maybe a glass oil lamp from Medinaat Al Salaam is more to your tastes. Whatever you need, Daremo is the one to see about it. The jovial middle aged man is Two Heavens Village's best kept secret, so well kept that his name is all most know about him. Rumors mark him as having done a favor for the Mirumoto long ago, a favor that buys him the right to come and go as he pleases. Others think him some strange sort of monk in service of Daikoku, spreading wealth wherever he goes. Yet more place him as the shamed scion of a vassal family, kept in good standing by the actions of his kin. Whatever the case may be, Daremo has friends in all places, and goes places that any heimen would never dare be seen. He spends much of the year travelling, delivering letters and filling orders from his Empire-wide sources. The only effect that the ongoing apocalypse seems to have had on his business is that prices for items commonly found in the now occupied Onyx Empire have gone up, and he has come home for the winter a touch earlier than years past. Despite this, his carts are as full as ever, and if you have coin to spend or goods to barter with, Daremo can get you what you need.

#### *GION, OKASAN OF THE LITTLE CROW'S PERCH*

Rare is the soul that has something unflattering to say about Gion or her geisha. Some have made off-hand comments about her entertainment only to find themselves in very awkward company. Many samurai at the castle have taken her for a surrogate mother figure, spreading simple wisdom and joy that they would have received in their own homes. All the while, she collects handsome sums of wealth by any standard. Nights at the Little Crows Perch are lit by clever games, riddles, and

its own share of song and dance that is not without some intellectual pursuit behind it. Any hinin of Rokugan would seem envious of Gion's life, but each year passes with just a little more dye in her hair and a thicker layer of makeup. She looks to her girls and worries. She looks to her actual daughter and imagines horror. An illegitimate child from a wishfully forgotten affair, Suneki had at one time nearly been her ruin, preventing any chance of Gion finding a decent purchase of her contract. That debt has since been paid many times over but the love of a mother has only dampened her spirits in these dark times. Gion hears horrors about the world below the mountains and would go to any lengths to protect her.

#### **KENICHI, *CERAMIC ARTIST***

The proprietor of Five Rings Pottery is quite a capable worker of clay, but that's not the most important thing about him. He has put himself in a position to hear about everything that happens in the area, and that's just how he likes it. Nearly everyone from Two Heavens Village, Shiro Mirumoto, and the smaller surrounding settlements needs to do business with him at some point, and while Kenichi prepares whatever they might need from him, they talk...sometimes, perhaps, about more than they realize. Kenichi is a skilled conversationalist, having a natural talent for guiding conversations and asking subtle, probing questions that courtiers across the Empire would kill for. While some may use the information he acquires as a source of blackmail, or to develop political strategies, Kenichi just gathers his intelligence for the sheer joy of having it. He likes knowing about the things people hide, even from themselves, but wouldn't think of doing anything as crass as putting that information up for sale. Maybe, one day, he'll write down the really interesting tales he's heard, once he learns how to read and write, of course, and leave them for someone else who enjoys such things as much as he does, but for now, he is all too happy for the secrets he's collected to be his and no one else's.

#### **GOROBEI, *NOODLE COOK***

In terms of quality, Gorobei is the superior noodle cook in Two Heavens Village, and everyone knows it. Why, then, must he struggle to retain his customers? Simply put, it's because Kayo is able to undercut Gorobei's prices while getting preferential treatment from the ryorishi, Kyujin, who was once old Kayo's favored apprentice. At least, that's the story that Gorobei will tell, gladly and at length, to anyone who seems even slightly willing to listen. In truth, the rivalry began years ago, when Gorobei too was Kayo's apprentice but unlike Kayo and Kyujin, Gorobei never got along with his master due to the former's perfectionism and overly-fixed and closed mindset. Finally, when he had at last had enough of Kayo's "slapdash" approach to cooking, exacerbated by his frustration at seeing the very experimental chef Kyujin elevated as Shiro Mirumoto's ryorishi, Gorobei broke away and opened his own shop, promising his customers "noodles done RIGHT". He has some regulars who appreciate his good and consistent offerings, enough to keep him in business, but the years of competition seem to have had absolutely no impact on Kayo at all. Perhaps there is nothing in the world that irritates Gorobei more...

#### **KAYO THE THIRTEENTH, *NOODLE COOK***

Two Heavens Village's ORIGINAL noodle cook, and never mind that Gorobei fellow. Old Kayo has trained just about every peasant cook in the region worth speaking of, teaching them the art of "cooking by the heart", as he calls it. Kayo prides himself for his speed and experimental approach to cooking, always being willing to consider a new way of doing things. Sometimes it means his food isn't as good as it should be, but that worries him not at all as such is the price of true genius. His product isn't nearly as good as Gorobei's, but as Kayo is quick to remind his customers, not only is it ready faster, but it has a "comfortable" taste that you can only get from someone who

really puts himself into every bowl he makes, rather than the "stale" taste one would get from a cook who only prepares his food by the book. As Gorobei suspects, Kayo enjoys a productive relationship with his former pupil, the ryorishi Kyujin, who does make sure his old master gets the first pick of fresh, quality ingredients. Maybe Kayo can't do proper justice by these superior ingredients, but he's certain that the quality of a dish must be measured not only by how good it tastes, but also by the spirit and dedication of the cook.

#### OTARU THE SECOND, *ARTIST*

Once a young refugee from the City of the Rich Frog, Otaru spends his hours painting and carving as his father had. Sadly, his education was never complete. Otaru the First had been a splendid woodblock printer and was spoken well of throughout the city. Tragically, he fell to Kanpeki's armies in the initial wave of the assault on Rokugan. His son struggled to remember what he could from the lessons he gleaned as a boy, but most of his time had been preoccupied raising a sister, Ogiue, who had then still been a mere toddler. He took odd jobs serving food and even worked in the local "fishery" for a time. He saved money to buy art supplies and built from scratch what he could not procure, recreating some semblance of his father's craft. Still, Otaru had half the talent and little read on his own style to be an effective artist. Only the occasional boon of a single merchant, Daremo, who passes by twice a year seems to keep his business afloat. Though such a gift may seem lucky, Otaru finds himself depressed to no end. He speaks very rarely to those even in the village and lets Ogiue to do most of the talking for the family business.

#### OGIUE, *ART MERCHANT*

Little business to do with art happens around Shiro Mirumoto. Setting up shop in the Dragon mountains did not improve prospects for Ogiue and her big brother who, upon settling, realized that the more complex tastes of the Dragon did not fit with their lowland aesthetics that were far more likely to appeal to the tastes of city dwellers. Top that with years of war pressuring the Empire and there seemed little interest in their art. For many years, Ogiue watched her brother struggle to adapt to their new life until she was able to sell one of her brother's works to a suspiciously well-supplied merchant. Otaru's sister now manages the shop and gleefully sets to that task for their patrons. Still, Ogiue looks to her brother's sadness and sees the loss she never knew. At every chance, she seeks to reward the sacrifices Otaru made for her but fears her efforts may never be enough.