

EMERALD LEGACY



Sanctuary

Chris Garvey and Jeanne Kalvar



The Imperial ship, Memories of Jade, burst from the all-consuming mists, several dozen li from the shores of the hidden island the mists concealed. Their Sanctuary. One by one the other ships of the fleet emerged. This was it. The land Lady Dōji promised, where they would be safe. Each of the Great Clans had prepared for this journey, ready to settle this new land.

The clans were on their own to decide where they would make landfall for their new territory. No one knew what resources or dangers lie on this mysterious island. A poor choice could spell disaster for a clan. Overtures and threats, promises and blackmail, as complex an intrigue as ever had occurred in the Imperial Palace had brokered between the clans, carried in envoys traveling from one ship to another as they moved through the mists to the destination the Water Dragon had promised.

Such promises meant little now.

Each ship of the fleet seemed to pause either in reverence or awe at Sanctuary, but the moment was brief before each clan separated going their own way.

The Scorpion ship, the Silken Ghost, was swift and stealthy, and the eyes of their scouts could see far.

They caught sight of fortresses rising out of the ocean atop jade-colored rocks, a promise of wealth and strength, and safe succor against even a strong army. A lighthouse warned of the treacherous waters. These buildings' grandeur called to the Scorpion, unlike the dilapidated city or wild forests they had passed. This is where they would stay and make their home in Sanctuary. Grand fortresses for a grand clan.

The commands went out swiftly.

As the Silken Ghost reached the waters, near enough for her first scouts to race ashore, Soshi Yuka watched. "These will have to do," she said, though the smallest smile graced her lips.

There was no doubt that the Lion would make ready to claim the finest land available. Their fierce army would defend any claim others might choose to make to strip it from them. But the lush bounty of the Fertile Fields surprised them all.

"I cannot believe my eyes," a reverent hush colored Akodo Yoshitsune's first words as he climbed out of the landing craft to see li after li of developed rice paddy. A gift of the Kami, truly.

Fields ready for planting stretched on as far as the eye could see. The fields were fertile, little tilling would need to be done and the bounty would be plenty. Truly this was a blessing for the Lion. This land they would ferociously defend, theirs.

"Land at last." Mirumoto Hitori had no love of the sea. The churning motion of the waves set his belly to roiling and he was grateful indeed to lay eyes on the sheer walls rising from the beach. The great Cliffs the Sea Dragon had brought them to reminded him of the mountain home they left behind. It was no snow-capped peak, though there might be mountains further away from the sea. But for Hitori, it was dry land, it was off The Water Ox, and it was enough.

An empty city, just waiting, cold and dead and lifeless. If any area of this new land held spiritual traps that lay hidden in waiting, it was this place. But, despite the danger, what a boon! Asako Reina walked the streets of the silent city in wonder. A city, fully furnished, just waiting for them. It was too good to be true. The Phoenix had not relished the thought of building a place to live, primitive and new, and this boon solved that problem.

And the other clans made no claim to it. For whom better than the Phoenix to deal with its mysteries? The first mystery was obvious to Reina. "Lady Dōji didn't build this city...but who did?"

Unicorn scouts were the most fleet in the Empire, their horses outracing the very wind. But Takame feared they would never match such speed on the waves, not in a wallowing beast of a boat. Horses were meant to run, not be carried.

The Imperial ship was ahead of them when a sandbar ground under the hull; the East Wind would sail no more. Shinjo Takame sighed as she climbed down to the boat that would convey her to this new land. "We are so far from home."

She hoped that there were meadows nearby for the horses. For now, though, all she could see was a thin stretch of beach, a small cove, and rising black and red striped cliffs, riddled with caves. Each cave was a black tunnel disappearing into darkness. Things to explore later, but for now, she needed grass.

"It's so beautiful." A soft shirring whispered across the wind, li after li of rustling bamboo mingled with the sound of birds to Daidoji Akikore's ears.

The politicking to win the spot had been carefully done. It would have been nice to hold the fertile fields the Lion seized, of course. But that would make the Crane a target for every clan eager to fill their bellies. But great industry could be hidden in the depths of a forest of this size, and bamboo provided great wealth for those who knew how to craft it.

For Akikore, it was its beauty that called him. That, and the lure, the whisper of adventure, possibility, and hidden secrets. For that, maybe it was worth leaving the Empire behind.

"We must bear it, for the Empire." Hida Honoka grumbled, as she glowered at the Shore of Ashen Flames. The Imperials had chosen a sheltered cove and inland lake, beautiful as a picture, but they did not seem to care that the land nearby was far too near the lightly steaming volcano that dominated the northern part of the island's sky. The Crab felt duty-bound to stay close to the Empress, but the Unicorn had claimed, if only accidentally, the more favorable southern shoreline.

That left the shore to the north of the Imperials the only true option. Strange smells and rocks stained with sulfur or built into terraces of gypsum, trees twisted with the heat and paths of glassy basalt serving as rivers twisted parts of the landscape. But there were hot springs here, and the Kaiu would never find a greater forge. And, Honoka had to admit, a blasted landscape did remind her of home.

Hardships would lay before them all. Challenges that had not been seen in centuries. But as Hantei Botan watched the shoreline of emerald and ruby, jade and jet, approach, with a crown of colorful birds, she realized she did not feel even a little afraid.