

# Bizzaro Rokugan

*There are no coincidences.*

– The Tao of Zen Nihilism

As I slowly recover from the apartment manager disaster, I'm working for a high class temp agency that's landed me with an accounting firm that handles NPR accounts. Every day, I handle paperwork for *Fresh Aire* and *All Things Considered*. I also know that my buddy Matt "Suck It Up" Colville works exactly seven floors above me. As I drove up to the building, looking at the address on my directions for my first day at work, I chuckled to myself, knowing that I'd be working in the same building as my buddy Matt.

I called him that afternoon and let him know where I was. We went out to lunch with a slew of folks from his work—most of whom turn out to be L5R fans. Matt drops the hint. "So, John. Are you going to run an L5R game?"

How could I refuse?

But I wanted to do something different. The group is made up of new and old L5R fans. Matt is ol' school. He remembers the Day of Thunder. His buddies are new school. They've *heard* of Kachiko and Hoturi and the other Seven Thunders, but they don't have any direct memory.

I decided to set the game in an obscure year—around 700 or so—so everybody would be a little out of place, a little off balance. I also started posting little essays about the "State of the Empire." The details do a better job of explaining what I'm doing, so rather than tell you about what's going on, I'll just *show you*.

This is the Rokugan they'll be playing in. Around 700. Familiar faces, familiar names... but everything is a little out of place... a little off balance...

And remember... there are no coincidences.

The State of the Empire

## **The Crab**

A darkness has fallen over the lands of the Crab. Hida Motonari, one of the Clan's greatest heroes, has fallen. His two sons and daughter have also been lost, leaving the Hida family with no direct heir.

The Scorpion and the Crane would have immediately claimed the Crab lands forfeit, but neither wanted to inherit the duty of the Kaiu Wall. Instead, their armies have marched steadily south, claiming lands as they go.

As the Hida struggle, the other families have taken steps to secure Crab lands. The Hida family was lost in a violent assault on Hiruma Castle. The entire battle was a cacophony of errors, stealing 10% of the Hida's entire fighting force. The Hiruma have heard reports the Nameless

One's armies are preparing another assault. With the massing Shadowlands armies to the south and the encroaching Crane and Scorpion armies to the North, the Crab must find a way to stand against them both.

Meanwhile, the Crab have found a new daimyo... in the halls of the Lion. A young Akodo is the closest relative of the Hida family. His reputation in the academy is near legendary, his teachers calling him one of the greatest military minds of this generation, but his training could not prepare him for the realities of the Shadowlands. Upon receiving his title as Crab Daimyo, he changed his name. The mantle he chose was from one of his most famous ancestors. He is now known as Hida Toturi.

### **The Crane**

The daimyo of the Crane has always defined the right hand of the Emperor, and its current daimyo is no exception. Beautiful, clever, witty, and inventive, she is all the Crane could hope for in a champion. She is the epitome of dignity and grace, embodying all that the Crane stand for. At the same time, she is also incredibly ingenious, bringing innovations to the court that skirt on the edge of controversy. She even broke what many believe to be the most sacred tradition by not dying her hair silver, but maintaining her native black locks.

Politically, the Crane surpass all other Clans. Their ambassadors in Otosan Uchi run the courts. None may speak without permission from the Crane. The Emperor himself is so smitten with his mother's Clan (his father was an Otomo), he gives them almost complete latitude in every affair.

But as the court glows bright with the Crane's brilliance, to the South, her armies move steadily onward, claiming Crab lands as they go. They have come in sight with the Scorpion armies, but the two forces have not yet exchanged words, let alone arrows.

But moving armies are eclipsed by the resurgence of culture brought by the Crane Clan daimyo. The Crane even go so far as to call her "Lady Doji," a right reserved for only the most distinguished of their Clan. Her mother called her "Shini," but the courts whisper another name for her. A particular nickname that means "little cat."

"Kachiko."

### **The Dragon**

The Crab call him, "His Enigmatic Exaltedness." Sitting high in the mountains, the daimyo of the Dragon Clan—Togashi Hoju—has never been seen in court. His representative, the daimyo of the Mirumoto, takes his place instead.

As is usual, the Dragon have remained in their mountain keeps for the last ten years. Occasionally, members of the Mirumoto family attend court, but more often than not, the Dragon seat remains empty at the Emperor's table.

The current daimyo of the Mirumoto has a curious reputation. His beauty is startling, making his absence at court all that much more intriguing. His last appearance was marked by a duel. It ended with the Mirumoto standing over a Kakita, nearly cut in half. The Mirumoto spoke only

two words, both in hushed whispers. No-one is certain what he said, although Lady Doji certainly heard it: the words made her blush.

The name his mother gave him is Yoshihisa, but the court has come to call him “reflecting pool,” a nickname given to him by the daimyo of the Shosuro family: Hoturi.

### **The Lion**

The Crane have done well in the Emperor’s court. From the Lion’s perspective, far too well. The Lion Clan is fit with a jeweled leash, crafted from Asahina hands. It is brilliant and beautiful and keeps the Emperor’s left hand seated and quiet.

“The Emperor has no enemies,” the Crane say. “What use is the Lion?” And with a Crane taking the mantle of Emerald Champion, the proud Clan has found fewer and fewer Akodo and Matsu magistrates.

With their influence shrinking, the Matsu daimyo has sent the armies of the Lion south: toward the lands of the Crab. As the Hida seek reinforcements to fill the gaps on the Kaiu Wall, their castles’ defenses grow thin. Ripe for the pickings.

But the Scorpion have the same plan, moving armies southward, gaining castles in a parallel line. The two armies have not clashed... yet.

As is always with the Lion, the Akodo and Matsu struggle for control of the Clan. Currently, the children of Matsu are dominant, but in a dangerous precedent, the daimyo is not a woman. He stands three feet taller than any other Matsu or Akodo, his hands large enough to hold a tetsubo in one hand. His eyes are mad and his devotion to the ancestors is unquestionable. Destiny runs in his blood. His name is Matsu Yakamo. And if he has to kill every last Crab to gain the strength he needs to smash the upstart Crane... he will.

### **The Phoenix**

Far to the northwest, the castles of the Phoenix are not as isolated as they once were. The Emperor spends most of his winters in Phoenix lands, pouring the teachings of Shinsei. He spends hours with the sacred scrolls, filling his mind with the Little Master’s wisdom. This has brought much wealth and prestige to the Phoenix who are not entirely used to such attention. The Crane dare not speak against them, although rumors in the wind hint that some sort of distraction is being prepared to lure the Emperor away from the frozen Phoenix lands and back to the warm and friendly lands of the Crane.

The Phoenix Clan daimyo sees the Emperor’s interest as good fortune. An Emperor so obsessed with learning can only lead to an enlightened Empire. Of course, there may be another reason for the Emperor’s visits. It is said he is particularly taken with the daimyo’s daughter: a beautiful woman with emerald eyes. She serves as yojimbo to the Master of the Void and the courtiers say that her mastery of the sword is matched only by her beauty. Many samurai travel north for the sole purpose of challenging her. So far, none have met the challenge. She earned her name after protecting the Master of Air against an ambush of bakemono. The Elemental Master said that he

never met a samurai who's soul was so in tune with the elements. He called her "little wind rider."

"Shiba Kamoko."

### **The Scorpion**

Even half-hidden by shadows and veils, the samurai of the Scorpion Clan cannot hide their concern. The Crane threaten their borders with bureaucracy, the Lion threaten their borders with force, and there are no allies to be found in the Crab. The Dragon remain aloof in the North and the Phoenix maintain their cold and distant vigil.

Adding to their difficulty, it seems the Emperor has no need for an underhand. His obsession with esoteric matters has left the Scorpion without funds to maintain their whisper networks. The Crane have all but overtaken the industries where the Scorpion excel, stealing vice and making it their own. They have turned the once secret and subtle dens of iniquity and made art houses out of them.

In Kyuden Bayushi, the young and untested daimyo sits on her throne. The only daughter of Bayushi Unugen, she never sought nor wanted her father's love. She studied swordplay, certain her clever and beautiful brother would take her father's place. But that was not to be. Her brother was killed in a duel by the beautiful Dragon they call "mirrored pool," forcing her to inherit her father's cold throne. It is said that her lands suffer because she plans revenge upon the Dragon called Hoturi... not because he killed her brother, but because he made her take his place.

Although her given name is Kameko, the Crane poets have started calling her a different name. A name from Rokugan's distant past. A name from a story about a young girl who becomes a samurai to avenge her brother's death. Of course, the irony was not lost on Kameko and when she speaks the name, she does so with a cruel and knowing smile.

"Hitomi."