

*Heroes are born and die, like ordinary men. They live, breathe, love and serve their lords.
Only one thing sets them apart from other men:
The telling of their tale.
- Doji Shizune*

The Beginning

Do you see the circle I have drawn, child? Where is the beginning? Where is the end? Of course, you cannot answer, for there is no answer to this question. There must be a beginning and an end, but there is neither.

Just like the circle, this story has no beginning and no ending. Before this world was another. After this world there will be another and our souls will fall into that world carried by the weight of our great and lowly deeds. This is the way of things, child, a way you must learn. Only by learning the way will you find peace in this world of sorrow. The beginning of the world, as it is for every world, is with nothing. Nothing was alone in the void and so it was for countless ages. Then, without warning, Nothing realized it was alone and it was afraid. This created one third of the world. Then, Nothing realized it desired companions. This created another third. Lastly, Nothing realized its weaknesses had created the world and it felt regret, wishing to undo what it had done. Nothing's regret completed the world and made it whole.

When nothing spoke its words, the world was made. At first the stuff of the world was like an egg whose heavy yolk had been broken and mixed together with the delicate white. The delicate separated from the heavy and the delicate rose and the heavy sank. The delicate rose ever higher, but some hesitated and became the sky and the clouds. The rest climbed what seemed like forever and created the high Heavens. The heavy stuff fell deeper and deeper, forming nothing except the shapeless chaos of a jellyfish. And so it was for many, many years.

The Sun and Moon

With the creation of the heavens came the creation of the Three Gods Whose Names Cannot Be Spoken. They recognized the need to bring form and shape to the earth below and so together they created a young man and a young woman to give it shape and form. In doing so, they used up their names and that is why we cannot say them anymore. The man and the woman were born in Heaven and looked down upon the shapeless earth, seeing need to bring it shape. They descended on a rainbow and found it was like a jellyfish. The man and woman pondered how to give it shape and realized that the only way to do so would be to name it. They thought long about the name to give to the world and when it was ready they kissed the formless earth and whispered the name. As the name was spoken, so were their own names. The woman became Amaterasu, the Sun and the man became Onnotangu, the Moon.

Together they floated across the sky and about the newly named Earth as it took shape, naming all the parts of Creation. The land separated from the sea and from fertile soil, plants grew. In the warm seas, the fishes took their many shapes. In the Heavens the Fortunes began to take form, born from the dreams of the creatures who slept far below. The Moon and the Sun flew around the world again and again, until all the creatures chose their shapes. Then they rested and looked down on the Earth and to their

amazement, some of the creatures began to build. These creatures were the Naga, who came before humanity and vanished into legend in the coming of the Great Sleep.

Children of the Sun and Moon

Since the beginning of time, Lord Moon has chased Lady Sun around the world and one day he caught her. As her light faded, one by one the Naga fell asleep. Many months later, Lady Sun gave birth to ten children: Hida, Doji, Togashi, Akodo, Shiba, Bayushi, Shinjo, Fu Leng, Ryoshan, and Hantei. Lord Moon knew that any children whose veins carried elements of the Sun and the Moon would grow to be greater than he and so despite the protests of Lady Sun, he swallowed the children one by one.

Lady Sun had to think quickly. As Lord Moon swallowed her first child she said "My Lord, certainly after such a meal you must be thirsty," and she offered him a cup of sake. Lord Moon thanked her and drank it down. After each child, she repeated her offering and he accepted it, not knowing that each cup had a single drop of poison swimming in the sake. Down each child went into Lord Moon's stomach and as he swallowed them down, Lady Sun's many tears fell. As they fell far down from the Heavens to the Earth, they mingled with the stuff of the air and the stuff of the wind. Finally the tears of the Sun touched the Earth and where each them fell, they remained still, silent and sleeping.

Soon Lord Moon became so drunk and numb that he did not notice that she had replaced the last child, Hantei, with a rock. Lord Moon fell into a deep sleep and as he slept Lady Sun smuggled Hantei away and hid him from sight. Lady Sun explained to the child that he must one day rescue his brothers and sisters. She trained him in the arts of combat, preparing Hantei for the day his father would awaken.

It is said many years passed during this time and it is even said many centuries passed. When lord Moon awoke he found Lady Sun and the young Hantei waiting for him. The battle that took place was great; in the end Hantei sliced open his father's belly and the children and his entrails fell out to the Earth below. Lord Moon reached out at the last moment to grasp the children, but only caught little Fu Leng. Hantei then sliced off his father's hand, breaking his grip and causing Fu Leng (and his father's severed hand) to follow his brothers and sisters to the earth below. But as Fu Leng fell he reached out and grabbed Hantei, dragging his brother down.

Lord Moon's blood fell to the earth, finding the puddles of shapeless forms made from the Lady Sun's tears. When they found each other, the blood and tears mingled and a man and a woman formed from each of the thousands of puddles. Fu Leng fell apart far from his brothers and sisters into a crevasse far to the West. Trapped beneath the Earth he struggled to reach the surface, but was no longer the same. His many months underground had given him dark knowledge, poisoning his mind and body into a twisted mockery of who he once was.

Alas, Ryoshan had not survived the time spent in his father's belly. His name was forgotten.

When the last Akodo falls

As soon as the Children of the Sun and Moon touched the Earth, they ceased to be divine. While they were not mortal men, they were no longer gods. They looked around and found the scattered beginnings of mankind and knew what they must do. Mankind was as naked and naïve as newborn children and the Children of the Sun and Moon made 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."

The Children of the Sun and Moon except for trapped Fu Leng decided that they would hold a tournament to see who among them should rule the world. There was a contest of speed, a contest of strength, a contest of wits and many others. Togashi declined to compete in the tournament, for he looked at his brothers and sisters and knew the outcome. The last contest was a great melee.

Lord Hida relied on his great strength to carry him through the battle, but he was swiftly overcome by the speed and accuracy of Shinjo's strikes. Lady Shinjo's swiftness proved to be her undoing and Lord Bayushi used her impetuosity to catch her off guard. Using his tricks and distractions he defeated her. Lord Shiba was too crafty for such trickery however. He observed Bayushi's tricks and his actions were unmoved by his distractions. Then Lord Shiba turned to meet the Lady Doji. The slender and beautiful Doji stood back and waited for Shiba to strike, knowing that her brother would gain too much knowledge from watching her actions. Shiba's patience ran out; he attacked and was swiftly defeated by Doji's technique. Then Akodo stepped forward. He knew Lady Doji's tactic and used it against her. Finally, only Akodo and Hantei stood on the battlefield. They fought and as the battle's intensity grew, so did Akodo's temper. At a crucial moment, Akodo's great fury overcame him. Hantei sensed his brother's rage and used it against him. It was a thoughtless mistake that caused Akodo to lose his duel with Hantei, one that should have cost him his life. Because Hantei spared his life, Akodo swore to his brother that he and his family would serve him. Togashi watching the battle in the distance, whispered: "When the last Akodo falls, so will the last Hantei."

The Hantei Dynasty

At the end of the tournament, it was decided that Hantei's dynasty would rule the others. Hantei declared that the Children of the Sun and Moon should build a mighty Empire, an Empire show their devotion to their sacred mother Amaterasu. As Hantei was Emperor, each of the brothers went out into the known lands to gather together mankind and to form the Seven Great Clans. Hida formed the Crab Clan, Doji formed the Crane Clan. Togashi formed the Dragon Clan and Akodo formed the Lion Clan. Shiba formed the Phoenix Clan, while Bayushi formed the Scorpion Clan. Lastly, Shinjo formed the Ki-Rin Clan.

For many years the Empire flourished as Hantei and the Clans built roads, palaces and temples. But one day an army of foul and putrid creatures attacked the palaces and temples of the Children of the Sun and Moon. They were the forces of Fu Leng, who had fallen far from his brothers and sisters. His mastery of the magic of the underworld was complete. Armed with spirit creatures he had summoned from the darkest parts of Jigoku, he planned to destroy the Emerald Empire and claim the souls of humanity for his own power and glory.

The New Way

Hantei and the Clans gathered an army to combat the goblins, ogres and shape-shifting Oni of Fu Leng, but no magic or steel could defeat his evil sorcery. Every battle forced Hantei and his allies to fall back. Finally as his ragged army prepared for one last assault, a small man with a shaved head dressed in robes came to visit the Emperor Hantei. The man introduced himself as "Shinsei", which means "new way". He promised the Emperor that he could defeat the armies of Fu Leng, but Hantei was unimpressed. He commanded that the little man be removed, but when the guards tried to touch Shinsei, he defeated them all without using a weapon. Then he turned to the Emperor and said, "Let me take seven warriors with me to your brother. There, I will stop the armies that march upon your lands."

Hantei was intrigued by the little man. He spent the entire night questioning Shinsei while his brother Shiba recorded every word. The record of this conversation, called The Tao of Shinsei, can still be found in the Emperor's library and in all the libraries of the Clans. At the end of the evening, Hantei was convinced. He wished to send his brothers and sisters, but the little man shook his head and said, "No. It must be mortal men, for favours the mortal man." Hantei saw the wisdom in Shinsei's words and sent one warrior from each of the Clans along with Shinsei. He called them samurai, which means "servant". This band of Samurai was called The Seven Thunders.

Many weeks passed and the armies of Fu Leng continued to grow in strength and ground with every battle. But one day their power suddenly ebbed and at a crucial moment, Hantei's forces charged. The ranks of darkness broke and fled. Hantei knew that somehow Shinsei had fulfilled his promise. A great feast was prepared in anticipation of the return of Shinsei and the Seven Thunders, to celebrate their victory, but only one samurai returned. It was the Scorpion, Shoshuro, bearing twelve scrolls and an enchanted hand made of obsidian. "Hide these scrolls," she said, "for they were the doom of Fu Leng." Then she died in Bayushi's arms.

The Emperor forbade the breaking of the scrolls' seals and gave the duty of hiding and guarding the to the Scorpion Clan. He then commanded the Crab Clan to stand between the Empire and the dark lands of the underworld, now known as the Shadowlands to guard Rokugan from its evil. The Crane and the Lion Clans swore to protect the Emperor. Doji was selected to become the Emperor's first champion while Akodo lead the Emperor's armies on the field of battle. The Dragon and the Phoenix chose paths of contemplation; both clans took the Tao of Shinsei and incorporated it into their won understanding of sorcery. Lastly, the Ki-Rin Clan left the Empire to find out what lay beyond its borders.

The Thousand Years of Peace and the Second Day of Thunder

But ultimate evil never rests for long, and after the "Thousand Years of Peace," the dark spirit began to stir once more. The champion of the Scorpion clan, Bayushi Shoju, discovered a prophecy that predicted Fu Leng's return in the time of the last Hantei. A loyal servant of the empire, Shoju killed Hantei XXXVIII and attempted to seize the throne. But what the Scorpion didn't realize was that the former emperor's young son had escaped. Akodo Toturi, the Emperor's Champion, eventually killed the

usurper in the throne room, and the young Hantei returned to the capitol city to regain power. Instead of stopping the prophecy from coming true, Bayushi Shoju's coup in fact gave Fu Leng the opportunity he needed. Eleven of the twelve Black Scrolls were opened, and the Dark Lord easily overwhelmed the young emperor, taking Otosan Uchi, the Rokugan seat of power, for himself.

Eventually, a descendent of Shinsei, known as the Hooded Ronin, gathered up a descendent from each of the original Thunders (Kisada's son Yakamo, Utaku Kamoko, Doji Hoturi, Isawa Takada, Bayushi Kachiko, Mirumoto Hitomi, and Akodo Toturi) and led them into the capitol city to face Fu Leng again. As they fought, the Dragon Champion Togashi Yokuni revealed himself to be the Kami Togashi. Changing into a dragon form, he tore into his brother, but the power of Fu Leng was too great. Togashi collapsed in front of the Thunders as the Dark Lord laughed. However, the mystical being had held the twelfth Black Scroll within his own body for centuries and now was the time to open it. Hitomi cut open the dragon, killing him, and opened the scroll. The result was that Fu Leng was brought back to his full potency in the body of the last Hantei -- but he was also turned mortal. The new Thunders could now harm the dark lord, and Toturi and Hoturi struck the fatal blows. Fu Leng was no more, and Toturi took the throne.

The Shadow

Two years later, a blight passed over the land – the Shadow. This was a taint left over from creation, a bit of the Earth that did not have a name. But now it infected the unsuspecting, and it took the new emperor. Realizing what he must do, Toturi committed seppuku, taking his own life to save the empire. The Shadow then sought to destroy Jigoku, the land of the spirits, where the Rokugani ancestors dwelled. Meanwhile, an army marched on the gates of Jigoku, fighting with the creatures of Shadow and Shadowland alike. The tenth Kami, Ryoshan, was revealed. In being the first creature to pass into death he created Oblivion's Gate and became the guardian of the honored dead, guiding them to the afterlife. He destroyed the Gate, blocking the Shadow's access to the spirit realm. During that battle, a powerful ronin named Ginawa saw Toturi's spirit in the land of the dead, and he pulled the emperor back through into the land of the living. Passing through Oblivion's Gate, from Jigoku into Rokugan, Toturi was purified, and once again he was installed upon the throne. The Shadow was named, and thus defeated. Then the reign of the Toturi emperors began in earnest.