



THE HIDDEN EMPEROR™

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To use the L5R RPG 2nd Edition portions of this book, a GM needs the *Game Master's Guide* and the *Player's Guide*.

A player needs only the *Player's Guide*.

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WIZARDS OF THE COAST



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WELCOME TO THE JADE EMPIRE!

For those of you who have been following the recent sourcebooks in Legend of the Five Rings, this book may appear a bit strange. Compared to the current ongoing storyline, it's something of a step back, a retelling of various stories. For long-time fans of the L5R CCG, the tales in this book will be familiar. This sourcebook retells the Hidden Emperor story arc from the Legend of the Five Rings Collectible Card Game. Just as *Time of the Void* explored the Clan War, *The Hidden Emperor* is a sourcebook that covers this very specific time in the Legend of the Five Rings continuity — The War Against the Darkness.

Though there are a number of new mechanical options in this book for player use, we recommend that only the GM read any further. Each chapter contains a number of spoilers relating to the ongoing story that the GM may wish to work into his own campaign, so by spoiling the future, you're only hurting yourself.

Why take a step back?

The most recently published L5R sourcebooks are set over three decades after the events in this book took place. Why would we want to dwell on the past?

To put it simply, the Hidden Emperor period was too interesting to ignore any longer. A significant period that colored many important events, many questions were left unanswered. A large number of fans wished to know more about the War Against the Darkness — what happened, when it happened, why it happened, and how. This book answers as many of those questions as possible.

For those players with campaigns set in modern Rokugan, this book can still be quite useful. The timelines are an invaluable history resource, and a possible inspiration for adventure hooks set in the present. (What happened to the castle where Kitsu Okura first met Akuma, for example? Is it still standing?) The new mechanical options, naturally, are timeless and can be used in almost any campaign. And this is to say nothing of enterprising GMs who may wish to update the adventure in this book for their modern campaign, or even hurl the players into the paths taken by their own ancestors and watch them attempt to survive the War Against the Darkness.

This isn't my story.

In a game like Legend of the Five Rings, where player characters share a setting with well known fictional characters, there is always the danger that the player characters will never live up to the example of the setting's famous heroes. Just because the timeline describes the War Against the Darkness in a linear fashion does not mean that the player characters cannot affect events in some manner. They should feel as though they are minor players in a larger game, or that they simply look on as heroes such as Ginawa and Isawa Hochiu perform marvelous deeds. The GM is highly encouraged to adapt the War Against the Darkness to showcase the player characters. Perhaps in your campaign, Ginawa and Hiroru never begin their quest. Perhaps Otaku

Kamoko never rescues the Emperor. Perhaps Hochiu never steps forward to battle Goju Adorai. Perhaps the player characters are the ones to fulfill these roles, and perhaps the war does not end quite the same way as it ends here....

The possibilities are endless.

What you'll find in this book...

This book is divided into six chapters, each of which is named after the original CCG expansions during the Hidden Emperor story arc. Each covers a different portion of that time period. Though the first chapter covers a wider time span than the other five, many important events happen in the later chapters so they have been divided and spread evenly to prevent confusion.

Each chapter begins with fiction set in that time period, followed by a timeline that describes the major events. This is followed in turn by a section detailing new mechanics for this period, adventure hooks, and descriptions of important NPCs that became prominent at this time. Each chapter concludes with part of an ongoing campaign set during the War Against the Darkness.

What do I need to use this adventure?

While many of the NPCs in this book use character options from various L5R sourcebooks, all you really need is the *Player's Guide* and the *Game Master's Guide* (for the traditional system) or *Rokugan*, the *Player's Handbook*, and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (for the d20 system). While the various NPCs use character options from all the L5R sourcebooks, the ongoing campaign in each of the chapters is designed to draw only upon options presented in the core books and this volume. If you wish to use an NPC and do not have access to everything listed in his or her stats, feel free to edit their stats to your liking.

ROLE-PLAYING DURING THE WAR AGAINST THE DARKNESS

Much like *Time of the Void*, *The Hidden Emperor* describes a particularly bloody and divisive time in Rokugan's history. Many L5R campaigns feature mixed parties with characters of multiple clans. Can a Phoenix shugenja and Mantis samurai peacefully coexist in a party while Yoritomo lays siege to Kyuden Asako? The GM should consider questions such as these carefully lest these events that nearly shattered an Empire shatter the campaign as well.

There are several options that could help a party remain together during the War Against the Darkness. Most obvious is a party composed entirely of a single clan (though in the case of a Crane or Dragon party even this is not foolproof during this period). Obviously this sort of campaign comes about only on the rarest occasion and is unlikely to occur without the players and GM agreeing upon it in advance.

Another option comes from an old standard of L5R campaigns, the magistrate party. After the Emperor's disappearance, lawlessness and chaos are widespread. The need for loyal, dutiful magistrates is greater than ever. A party of Emerald Magistrates will be truly tested, forced to work together to preserve the unity of the Empire even as their clans enter war with one another.

A third option appears rather obvious, given the name of the sourcebook. Though each clan may have a separate objective, they are united in their loyalty to the Emperor. Following Toturi's kidnapping, perhaps the party gathers to attempt to discover what has become of Toturi. Each player character might bear different clues, different pieces to a puzzle that can only be completed by joining forces. Once they find the Emperor, no doubt the player characters will realize something is dreadfully wrong. If they know too much, Goju Adorai and his brethren will inevitably begin to hunt them. Even player characters from warring clans will be forced to band together by circumstance, allying against an enemy that only they understand. This requires a bit of extra work on the part of the GM and players alike as they figure out how their player characters relate to the mystery at hand, but results in a rewarding experience.

The only real challenge in playing a campaign during this period is, as in *Time of the Void*, Scorpion characters. The Scorpion Clan is blamed for Toturi's disappearance and exiled to the Burning Sands early in the story, thus any Scorpion character caught in Rokugan is likely to be arrested and executed as a traitor. A handful of Scorpion during this time period remained in Rokugan, hiding among the populace by removing their masks and posing as ronin. This option should be offered to Scorpion player characters, but with a measure of caution. Any Scorpion who remains in Rokugan after the Emerald Champion's edict takes an extraordinary risk. Those captured will be shown no mercy.

Some player characters will see this as an exciting challenge, but the GM must be careful not to coddle Scorpion who have gone "underground." A Scorpion in hiding should be in a constant struggle to keep the truth hidden. Further, those Scorpion who remain will be expected to spare no effort in finding a way to redeem their clan's stained honor. Any Scorpion who dodges his clan's punishment and spends his time in Rokugan idle will find his kinsmen most displeased when they finally return.

NEW MECHANICS

The Legend of the Five Rings game setting has been officially presented in two separate game systems, the *Legend of the Five Rings RPG 2nd Edition System* (presented in the *Player's Guide and Game Master's Guide*) and *Wizards of the Coast's d20 System™* (presented in *Rokugan™*, the official supplement to *Oriental Adventures™*). While these two systems are somewhat dissimilar, the setting presented in both versions of the game is the same, and thus it is our intent to present a sourcebook that is useful no matter which of these systems you choose to use when running your game.

Generally, when a new rule or mechanic is presented, whenever applicable we will present equivalent d20 System™ and L5R RPG 2E System versions in close proximity.

Rules and options for the d20 System™ look like this.

Rules and options for the L5R RPG 2E System look like this.

Occasionally, extensive new information may be exclusive to a specific system (such as *New Paths for the L5R RPG 2E System* or new feats for the d20 System™). In such a case, the information will follow the same convention as above.

The d20 System™ material will appear in black and the L5R RPG 2E System material in blue.

In the case of characters, occasionally, a character's name will be followed by a short explanation of his character class in lieu of full statistical information. Such an example might look like this:

TORITAKA TATSURE

[Samurai 6/Berserker 4/Shadowlands Veteran 10; Hida Bushi 5/Hida Avenger 3]

The information presented before the semicolon is the character's class and level in the d20 System™. The information presented after the semicolon is the character's rank and school in the L5R RPG 2E System.

Sometimes material must be presented for one system or the other. In such cases, this text will be contained in a callout box with a gray background, such as the one below. The headers for these boxes will clearly label which information is for the d20 System™ and which information is for the L5R RPG 2nd Edition ("L5R RPG 2E").

WHAT IS THE LYING DARKNESS?

You may note that many of the events that take place in the history section seem rather curious or contradictory. Most such events will explain that this results from manipulations by the Lying Darkness, also known as Nothing, a powerful force for evil that is highly active during this time period.

Before the world existed, there was Nothing. When Nothing realized it was alone, it became afraid, and created one third of the world. It desired a companion, and created another third. When it realized that it had ruined the perfect nothingness of the universe and regretted what it had done, the world became complete.

When Lady Sun and Lord Moon went about the task of handing out names to everything that existed, Nothing decided that it did not want a name. It begged the shadow to hide it so that it would not be noticed, and thus remained undefined, and an embodiment of the formless tempestuous void that once was.

Nothing hid within the shadow and watched carefully, looking for a way to destroy this world it had accidentally made. It saw potential in the youngest of Lord Moon's children, the one named Fu Leng. Fu Leng was wise but also very arrogant with a rage deep inside him that, if tempered properly, could destroy all that existed. Nothing came to Fu Leng and revealed itself, told him the true origins of the universe, and taught him the ways of magic. It offered to ally with him, to grant him true power if it would help him unmake all of existence.

Fu Leng listened intently for a long time. When Nothing finished teaching him, the young Kami smirked and refused to ally with it. Nothing became enraged and attacked Fu Leng, but the Kami already knew too much. He defended himself with a crystal sword, cutting off a piece of Nothing and wounding it terribly. It fled back into the shadows.

Bitter and terrified, Nothing turned instead to Lord Moon. This time, it did not reveal itself. It whispered in Lord Moon's

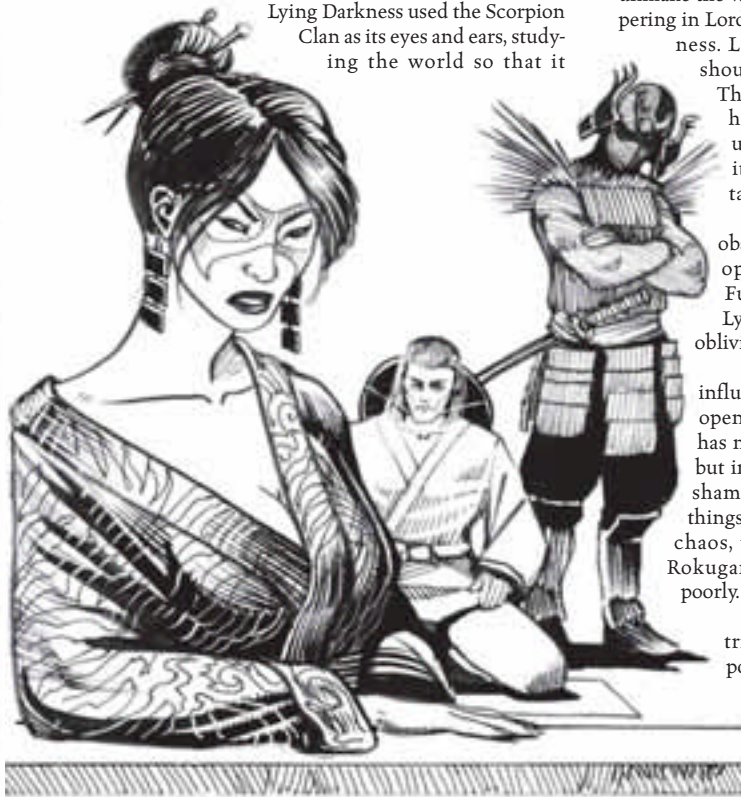
ear, driving him to madness, turning his suspicions against Fu Leng. As Lord Moon hunted his children, Nothing offered Fu Leng a place to hide in the shadow, a final chance to form an alliance. Before Fu Leng could reply, Togashi drew his brother from the shadows and both were devoured by Lord Moon. Nothing considered this an acceptable conclusion until Hantei arrived and rescued his siblings. They fell to the mortal realm, where Lord Moon would no longer chase after them.

As the Kami fell, Nothing flew to darkest Jigoku in an instant. It whispered in the ear of the living Realm of Evil, warning it that the Kami were dangerous and must be destroyed — Fu Leng most of all. But Jigoku was more intrigued than afraid of the way Nothing described Fu Leng. The realm snatched Fu Leng as he fell from the sky, dragging him deep into the earth and suffusing him with its corruption.

Nothing now became even more afraid. This Fu Leng was powerful, and he knew its weaknesses. It had acted too rashly in seeking an ally, and instead had created a powerful rival. Nothing saw but one recourse — to retreat into shadow and hope that Fu Leng forgot about it.

When the Seven Thunders defeated Fu Leng, Nothing rejoiced. It knew, however, that Fu Leng was not truly dead, so it hurried to his ruined keep to find a weapon that might be used against the Kami when he returned. It found the severed obsidian hand of Onnotangu, Lord Moon, and drew it into the shadows. As it fled from the Shadowlands, it came across the two humans who had survived the battle with Fu Leng. One, surprisingly enough, was not truly human at all, but made from the piece of Nothing that Fu Leng had carved away so long ago. Nothing offered Shosuro a chance to escape, if she helped it.

She agreed, and for centuries the Lying Darkness used the Scorpion Clan as its eyes and ears, studying the world so that it



D20 AND L5R

Since 2001, *Legend of the Five Rings* has used two separate mechanical systems, the classic “roll and keep” system of *Legend of the Five Rings Second Edition*, and the d20 system made popular by *Dungeons and Dragons*.

As you may already know, *The Hidden Emperor* will be the last *Legend of the Five Rings* book that uses the d20 system. A number of factors contributed to this decision, including the fact that *Oriental Adventures* (a book which the L5R sourcebooks draw upon but which was not printed by Alderac Entertainment Group) is now out of print. Following this book, all future *Legend of the Five Rings* sourcebooks will use the new Third Edition L5R system, a refinement of the classic “roll and keep system.”

This is not meant as a criticism of the d20 system, but rather a return to the game’s roots. For those fans of the original system who have stuck with us the entire time, we thank you and hope you’ll enjoy Third Edition as much as you’ve enjoyed everything else. For those of you who came on board during the dual-system period, we sincerely hope that you’ll stick around to see what else Rokugan has in store...

might better know how to unmake it. It never truly understood the world — it could not understand and remain what it was. Instead, it found humans who were willing to help. The house of the ninja named Goju fell out of favor and was to be executed for treason. The Lying Darkness drew them into shadow and made them its servants.

For centuries it waited, plotted, and planned for a chance to unmake the world again. It stayed close to Onnotangu, whispering in Lord Moon’s ear, driving him ever deeper into madness. Lord Moon, it reasoned, was its only defense should Fu Leng ever return to hunt it once more.

Though Onnotangu believes the little shadow is his willing servant, in truth he has become its unthinking slave. When the Darkness unleashes its power upon the mortal realm again, Onnotangu will serve as its most powerful minion.

On the Day of Thunder, the only true obstacle remaining, the only one who could truly oppose the Darkness, was destroyed. With Fu Leng dead, could anyone truly stop the Lying Darkness from casting all the realms into oblivion?

For two years, the Darkness subtly spread its influence throughout the Empire. As *Hidden Emperor* opens, there is not a single being in Rokugan who has not felt its touch. Its influence is always subtle, but inevitably profound. In its wake it leaves doubt, shame, indecision, causes noble men to do foolish things. While its mortal servants bring distraction and chaos, the Darkness’ subtle influence insures that Rokugan’s heroes will deal with the resulting crises poorly.

Can even the greatest heroes of the Empire triumph against a menace with such insidious power? Read on and see.