

Introduction

Kaimetsu-Uo lashed out with his parangu, cutting away a section of the tough vine wall. The Islands of Spice and Silk were a wild and foreboding place; the jungles at their heart were even more so. The heat had already overcome most of his men. They were used to the temperate lands of the Lion or the cool mountains of the Crab; some had foolishly attempted to brave the jungle while still wearing their armor. Kaimetsu-Uo had at least been wise enough to leave his armor and swords safe on his mother's ship. The exhausted soldiers had been left behind to seek water and recover; he would finish this quest alone if he must. Surprisingly, Kindari had kept pace.

"My lord, we must turn back," the scrawny little scout said, eyes wide as he took in the shadowy vegetation around them. The sun barely shone here; it was an overgrown world of roots and vines, echoing with the cries of strange creatures unknown in Rokugan.

"We cannot turn back," Kaimetsu-Uo replied. He continued hacking his way through the unforgiving jungle. The former Crab was stripped to the waist, thick body streaked with grime and sweat from the endless labor. "We cannot give up when we are nearly there."

"How can you be sure we are nearly there?" Kindari asked sharply. "None live who have seen the one you seek! We do not even know if the tales are true! We have searched for weeks!" Kaimetsu-Uo turned, seizing the smaller samurai by his collar. "These tales were passed down from my grandfather," he snarled, eyes narrowing. "Would you call my grandfather a liar?"

Kindari only shook his head slightly, too terrified to reply. His eyes fixed fearfully on the short chopping blade in Kaimetsu-Uo's hand.

Kaimetsu-Uo frowned and released his vassal with a sigh. "I am sorry, Kindari-san," he said quietly. "My anger is not meant for you but for myself. I must find my place in this world. Only here may I find the answers I seek."



“If that is what you believe, then I stand by you to the end, my lord,” Kindari said, “but I worry for the others.”

“A point well taken,” Kaimetsu-Uo said more soberly. “I am prepared to die to find my destiny, but I would not offer that same death to those who follow me. Go back to the others and tell them to return to the ships.” He sighed deeply. “Tell my mother we will return to Rokugan in the morning. I shall search alone for one more night.”

Kindari nodded, but said nothing. Kaimetsu-Uo’s decision had not been easy; he would not cheapen that sacrifice with words. He turned away and moved back the way they had come.

Kaimetsu-Uo silently sat upon a gnarled root, burying his parangu in the ground beside him with a flick of the wrist. His face was hollow, empty as he stared at the jungle floor. Could it be that he had come all this way for nothing? Would he be denied the answers he sought? No!

He reached for his parangu again. The others could return; he would remain. His mother would lead them well enough. A man without purpose was no man at all. He could not face them again and not know the truth.

“Ah, yes,” cackled a voice from the dark shadows of the treetops. “Few bear fury, hope, and honor in such equal measure. You are a child of the gods.



Kaimetsu-Uo looked up, holding his weapon ready for any attack as he rose into a battle stance. To his surprise he saw a tiny old man seated high in the branches of a twisting tree. He wore only a thick black cloak and a

wide-brimmed straw hat. His wrinkled face was turned up in a mischievous smile. In the dim light of the forest, his eyes seemed to shine a milky green. Kaimetsu-Uo lowered his weapon. His eyes were wide now, exhaustion and anger replaced by hope.

“You are Unmei, the storyteller?” Kaimetsu-Uo asked.

And you” The old man seemed to sniff the air. “You are a son of Hida, if I am not mistaken.” He hopped down from the tree, hobbling close “to study the strange samurai more closely.

“His grandson. How did you know?”

“If you have come seeking me, then we both know what I am,” Unmei cackled. “I am a koumori, a spirit from a time before your human Empire. When the Hantei dispatched his armies to claim the lands for mankind, it was your grandfather who showed me mercy. Hida recognized we were not Fu Leng’s minions. He allowed me to flee with my kin to these islands where we would be safe. Have you come to collect on the debt I owe? Have you come for that which Hida has entrusted to me?” The old man smiled and backed away. He leaped onto a low branch and seated himself there with astounding agility. “I think that you have.”

Kaimetsu-Uo nodded.

“Very well,” Unmei said. “What tale shall I tell you?”

“Tell me about the dawn of the Empire.”

Dawn of the Empire

Part One of Ten by Rich Wulf

There is no beginning. There is no end. These things are only choices, a means by which a soul might understand what is and forever will be. This tale begins with a man, and with his wife.

This man and this woman were unlike any other for in those days there were no others. Though, as I have said, they were not the beginning. There were three before them, three with names that cannot be spoken, and even they were not the beginning. Before them there was Nothing, and this Nothing was Everything for in that time there was nothing else but Nothing. Perhaps even that was not the beginning.

But I have strayed from my tale.

This man’s name was Onnotangu and his wife was named Amaterasu. These two were as perfect a match as there ever has been. Where Onnotangu was brash, Amaterasu was patient.



Where Onnotangu was fearless, Amaterasu was cautious. Where Onnotangu was proud, Amaterasu was humble. Where Onnotangu was the mysterious Moon, Amaterasu was the brilliant Sun. Yet both were virtuous and honorable, and loved one another deeply. Their duty was to name the formless earth, to give all things that existed within it a purpose and destiny. All things, great and small, good and evil, were granted names and purpose by Onnotangu and Amaterasu.

Except one.

This one thing was Nothing, which was once powerful but which had, in its foolishness, caused the world as we know it to be and thus diminished itself. Nothing did not want a name, so it wrapped itself in shadow, befriended the darkness, and hid away from the vigilant eyes of the Sun and Moon. Concealed, it planned its revenge.

Having completed the world, Lord Moon and Lady Sun returned to the heavens. Lord Moon made sport of chasing Lady Sun across the sky, flying high over the world they had made. Where Lady Sun cast the world in brilliant light, Lord Moon wove darkness in his wake. The shadows followed Lord Moon, and from deep within them, Nothing whispered in his ear. Nothing whispered of fear, desire, and regret, planting seeds of madness deep within the noble god's heart.

In time, Lady Sun bore her husband nine children, whom they called the Kami. These children were all gods and goddesses like their parents. Doji was the most beautiful of them all. Akodo was the bravest.



Hida was the strongest, and Shinjo the quickest.

14 **Hida** 8



— 0 5

Crab Clan Kami • Samurai • Double Chi • Yu 20
Unique • **Loyal** • Will not enter play normally unless another player has more than 10 Family Honor.
Battle: If Hida is face-up in one of your Provinces, you are the Defender, and the current attacking army contains a unit, bring Hida into play in your army in the current battle.
Battle: Target an attacking unit. Destroy it.
"I did not choose this world, but I will protect it."

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12 **Shinjo** 8



0 0 5

Unicorn Clan Kami • Samurai • Cavalry
Double Chi • **Unique** • **Loyal**
 Will not enter play normally. Units you control do not bow from battle resolution.
Battle: If Shinjo is face-up in one of your Provinces, you are the Attacker, and there is a defending unit in the current battle, bring Shinjo into play in your army.

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The twins, Shiba and Bayushi, were the most cunning,

10 **Shiba** 10



6 0 5

Phoenix Clan Kami • Samurai • Double Chi • **Unique**
Loyal • You must bow three Phoenix Clan Shugenja you control as an additional cost of playing Shiba. You may play Follower, Item, and Spell cards from your discard pile as if they were in your hand.
Limited: Once per turn, target an Honorable Dead Personality in your discard pile. Put him into play, ignoring costs and restrictions.

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11 **Bayushi** 11



— 0 4

Scorpion Clan Kami • Samurai • Courtier • **Unique**
Loyal • Will not enter play unless two non-Shadowlands cards you own created Honor losses this turn.
 Bayushi need not bow to perform Political actions.
Political Limited: Once per turn, search your Fate deck for a Political Action card. Show it. Put it in your hand.
Limited: Permanently reduce Bayushi's Chi by at least 1: Target a Personality. Reduce his Chi by the same amount.

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Togashi was the wisest and Ryoshun was the most patient. Hantei was the most beloved by his mother



Fu Leng, who had a different name in that time, had almost all the virtues of his siblings. He was almost as clever as Bayushi and Shiba, almost as strong as Hida even though he was small, almost as swift as Shinjo, almost as beautiful as Doji. Only Akodo's courage and Ryoshun's patience did Fu Leng lack in any noticeable measure. But while he had many admirable qualities, Fu Leng excelled at nothing. Fu Leng was indolent. His parents were gods why should he exert himself? Yet each time his brothers and sisters accomplished some great deed and won their parents' acknowledgment, Fu Leng's heart burned with jealousy.

All the while, Lord Moon secretly feared his children; in his madness he believed that one day they would destroy him, that they would recreate the world that had already been rendered perfect by his will. Lord Moon's children were no fools, and some among them sensed their father's hatred. Bayushi and Shiba feared that one day their father might harm them, but they knew that they alone could not stop Onnotangu they were only children, after all. They turned instead to Hantei and Fu Leng. Hantei was outraged to hear that his brothers were plotting against their father. He commanded them to abandon their foolish plans, though for love of them he would not tell his father what his brothers had done if they promised to serve Onnotangu loyally henceforth. Bayushi and Shiba agreed.

Fu Leng was not so forgiving. Fu Leng imagined that Onnotangu had loved Hantei best. Perhaps if Onnotangu knew that Bayushi and Shiba had plotted against him, and that Hantei knew the truth but had concealed it, then his father would come to realize that Fu Leng was truly the most worthy of his heirs. Fu Leng promised Bayushi, Shiba, and Hantei that he would speak no word of what had happened, then immediately went to their father and revealed all of what had occurred.

To Fu Leng's chagrin he was not pleased by his son's dedication; neither was he grateful. Onnotangu began a savage hunt through the Celestial Heavens, seeking out each of his children and consuming them completely. Even Fu Leng could not hide from his father, and in time he too was swallowed. Lady Sun was horrified by her husband's actions, but she did not panic. She, too, had sensed the strength that lay within their children, but that strength had filled her with pride rather than paranoia. One day her children might be strong enough to face their father, but that day would not be today.

Playing the part of the dutiful wife, Amaterasu delivered sake to her husband, one cup after each child. Into each cup she let a drop of poison fall. Poison could not kill Lord Onnotangu, but by the time he sought out his last child he was so drunk that he mistook a stone for Hantei, and swallowed it whole. Hantei fled across the Heavens and into the Realm of Dream where his father would not find him.

Each day, after her course across the heavens was complete, Amaterasu visited her son. She taught him to be noble, pure, and brave. She instructed him in the ways of the warrior. She told him stories of the man his father had once been, a noble guardian, a protector of virtue,

a creator of the world. While she knew that Hantei would have to face his father one day, she urged him not to hate Onnotangu. For Hantei, this was a difficult lesson to learn, but he accepted his mother's teachings with duty and sincerity.

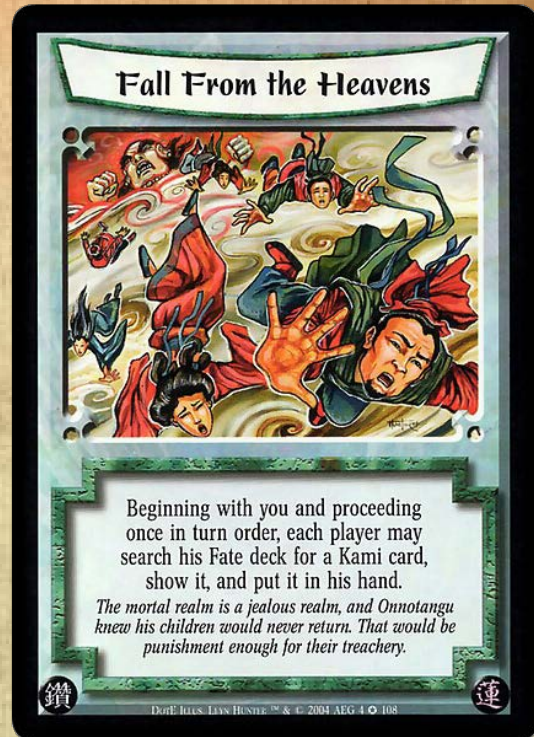
When Hantei was ready, he confronted his father once more. Blades were drawn, and father and son entered a mighty duel that shook the heavens. Onnotangu fought without mercy, seeking to destroy his upstart child, but Hantei could not bring himself to kill his father. In the end, this was his defeat, and Hantei fell before Lord Moon. Yet as his father lifted his sword for the killing stroke, Hantei heard a distant cry, the voices of his siblings. The thought that his brothers and sisters might yet live filled Hantei with hope and strength. He rolled aside as his father's blade fell with such force that it knocked a hole in the sky



Hantei lifted his own sword and cut his father across the stomach. Lord Moon cried out, such a cry of pain as has never been heard again. His blood and entrails poured forth through the hole in the sky, carrying with them the Kami he had swallowed so long ago.

Fu Leng was the last to fall, and as he fell he grasped the edge of the hole in the sky. He looked down at the world below him, the mortal world, and was filled with terror. He could sense something there, something waiting for him, a terror that could not be named. Desperately, Fu Leng reached for his father. Onnotangu took Fu Leng's hand, crushing it in a vice-like grip. Seeing his brother's pain, Hantei struck out with his sword again, cutting off his father's hand. Fu Leng began to fall, but as he fell he seized his brother by the shoulder. Still off balance from the battle, Hantei fell along with his brother

They all fell, down, down, down to the world below. Fu Leng fell further than most; he fell to a place that had been waiting for one such as him.



Ryoshun somehow did not reach the earth at all but instead quietly passed into the Realm of the Dead, where he still waits today. The others all fell in a place the mortals called Seppun Hill

Hantei soon realized that this world had changed them. His body no longer shone with the brilliance of the Heavens. He could feel the weight of time now pressing upon him. He had become mortal. For a time, he sought a means by which to return to the Heavens, but no such path existed. This world was not a perfect world. It was a world of pain and dirt and toil, inhabited by primitive creatures that fought among themselves like animals. When Hantei realized that the heavens were closed, he sent out for his siblings to determine what must be done. What was to become of gods trapped in an imperfect, barbaric world? Was this to be his punishment for betraying and injuring his father?

It was Lady Doji who answered first. "We must follow the example of our mother and father," she replied. "As the Sun and Moon gave shape to the formless, so must we create order from chaos. These mortals are not without worth, merely without direction. We must offer them that direction, Hantei. We must lead them."

Hantei was touched by his sister's words, as were the others. Together they would create a harmony on earth that matched the harmony their parents had created in the heavens, and it would be named Rokugan. But who among them would lead? The Kami conspired to create a grand tournament, a competition of strength, skill, and wisdom that would determine the most fit among them. Each would stand until defeated, and the winner would be named Emperor of Rokugan.

Hida was the first to fall, his strength overcome by Shinjo's speed. She was in turn tricked by Bayushi, but Bayushi's twin, Shiba, was too wise and patient to succumb to his brother's tricks. Doji outmaneuvered Shiba, and was in turn defeated by Akodo who had studied her techniques well. In the end, Akodo faced Hantei; the duel that followed was as incredible a display of determination, power, and swordsmanship that the world has ever seen. Akodo became consumed with the fury of battle, lifting his sword to end his brother's life. When Akodo thought the battle won, Hantei angled his sword so that the light of the heavens shone in his brother's eye. The light of the heavens flooded into Akodo's soul, and he realized the horrible deed that had almost been done. He recognized then that Hantei could have defeated him at any time but he would not shed his brother's blood. In the face of such strength, compassion, and honor Akodo realized he was a small man indeed. His sword fell to the earth and he bent his knee before his brother.

Hantei was crowned Emperor of Rokugan before any realized that Togashi had not participated in the tournament at all.



Lady Doji went out to the human leaders, and she delivered them this promise: “We will teach you the ways of the world and we will protect you from its evils. Serve us with humility and obedience and we will keep this promise.”

When the humans heard these words, they were filled with astonishment and dread. Many of the human leaders stepped forward to offer fealty to the Kami. Some, such as Akodo and Bayushi, had already been gathering followers among the mortals. Before long, each of the Kami had many followers to call their own, but imposing their will upon the people was not an easy task. Some did not wish to be led. Some did not desire a path of honor and duty. Some were simply afraid.

Some humans drew sword against the Kami, swearing to purge their influence from the earth. Akodo’s armies purged them from the lands, though he took no joy in their defeat. Others refused to obey Hantei’s will, but did not wish to fight their fellow man. Hantei issued an edict those who would not obey the Emperor would not live beneath his protection. These renegades journeyed north into the mountains, where they became the Yobanjin, or southwest into the dark plains where the Nezumi once dwelled and were seen no more.

The birth of Rokugan was not an easy time, but in the end there was peace. Each of the Kami came to serve a clan, and each of these clans swore its fealty to Hantei. Lady Doji became the founder of the Crane Clan, and her followers created art and culture. Lord Akodo became the founder of the Lion Clan; his followers were warriors and it became their first duty to purge all those who would not obey the Hantei’s rule. The twins, Shiba and Bayushi, became the lords of the Phoenix and Scorpion clans respectively, one the master of knowledge and the other the master of secrets. Lady Shinjo, now leader of the Ki-Rin Clan, guarded the Empire’s northwest border, while Lord Hida and his newly founded Crab Clan guarded the south. Lord Togashi accepted no duty from his brother and was given none, nor did he seek followers. He merely retreated into the mountains, where inevitably those who sought his unmatched wisdom came to him.



So ends this part of the tale, yet like all endings this is merely a beginning.