

## **THE CURRENT STATES OF CLANS AND FACTIONS**

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### **CRAB CLAN**

No one has been more prepared or willing to fight Kanpeki's hordes than the children of Hida. After the initial successes of the Spider Clan in conquering territory, per the order of their lord, the Kaiu Family has redoubled their task in developing war machines to counter the massive oni and other misbegotten beasts of the Shadowlands. As a result, the Crab Clan has ignited something of a brief industrial era, developing assembly line siege weapons at a rapid pace. Kaiu engineers work countless hours researching and testing war machines designed to crush, impale, and set their enemies ablaze. Meanwhile, many had been taken off the rice fields to work assembly.

When the first of these machines were presented to the Emperor, they were met with enthusiastic approval and the Clan was granted the duty of wiping out the Spider Clan once and for all. For several years, they carved major inroads towards the reconquest of the Southern Empire and perhaps to the fright of the other Clans, capitalized on their efforts prestige in the courts. However, such did not come without drawing ire. Because their efforts involved the exploitation of the Kitsune Forest for its vast lumber supply, the Kitsune family were quick to protest. However, their pleas were muted that so many Clans had already geared their own resources towards fighting Kanpeki and making many questionable sacrifices in doing so.

After retaking Seikitsu Pass, the criticisms were silenced for a time. That was when Kanpeki reappeared and snapped the Crab Army in two. The Crab, who had protected the Wall with such monumental effort for centuries, had to complete their duty with an extended supply line that they did not have the means to defend properly. As a consequence, the Crab's powerbase has now been cut in two. The bulk of their army gleans what they can from the lands of the Matsu family while their more fortified brethren hunker down in their castles and walls far to the south.

Tensions between the two strongest military factions are at a peak. The Crab's seeming failure disgusts the Lion while the orphaned Crab army is quick to retort with the Lion Clan's own failures in defending their own lands. Akodo Kano's assumption of the Shogun role has relieved the tension somewhat, by assigning them to defend the bridge at Ikeda Toshi, granting the Crab a duty while keeping the armies from direct confrontation. Such still does not bode well for the pride of the Lion who see the Crab's draining of their resources as a potential drain on their glory. The Crab commander, Kaiu Toshiaka stands indifferent of the plight of the Lion, focusing all his attention on building defenses rather than bonds of trust between the two forces. The Matsu fume as the Emperor holds so many Crab to his ear, disinterested and wholly concerned with only the effectiveness of their defense.

At the current time, the Crab maintain a high standing in courts, capitalizing on their initial military successes and many still see them as the Empire's best hope for defeating Kanpeki. However, that reputation wanes with each passing season, as many see the ill they cause could very well scar them worse than the cure they offer.

### **CRANE CLAN**

When the Crane Clan set out to do something, it gets done. Unfortunately for the Crane, the costs of their efforts grow with every passing season.

The Clan of Doji has taken up arms, marching against the forces of darkness to strike where they can, while still maintaining their borders' security. It is a thankless task, as it demands putting forward a much harsher visage than they are comfortable with. Indeed, though the Doji make their presence known in every land still capable of holding court, they are dismayed to find out that the opinion of the other Clans is slowly but surely shifting to hold the Daidoji as the true faces of the Crane.

To find the reasons for this shift in attitude, one need look no further than the lands of the Crane themselves. While the interior of the Clan's territory remains much the same as it has been in more civilized times, the borders are an ever-fluctuating picture of an Empire in turmoil.

On the coast, hard-eyed scouts watch the waters for any sign that the horrors from the sea have come again, dealing with the remnants of the Mantis Clan through gritted teeth in order to patrol whatever villages are most easily reached by boat. Their watch has been fruitless so far, as the threats in the waters seem to have been quelled, but the nightmare has only begun. The samurai whose blades grow rusty and dull watching for an incursion that does not come can only watch, seething with impotent fury, as the fishermen whom they guard draw haul after haul of inedible garbage from the polluted waters. They are instructed to sharply control morale in their provinces, as even the slightest panic over the coming famine would ignite a flame not easily quenched.

Further inland, the Crane still control much of their lands, but it would be unfair to say that they have held their borders. Rather, in the sprawling years of violence, their lands have been in a state of flux, as either side has seized the same land from the other multiple times during lulls in the relative strengths. The lands of the Crane, once renowned for their beauty, are now irreparably scarred, the landscape marred with the blood of samurai and demons alike. Blackened pockmarks in the terrain are evidence of the heavy and frequent use of Gaijin Pepper explosive weaponry, which the Clan has been manufacturing and stockpiling ever since receiving permission to use it openly against the enemies of the Empire. Currently, with Kanpeki having halted his offensive, there exists a wide no-man's-land in the Kosaten Province, both sides watching each other warily from over hastily constructed fortifications. The once-fertile farmlands have been trampled and incinerated numerous times, leading some to question whether or not they will ever bear crops again. With their peasants dying at the hands of demons, resorting to banditry, or fleeing to join the Last Legion, others question who would harvest them if they did?

Politically, the Crane remain a dominant force by the sheer force of will of their courtiers. The apocalyptic situation brewing in their lands over the lack of available foodstuffs has been reason enough for them to call in every debt, every favor that anyone remaining in power has ever owed them to try to recoup their losses. Unfortunately, no matter how skilled their courtiers, no matter how deep their influence runs, they are quickly finding out that simply willing supplies to exist does not make them appear.

## **DRAGON CLAN**

The Dragon Clan is in one of the best positions of any of the Clans remaining in power. There is a certain irony in the fact that the Dragon, whose lands provide meager crops in the best of years, is

perhaps the least affected Clan in these times of famine. Simply put, the populace of the Dragon are inured to fasting, and the samurai have long gotten sustenance from “Mountain Tuna” (goat meat) and other sources of nutrition that the more egalitarian Clans disdain as impure or fit only for heimin.

Their mountain home has prevented the worst of the conflict that has scorched the earth of Rokugan from reaching their lands. Only the very edges of their territory have known combat, and even then their forces defended from a position of strength.

This is not to say that the samurai of the Dragon have not seen any battle, however. There is a stark divide in the Clan of Togashi that has only grown wider as the years have gone on. The younger generations, especially those of the Mirumoto family, have been anxious to directly engage the threat of Kanpeki. Full of the confidence of youth and innocence born of being relatively safe throughout the worst of the calamity, they are not aware of the true horror that lurks outside their borders. As such, those that have disobeyed their elders and broken isolation have either quickly and ignominiously perished or fallen in with one of the few militant factions still able to make a stand against the darkness.

The older generations are hidebound with not only tradition, but with fear. While they publicly set forth the image of calm wisdom that has been the face of the Dragon since the dawn of time, the isolationists among the Togashi are especially cautious. With the revelation that the tattoos of all living members of the family were drawn with Kokujin’s technique, they are wary of their own powers turning against the Empire, especially considering the rise of the Order of the Dark Lotus. These and other concerns are hidden behind the veneer of traditional mysticism that the Dragon cultivate.

The inner circle of the Dragon Clan, mysterious and aloof even by the standards of the Clan of Togashi, are the ones that decided to take in the Emperor when he and his family fled the capital city. There are rumors that the coming Winter Court is as much their doing as it is Iweko Seiken’s. How much truth there is to the rumors is hard to say, but the plans of the Dragon are far-reaching, and most of their own members even see only a small part of the grand scheme.

## **LAST LEGION**

The newest players on the board, the Last Legion must cope with a simple fact: No matter what prestigious names back them, they are never more than a hair’s-breadth from total annihilation.

The Last Legion began with simple enough roots: Moto Taigo, formerly Shogun of the Empire, drew the survivors of the Imperial Legions to his banner, along with thousands of ashigaru who had heard about the legendary hero of the people. He was later joined by the Unicorn guerillas, the few Lion that survived the taking of Toshi Ranbo, and a smattering of other deserters from the Clans armies. The Crab who became separated from the bulk of their army. The Phoenix, who disagreed with the use of Ryu. The Mantis who did not join Yoritomo Ichido. The Spider who remained loyal to the Emperor.

The bulk of the samurai force is the dishonored seeking redemption, those who survive against all odds, or simply those who have lost hope in the wake of Tengoku’s silence and wish for a glorious end. Outnumbering them by far are the peasant caste, who come for their own reasons. Some were

trained by the Unicorn in the arts of war, and left their lords' lands to join the Legion. Some lost their lands and were abandoned by their Clans, so have come looking for sanctuary. Yet more of them heard by word of mouth of the army where Rokugani fight side-by-side regardless of birth.

Their purpose has been simple: To defeat the Shadowlands at all costs. Reinforced by jade heirlooms, legitimately owned or looted from wreckage, they were instrumental in securing the coastline against the horrors from the sea in the months following the fall of the Mantis isles. However, as the years have gone on, tolerance among the Clans for their activities has only waned. Year after year, more of the heimin that support the infrastructure of the Clans have vanished to swell the ranks of the Legion, with the harsh treatment intended to keep them in line only inspiring further desertion. This and the flagrant flouting of Rokugan's caste system lead opinions to range from suspicion to outright hostility.

On the other side of the conflict, the Spider regard the Legion as a thorn in their side, almost as much as one of the Great Clans. Not only did they undo their progress from the sea, but they have inspired the heimin of the Empire to fight back. While any Clan samurai might be worth 20 ashigaru in a fight, the heimin of the Empire number far more than a simple 20:1 ratio, and the simple act of an undefended village offering unexpected and effective resistance damages the Spider's ability to fully break the Empire. The Last Legion represents hope, and that, mingled with their intimate connections to Shibatsu and the Susumu, is why Daigotsu Kanpeki will never forgive them.

The Legion is holding fairly well against the specter of famine, as they have access to both the rich farmlands surrounding Otosan Uchi and a massive workforce familiar with the ins and outs of agriculture. In addition, the samurai of the Legion tend towards the pragmatic, having already traded pride for survival and a last shot at glory.

The current leadership of the Last Legion is Moto Taigo and Mirumoto Tsuda, advised by Akodo Dairuko and Moto Chinua. They have a functional working relationship with Susumu nee Iweko Shibatsu and his Emerald Spider, but internal tensions prevent them from bringing him fully on to the war council.

## **LJON CLAN**

The Clan of Akodo has always been defined by its relationship to the Imperial Dynasty, acting as their Right Hand for over a thousand years. When the Hantei fell on the Second Day of Thunder, it was one of their own who assumed their place as Emperor. Perhaps ironically, the old Hantei continue to define the Lion Clan's status in the Age of Ruin with Daigotsu Kanpeki's rise to power.

The majority of their fortresses and cities have been razed to the ground, their peasantry was slaughtered wholesale and the precise military machine they built over centuries was dismantled by the unorthodox tactics of Kanpeki's cleverest generals. Even the glory of Daigotsu Ookami's apparent demise was stolen from them by the Spider's counterpart loyal to the Emperor's brother, Susumu Shibatsu. When Kanpeki laid siege to Toshi Ranbo, it was their Champion who charged to the Emperor's defense. When the Emperor fled for Otosan Uchi and the protection of Shibatsu's Spider Clan, it was their forces who stayed to fight the enemy to the bitter end and they swallowed that bitterness with the hearts of true Samurai. Their loyalty was never rewarded.

The Lion Clan has grown weary of Iweko II's eccentric tendencies. His strange behaviors were easy to tolerate at first. His strange choice of wedding Hida Ayameko over their proposed consort was somewhat understandable, but his management of the armies grew strategically more and more bizarre as time approached the Battle of Kintani Valley. When the Imperial Legions were at last broken, all hope drained of a decisive recovery of their lands. From that time, the attitude of the Clan towards the Emperor has only grown sour. He takes ill strategic advice from less honorable clans while hiding behind walls built by his brother. All the while, his ear stands close to that brother's repugnant philosophies antithetical to Bushido.

For a generation now, they have stood at the frontline of a defensive war with only a few of their castles standing between Otosan Uchi and Kanpeki's so-called Onyx Empire. With the Ikoma family nearly lost, the Lion Clan are at the lowest point of their power as a political force, but should not be counted out militarily. The leadership structure remains mostly intact and their logistical and tactical prowess keeps their fief barely viable. Kanpeki's famine has cut them deeper than most and it may be only a matter of time before honor is their last sustenance. The greatest glimmer of hope is Akodo Kano's assumption of the role of Shogun and the prospect that his leadership skills can beckon the Empire's remaining forces to unite and coordinate a proper reconquest of Rokugan. They watch the Emperor, waiting for a legal recourse to wrest control from him and perhaps return order.

### **COLONIAL MANTIS CLAN**

The fate of those in the Mantis Clan isolated in the Colonies have been radically different from those left to their near demise in Rokugan proper. Resources are abundant, though even as hazards such as exotic diseases and forces of nature abound, such is nothing the children of storms cannot weather. With the Spider Clan having abandoned the region entirely and many of other Clans gearing their resources into defending their home, the venturesome among the Clan have been left to fill the power vacuum and reform the Colonies to their will.

Yoritomo Aranai, with her territorial conquests and prolific record for being able to defend them had first assumed the Clan's leadership role. The news of the Clan's destruction in the homeland only led her to redouble efforts to claim lands that other Clans thought to cling for their own. So it was for several years until a man named Arashi appeared. The man had a withered left arm and carried only a kama he procured from a farmer. Two strange women followed in his wake. Offering his service, he soon proved indispensable to Aranai as a tactical adviser. Her sudden confidence in Arashi was not lost on the Samurai under her and they were suspicious at first, but were very quickly convinced by his leadership skills. Such overwhelming success was not lost on the Colonial Governess Otomo Sukihime. She attempted to have Arashi assassinated and when that attempt failed, Aranai and Arashi struck back with a coup of the Second City. With Sukihime in chains, Arashi handed her over to the Unicorn Clan with a message for the Emperor of Rokugan, *The Colonies are mine and I am your equal. Stand with us or fall to Kanpeki.*

Arashi's words reflect much of the sentiment of many colonial Rokugani. So much of the populace had consisted of dejected Samurai and heimin seeking better lives in the wake of the Destroyer War, but native Rokugani, especially those in power, saw the foreign remnants of the Ivory Kingdoms as disposable and never gave them a thought beyond resource exploitation to improve their Celestial-inspired homeland. Arashi's coup had forced a shift in that dynamic in hopes that more respect can be garnered for those residing in the lands his forces occupied. But to he and his Mantis Clan, subservience is not the answer. Many samurai with tenuous loyalties have flocked to his banner, while others keep their old identities, paying the new Warlord tribute despite personal

apprehensions. The Colonies grow further under his control with each passing season. Arashi rules the Second City with an open palm forged of steel. The peasantry are taxed less and the remaining Ivindi are granted more respect than in previous years. Those who rebel against his rule however, are swiftly dealt with by his new Storm Legion.

An internal rift, however, has gradually torn in the new Mantis Banner. Some samurai wish to continue paying respects to their families back home and seek unity with those remaining in Rokugan. Many are worried about the fates of their brothers as the Empire continues to be ravaged by war and famine. Arashi however, appears to carry a strong vendetta with the man laying claim to the title *Savior of Storms*. Yoritomo Ichido is regarded by Arashi personally as an usurper of his rightful place as head of the Mantis, a Clan founded on rebellion and driven by ambition. Whether this ambition will lead to their greatness or final destruction is between them.

### ***NATIVE MANTIS CLAN***

The Storm is broken, but the children of Osano Wo remain, scattered by the winds and searching for a way. Once one of the richest clans in the Empire, that wealth was lost with the corrupt tsunami that swept away their island holdings. What remains of the Mantis navy are a motley collection of a few ships that avoided the devastation through mere chance. The clan's mainland holdings that were once the ancestral lands of their respective minor clans are theirs again but tenuously. The core of their power lost, the Kitsune, Tsuruchi and Moshi families face the Empire's enemies without the backing of Yoritomo military and financial might. The consequences have been dire.

The Tsuruchi have abandoned Kyuden Ashinagabachi after a protracted stand-off and have since retreated to the mountains, subsisting off whatever game they can hunt. The Kitsune are twice victims of war from both sides. The Crab Clan violated their sacred forests to feed their war machines, angering the spirits dwelling within and cursing all who dare cross it. Years later, the forces of Jigoku had their way. Daigotsu Kanpeki claimed their castle in his campaign against the Crab and propped a walking horror into their seat of power. Of the Moshi, they carry the burden of an existential crisis. The Heavens distance themselves from the mortal world. Thrice in a century, the Sun they worship has abandoned them as their protection had grown increasingly dependent on the strong arm of the Yoritomo family and even they have been cast aside. The more traditional matriarchs of the family desperately attempt to atone for the crimes of others. Some of their shugenja commit seppuku in disgust. Others seek amends in battle against Kanpeki's forces.

As to the Yoritomo, a Samurai named Yoritomo Ichido stepped up to the challenge of rebuilding the clan. The sacred kama of the Son of Storms mysteriously passed to him and after the escape of his crew from a desolate rock in the midst of the ocean, Ichido salvaged the remaining Mantis fleet, setting the Clan's new base of power at Kyuden Kumiko. From there, the Savior of Storms seized back the shattered remains of their island home in order to rebuild, reigned the Moshi back into the Mantis fold and promised the Kitsune back their lands in exchange for fealty- a promise he has prioritized but has yet to make good on.

In his quest to bring the Mantis back to their former glory, Ichido has determined to replicate the success of their ancestors' history of piracy and raiding tactics. Sadly, the Clan has been cut-off from their colonial holdings and they cannot spare a single ship to make rendezvous. The Mantis in the colonies have been left to fend for themselves and Ichido is eager to find any manner by which he can make contact with them. The Winter Court in the Dragon land appear to be a prime opportunity to harness that lost strength. Should any Mantis from the colonies make their presence

known, they will be welcomed back with open arms to help rebuild the destruction of their homeland. However, ill rumors persist that the colonies are now controlled by a charismatic warlord, Arashi, who flies the Mantis banner and scoffs at Imperial fealty while denouncing Ichido's own position as Champion. Should these rumors prove true, Ichido is bound by honor- and his own pride to deal with him.

### **PHOENIX CLAN**

The Phoenix Clan have finally succumbed fully to their hubris, and all of Rokugan suffers the consequences. The devout Clan of Shiba turned out to be the straw that broke the camel's back in regards to the divide between Ningen-do and Tengoku.

Their brashness may have cost the Empire the support of the Heavens, but the forces that it bought have been a boon to the Phoenix's military efforts. Only the Dragon have lost less territory, and with their farmlands and food stores unburnt, the Phoenix stand to weather the famine for a few years more than any Clan without changing their ways. It would be short-sighted of the Phoenix to not extend their stores further by adopting a more varied diet, but they no longer think in the long-term. The reasons for this are twofold:

First, the Phoenix have successfully held their borders, but in doing so have adopted an isolationist policy. Few come and go by the Phoenix border, a state that most attribute to the remaining members of the Elemental Council. The position of Master of Earth has stood vacant for years, and no word from the Colonies has given any indication that the Master of Void is still alive, but the remaining Council members are being incredibly slow in selecting replacements. Some whisper in furtive tones that the remaining members are divided on how to select one, as with the treachery that led to the death of the Fire Dragon, they are divided as to whether magical potency should take a back seat to unswerving loyalty. Whatever the case may be, two seats remain open on the Council, and the borders are sealed tightly.

The second reason for the short-sighted nature of Phoenix policy is that one of their primary methods of determining the correct course of action has become unreliable of late. There is uncertainty as to whether the separation of Heaven or Kanpeki's sundering of the Seals is to blame, but divination no longer seems to give sound advice. Stars seem to shift nightly in their constellations, coins land on their sides, tea leaves tell of naught but fog and gloom. Several prominent military maneuvers were made acting on faulty omens before the researchers connected the dots as to the source of the string of failures. Now, several Phoenix of high stature have devoted their entire effort towards solving the conundrum, as their purpose has been called into question by less couth members of the Clan.

Bereft of information as they are, they still opened their gates to one of the last surviving Miya, carrying an invitation to a Winter Court at Shiro Mirumoto. The Council debates nightly on who they should send, as after their patience was tried by previous delegations, they have decided to have much more of a direct hand in this delegation.

### **SCORPION CLAN**

The Scorpion Clan do as they always do: They prosper, regardless of who is in power.

The Clan of Bayushi plays a dangerous game by siding with the mercurial evil that is Daigotsu Kanpeki. On the one hand, their Champion has allied them with the most powerful faction in Rokugan in these trying times. On the other hand, the cost of that alliance has been the banishment of almost half of their clan back to the distant Sands, and the remaining half is infiltrated from within by the forces of the Lying Darkness. The practice of Shadow Branding has granted strength to secretive elements of the Scorpion long suppressed while compromising the integrity of the Clan as a whole. Trust is the watchword of the Scorpion, a core tenant that has been tried to the point of breaking with this dark alliance.

However, the Scorpion abroad are not idle. They have set to work combating old enemies, calling on ties both old and new for additional strength, and have established a base of power where once they were slaves. In the Jewel of the Desert, they have made contact with the Unicorn expedition that went abroad seeking allies, and have joined forces with their fellow Rokugani to re-enter the Empire. Some of their number ride, unmasked and wearing purple, among the Unicorn, utilizing skirmish tactics so that those they strike never have time to guess at the poor horsemanship and traditional features among the rougher Unicorn.

As is natural for the Scorpion, not all is as it seems. Those Scorpion that remain by their Champion's side note that the corrupted elements of their Clan are occasionally given tasks that, coincidentally, take place at the same time as different missions undertaken by pure agents, placed so that never the two shall meet. The "Traitors" have likewise slipped out of Unicorn camps unnoticed to attend clandestine meetings before returning, while their fellows divert attention from their absence. Bayushi Nitoshi is playing games, using the lives of the Scorpion as his pieces, and not even those closest to him know exactly what the objectives of his games are.

With Kanpeki having called a cease-fire, the Scorpion can once again take to the battlefield of Court, where they not only excel, but act as cooler heads for the courtiers of the Empire to interact with in favor of the Daigotsu. However, they no longer come as peers, but as emissaries from a nearby and dangerous enemy nation, whose power is behind their every "request." Woe betide the foolish courtier who should forget such a fact, for the yojimbo of the Scorpion are now Spider samurai not exactly known for their controlled tempers, and slights are often answered swiftly and brutally. The Scorpion courtiers, as a result, can get away with much more than before in terms of insults and disrespect, for their opponents are hesitant to anger the lightly-napping Oni behind them.

As far as the state of the Empire, the Scorpion are hardly noticing the famine. A large portion of their forces do not need to care if their fare is corrupted, while the remaining population can subsist off of the supplies that the Tainted do not need. Meanwhile, the Traitor Scorpion have only small numbers in the Empire, who can forage along with the other Unicorn, while the bulk of their kin feast in the rich palaces of the Jewel.

### **EMERALD SPIDER CLAN**

Samurai of the Spider who remained loyal to the Emerald Empire struggled to find relevance under a banner that stood for conquest, yet held a comparably pitiful standing army left with which to conquer. Emperor Seiken's initial plan to turn the Spider against a possible Yodotai incursion was dashed with Kanpeki's rebuke and the mass defection of the Daigotsu family. His brother, Iweko Shibatsu, had taken his place and left to reorganize what pieces remained.



What the Emerald Spider have lacked in force and numbers, they have compensated with guile, tact and more than one great risk that has paid dividends. Shibatsu's leadership may have been suitable for an Emperor once, but now those few directly under his command reap the benefits of his skill and daring. The reclamation of Otosan Uchi through the blood of a dead foreign god has been their defining moment, acting as a beacon of awe to many while granting Shibatsu a growing aura of fear at those who distrust his dabbling in bizarre magics. There are still many samurai who refuse to set foot in the rebuilt capital. Shibatsu has also assumed the gambit of realigning the loyalties of his brother's enemies, one he plans to unveil at the next winter court.

Of the few members of the Daigotsu family remaining, they have assumed the stance of keeping the family name in order to further agitate their treacherous brothers. They fight to maintain a proper dojo and find revising or refining their more advanced techniques to be a formidable challenge. They still seek the power to bend the will of men, but doing so without the blessing of their founder may prove that they are nothing unless they can become equal monsters.

The Gyushi family's role as weapon-smiths have only expanded thanks to the efforts of Gyushi Kageto. While it has not been unheard of for shugenja to take on the role of smiths, no shugenja family before has placed such emphasis on the forge over the temple. To them, a temple to the Fortunes is as much a tribute to the hands that built it as to the god it's dedicated to. The act of creation itself is a form of worship but also an expression of self. Action defines one's karma and forges the soul. To create then, is to emulate the gods. To create weapons is show one is a god to be feared. That a priest would choose to sculpt a statue over kneeling before one is only natural to the Gyushi.

The Susumu family have never played from a position of strength in courts and Kanpeki's early attempt to assassinate the whole lot them ended with nearly half escaping and causing endless frustration for his armies. Almost immediately, they worked to form a counter-intelligence network under Shibatsu's command. Kanpeki's spies were slain or misdirected and many goju even fell to the wiles of a Susumu courtier who just happened to make convenient friends with an perceptive magistrate. The small family has proven if nothing else, useful to the Empire.

The Order of the Spider remain loyal to Shibatsu for the time-being if only because he has proven his strength in ways that continue to surprise them. Master Sora watches the fledgling great clan and Emperor they swear to with caution. Kanpeki dominates, yet, Seiken's Empire continues to hold tenaciously. The Order sees the Emerald Spider as ultimate question of their path: Is power without restraint the only strength worth pursuing? Or is Path of Victory forged of something far more human?

### **ONYX SPIDER CLAN**

To crush one's enemies underfoot and hear their lamentations. Such has been the uniting motivator for the Spider Clan that have founded the Onyx Empire. Daigotsu Kanpeki long remembered the echoes of his father's voice, instilling thoughts of greatness and destiny. Those ideas felt so distant when his father ascended and struck his bargain with the Empress Iweko. He was ripped from his family and raised by fops and fragile aristocrats who feared his potential. When the chance once again came for greatness, he seized the opportunity to train with the Order of the Spider and endured grueling years of training to harness his power. When he became of age, again, he suffered the foolishness of those who feared him and was sent to the colonies to claim vast lands and

resources for an Empire that wanted little to do with him. But it was his demotion by the Empress' successor that at last crushed his will to tolerate them.

In the ensuing years of devastation, the Spider Clan secured many early victories that rippled through the Empire. The breaking of two of the Three Seals of Jigoku, the dismantling of the Lion Clan's armies and the crushing of the Imperial Legions, set pace for the Empire's downfall that had already long-suffered nearly a century of wars from both foreign and civil threats. Only suicidal courage and the will of the Emerald Empire to adopt new tactics actually spared them from being fully overrun. However, in doing so, Kanpeki has affected with change that they would not have otherwise wished on themselves and in their struggle, have granted the new Shadow Emperor some wry delight that he had secretly wished for years.

Kanpeki's eventual trek beyond the mortal plane into the depths of the Second Pit, fraught his generals with seeds of doubt but his eventual return brought not just new power, but new understanding of the nature of the Shadowlands taint. With that, knowledge, Kanpeki at last held the means to conquer the Empire. The sudden halt in hostilities in the year 1216 at first seemed like a blessing to the war-ravaged Rokugani, but more discouraging, only proved the amount of discipline Kanpeki had achieved in his mastery of the taint. The new famine has proven both Kanpeki's guile and boundless cruelty.

In the wake of victory, the newly arisen Onyx Empire has modeled itself after Rokugan's culture as a tongue-in-cheek parody of horrors, a sick joke that keeps going too far. Kanpeki's generals have carved their own fiefs, naming themselves daimyo and champions, slaving their peasantry to collect taxes and ruling through fear of others and each other. Here, only the strong can survive and only the strongest can progress. Though perhaps what the Rokugani find most disturbing, is not how much Daigotsu Kanpeki has changed the Empire, but how much he has chosen to leave the same. The peasants still fear their masters and they are still overtaxed- albeit far more in blood than rice as Kanpeki's undead legions require a fraction of the food supply to sustain themselves, but needs far more bodies. A mirror, even a dim one, still reflects the viewer. Some peasants have even begun to prefer being occasional prey over protracted starvation and grudgingly submit to their new overlords who at least open a hope for higher status through the seduction of Daigotsu's Blessings. Day by day, the strength of the Spider waxes, bringing chaos in one hand and opportunity in a clenched fist.

### **UNICORN CLAN**

The Unicorn are nomadic once more, but hardly by choice. Their lands ravaged by the forces of darkness in the earliest days of the Age of Ruin, they have scattered to the far corners of the Empire. Population-wise, they have been hurt worse than most, and a bare quarter of that reduced number reside within the blasted remains of Rokugan. The bulk of the survivors, under the leadership of Shinjo Min-Hee, have seized Journey's End Keep, where the leadership of the Clan coordinates their movements using the speed of Iuchi and Moto messengers supported by the few Bat shugenja remaining on the plane of Ningen-do.

The most valued resource of the Unicorn lands, their horses, are nearly the sole reason that the Unicorn have been able to survive as they currently do. Even having vast hordes of undead and demons, Kanpeki's forces are simply unable to answer the Unicorn's mobility when they travel through the edges of the Onyx Empire. Inside Rokugan, their tactics are much the same, but they have to evade their fellow samurai as well as the Horde. The Unicorn that remain within the borders

of Rokugan are not welcomed with open arms in many places, for they rely on the heimin of the Empire for supplies. They trade for these vital goods with steel and the training necessary to use it. In their wake, villages stop paying their taxes, communication lines cease to function, and workers trickle off hearing the promise of glory in the Last Legion.

The Unicorn themselves are weathering the fast fairly well. Their numbers have been greatly reduced, but those that remain have been eating a wide variety of foods that the "civilized" clans shun for the length of their lives. Their varied diet allows them to get around the weakness that strikes many others with the waters polluted. In addition, the bulk of their population is situated in the Colonies, where crops are both abundant and varied. Those in the Empire have had to make do on simpler fare, but things as simple as the willingness to eat eggs preserves them from malnutrition.

Politically, the Unicorn are in a dubious position. Their policy of saving the heimin of the Empire by arming and training them has been very successful, but is a double-edged sword. For every village that successfully holds their own against a goblin swarm, another denies access to Clan tax collectors, defending their resources with steel. The Unicorns' actions have saved thousands of peasants, but they may have indirectly caused the death of dozens of samurai. In the eyes of Imperial Rokugan, those dozen lives would be worth tens of thousands of the peasant caste. They have partially avoided retribution for their actions by allying themselves with the Last Legion, for the rebel force welcomes samurai and ashigaru alike with open arms.

Furthermore, the skirmishers within the Empire have recently been reinforced, both militarily and with supplies, by Gaijin. The expedition to the Burning Sands was partially successful, as several factions within Medinaat al-Salaam decided that either the threat posed by Kanpeki would eventually spill beyond Rokugan's borders, or that the Emerald Empire's weakened state offers opportunities for one-sided bargaining for future favors. Their strange magics and foreign tactics are a boon that the Unicorn are uniquely suited to leveraging, but most in Rokugan still hold on to stringent xenophobia. The presence of foreigners amongst the Unicorn wins over few hearts.