

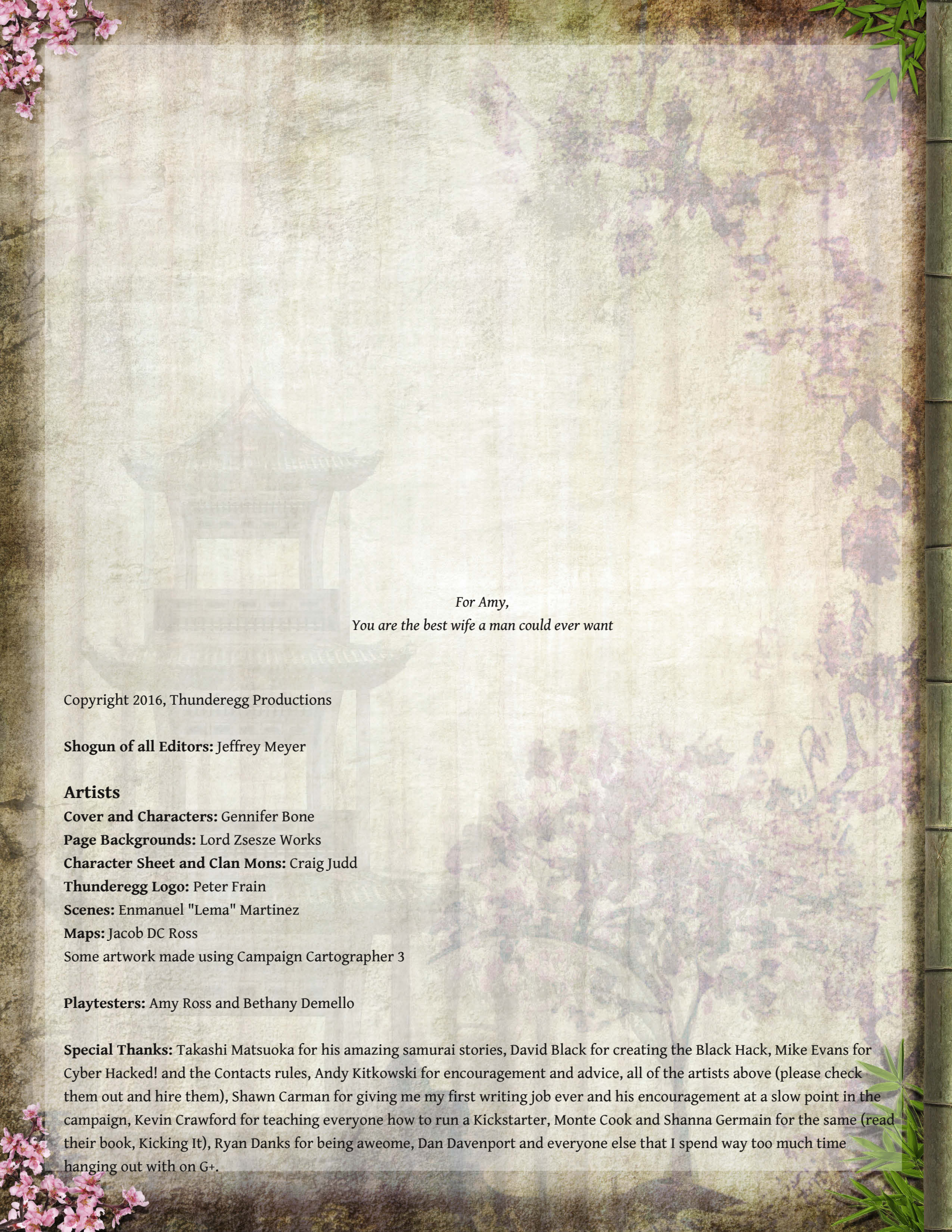
# KAI GAKU

Jacob DC Ross

GB

КАИГАКИ





*For Amy,  
You are the best wife a man could ever want*

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>Chapter 1: Game Rules</b>	<b>1</b>
Core Mechanic	
Advantage and Disadvantage	
Intensify	
Honor and Dishonor	
Tracking Time	
Adventure Level	
Combat	
Mass Combat	
Dueling	
Campaign and Miscellaneous Rules	
NPC Generators	
Battlefield Events	
Usage Die	
Contacts	
Crafting Items and Weapons	
Languages	
"Social Combat"	
<b>Chapter 2: Character Creation</b>	<b>15</b>
Stats	
Skills	
Classes	
Encumbrance and Equipment	
<b>Chapter 3: The Empire of Kaigaku</b>	<b>21</b>
Setting	
Kiseki	
<b>Chapter 4: The Clans of Kaigaku</b>	<b>25</b>
Atsumichi	
Chisaten	
Kakujima	
Kondo	
Morimoto	
Shirai	
Toguchi	
Watanabe	
Other Factions	
Lesser Clans	
Sugida	
Toyama	
<b>Chapter 5: Secrets of Kaigaku</b>	<b>57</b>
Clan Secrets	
NPC Secrets	

# Introduction

Kaigaku was a long time coming. I wanted to make a game that captured the feel of other samurai RPGs without being a simple copy. I found a fantastic set of rules in the Black Hack system, specifically in *Cyber Hacked!* by Mike Evans, which is a fun game that manages to be both fast and deep. I spent many days figuring out what this book would use from previous systems, what it would drop and what I needed to add to make it a complete experience.

While I was probably the only person to lose sleep over making this book just right, I'm not a diva, and I want to thank all of the artists again. If you are a publisher, please take the time to look them up online and check out their portfolios. Every one of them is a talented professional whose work I credit with making this book as good as it is.

The design principles that I followed were to take inspiration from the real world while making sure to respect all cultures and history, utilising simple game mechanics that are easy to learn (we got a game going in about 10 minutes the first time out), providing enough of a setting and background to get you inspired for your own stories without "overpowering" your ideas, and most of all to make something that I truly believe everyone is going to have fun playing.

Many, many people helped this campaign in its earliest stages, whether they were Kickstarter backers, advisors or people who helped to spread the word (several people did all three). Thank you more than I can say.

I hope that I can continue to bring more wonder and excitement into your life with this book and its forthcoming expansions for years to come. If I ever read one post on some website, ages from now, where someone fondly reminisces about their time spent playing Kaigaku with friends then this will all be worth it.

Many thanks,

Jacob DC Ross

The background of the page is a traditional East Asian ink wash painting. It depicts a landscape with a multi-tiered pagoda on the right side, a large tree with pink blossoms on the left, and a bamboo fence running along the bottom edge. The painting is rendered in a soft, misty style with muted colors. The text is overlaid on this background.

# Chapter 1

# Game Rules

# What is Kaigaku?

Kaigaku is a roleplaying game setting and rules system that allows you to play out fantastic samurai adventures with a group of friends. One player takes on the role of the gamemaster, or GM, who tells the story. The rest of the players create player characters (PCs) who interact with the fictional game world.

Throughout the course of the game, players meet, befriend, or overcome various non-player characters (NPCs), jockey for the glory of their clan, and go on thrilling adventures. The rule set is based on *The Black Hack*, by David Black, which is in turn a modification of the rules for the original version of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

Kaigaku is a retroclone, in that it uses established rules from older games to build a new framework. Some of the mechanics are inspired from popular samurai RPGs that are now out of print. The idea is to bring back the feel of samurai pulp into a new game world. This book is standalone, so you don't need any other books to play.

## Game Concepts

This section explains the game in the broadest sense and clarifies a few terms.

### Core Mechanic

Any time you need to see if your character succeeds or fails at a task, roll 1d20 (a 20-sided die) and compare it to the relevant stat (numerical values that represent your character's physical and mental abilities). The GM determines which stat you should roll for each test.

If the roll is under your stat, you pass. Generally enemies shouldn't be rolling tests, but if something comes up where it makes sense that they would, consider which class an enemy would have. It has stats equal to twice its HD in the two stats which that class can roll twice during level advancement and equal to its HD in other stats.

### Dice Notations

Any time you see "dX", where X is a number, that refers to a die with X number of sides. A d2 can be a coin, with your choice of heads or tails as 1 or 2, or you can roll any other die and have odd results represent 1 and evens 2.

Kaigaku uses the following stats:

**Strength (STR):** A measure of your character's ability to work and cause damage in combat.

**Dexterity (DEX):** Your character's athletic ability, nimbleness and skill with ranged weapons.

**Constitution (CON):** How well your character rolls with the punches and takes damage.

**Intelligence (INT):** The ability that allows you to see patterns and solve puzzles.

**Wisdom (WIS):** How much you know, and how well you notice things.

**Charisma (CHA):** That special something that helps you influence other people.

*For instance, our hero, Atsumichi Yuranosuke, is trying to outrun pursuing ninja until he can get to a safe place to make a stand. He has a Dexterity of 14, so he needs to roll 13 or less to make it. He rolls 1d20 and gets 12, which means that he succeeds.*

*Princess Kaihime wants to convince her uncle to let her attend a feast in the palace. She has Charisma 15 and thus needs to roll 14 or lower. She rolls 15, and so fails to persuade her uncle.*

A roll of 20 is a "fumble" and always fails. The GM usually declares that an unintended negative consequence comes from this. A roll of 1 is a "critical success", or just a "crit", and always succeeds. The GM usually declares a beneficial consequence from a crit.

### Advantage and Disadvantage

When circumstances or training are decidedly in your favor, you have Advantage on a roll. Roll 2d20 instead of the usual 1 and take the lower result. When the odds are highly stacked against you you have Disadvantage. Roll 2d20 and take the higher result. The GM determines when you have Advantage or Disadvantage. Your character's class also provides a reliable Advantage for situations related to your PC's areas of expertise.

An Advantage is always canceled by Disadvantage, and vice-versa. If you have multiple sources of Advantage and only a single source of Disadvantage, you still don't get Advantage.

*Let's revisit our examples from the previous section. Atsumichi Yuranosuke is running from ninja, but since he's in an unfamiliar area of town, the GM declares that he has Disadvantage. He still*

needs to roll a 13 or lower. Rolling 2d20 he gets 11 and 17. Instead of getting away, Yuranosuke has to make a stand alone.

Princess Kaihime wants to go to the party. The GM rules that since her uncle remembers that she gave him a magnificent painting earlier in the day, that she has Advantage. She has a Charisma of 15 and rolls 17 and 5. Kaihime now gets to go to the party.

## Intensify

PCs can try to do more dramatic things by making their rolls more difficult. Intensifying once means taking a -2 penalty to the stat you use to make a roll, intensifying twice means taking -4, etc. Some effects are universal, such as Intensifying your attack roll to do more damage, while others are only available if your character has specific abilities.

You can only Intensify on any roll a maximum number of times equal to your ryu tier level +1.

Standard Intensification effects include increasing damage done by +1 per Intensification or simply making your actions more impressive to onlookers.

## Honor and Dishonor

Honor is everything to a samurai. This honor doesn't mean living according to noble ideals, as it is supposed to be in modern society, but rather being loyal to one's lord, and appearing to be a noble. Samurai do all sorts of sneaky things and so long as they don't get caught they tend to feel justified in their actions.

In game terms, honor works like this: when you create your PC, you determine whether your character is honorable, and therefore outwardly loyal and vice-free, or dishonorable, and therefore free to act as he pleases in public, but rejected by those who can better hide their vices. Honorable characters can, once per session, declare that they are acting for their honor when making a roll. This grants them Advantage, even if they have Disadvantage (which normally cancel one another out) for that roll. Failing the roll doesn't cause them to be dishonorable, because they tried sincerely, but word of their failure spreads far and wide. You can only act for your honor when the stakes are high and there are witnesses.

Acting in a dishonorable way gives an honorable character Disadvantage, even if they have Advantage. Additionally, if an honorable character acts so dishonorably to shame their clan or the Emperors, then they become dishonorable, but continue to have Disadvantage from dishonorable conduct. Characters who choose to become dishonorable at character creation never suffer Disadvantage due to acting dishonorably (they might get Disadvantage from other sources). Characters who act too dishonorably (should they have an honorable lord) might find themselves exiled from the clan or even facing death.

A character can attempt to redeem themselves and live an honorable life. This is true both for fallen characters and those who begin the game dishonorably. It takes a great deal of personal struggle, both inwardly and outwardly, to change one's life. The ultimate decision of what's honorable and dishonorable, and to what degree, falls on each GM. The GM should be consistent in their application.

## Tracking Time

There are two units of time in this game. Rounds, are for fast actions during combat or other dramatic situations. Turns are for travel, exploration, and other low-stress scenarios.

Turns can be minutes, hours, days or longer, depending on the scale that you're operating. A long sea voyage might be played out in Turns that represent weeks, while a foot journey of 10 miles could be represented by hour-long turns.

## Adventure Level

Adventure Level is an indication of how difficult challenges should be. It's equal to the average character level of all party members, though the GM can choose to lower it at appropriate situations. This could be something like having a group of courtiers wandering through the woods, or bushi during their first day at court. Adventure Level is used for various systems, such as the Enemy Generator, to help make things fair but challenging for the PCs.

## Kiseki

The source of power in the world of Kaigaku. Various charged emeralds, sapphires, rubies, diamonds and other gems contain a form of energy that is little understood, but widely coveted. Ascetics often implant kiseki into their own bodies to gain new abilities.



# Combat

The following section details everything you need to know about running combat for your Kaigaku sessions.

## Initiative

When combat breaks out, everyone sorts into an order so they each get to act and react in turn. Every character tests their Dexterity; those who succeed take their turn before their opponents. They must then act as a group, deciding their own order for actions. Those who fail their Dexterity tests go after their opponents.

## Player Turns

On their action, a PC can take a variety of actions: try and convince someone of something, blend into the background, attack their enemy, etc. It's not always necessary to keep track of turns outside of combat, but sometimes things are moving too quickly for PCs to get everything that they want to do done before anyone else acts.

*Princess Kaihime is in court. She sees a courtier whom she needs to warn of an impending plot. Other nobles are aware of the plot and want to be the first to warn the courtier. To make it to the courtier each PC and NPC has to walk from the entrance to the far end of court, and they're interrupted by sycophants who want to schmooze. Each character takes a turn moving and politely extricating themselves from conversation.*

## Armor Points

Armor Points, or AP, represent a character's ability to avoid incoming damage. They have a set value based on equipment and ryu. After each hit on a character, reduce damage by AP, then reduce AP by 1. AP regenerates after the character has a chance to rest for an amount of time that makes sense for the game's narrative. For instance, a minor scuffle might require only a few minutes for recovery, while a larger melee could require an hour or more. A night's sleep is always enough time for rest. Enemies have AP equal to their HD -1, to a maximum of 10.

*Atsumichi Yuranosuke is wearing medium armor. He has 4 AP. After being struck by a ninja blade (the 7 HD ninja rolls 2d8 for damage and gets 5), Yuranosuke uses his armor to reduce the damage. It's currently at 4, so the strike does only 1 damage as it glances off his shoulder pads. His AP then reduces to 3.*

## Armor Proficiency

A character's class determines which armor they can comfortably wear. If a character wears unfamiliar armor, they subtract -X from their stats when making physical rolls, where X is the AP from that armor.

*Princess Kaihime is travelling on the road. Her guards insist that she wears armor as protection from snipers. She currently has on a set of heavy armor, which gives her AP 6. Since she's a courtier not trained in armor, she gets -6 to all of her physical stats for making rolls.*

## Movement and Distance

There are four abstract range bands in this game. Close is within arm's reach, or up to 5 feet, Nearby is between 5 and 60 feet, Far Away is 60 to 120 feet and Distant is anything beyond this. Some effects have listings in specific distances, but for the most part you should be able to relax and not worry about counting squares and hexes on maps. You can run to a Far Away Distance if you don't do anything else in a combat round, and you can move to anything Nearby and attack. Enemies might attack you while you run.

Ranged and thrown weapons list maximum accurate distances. Shooting or throwing beyond this distance imposes Disadvantage on your attack and requires you to Intensify for each range beyond the maximum distance. If maximum distance is Distant, apply a -2 stat penalty for every 60 feet beyond 120 feet.

## Attacking, Defending, and Damage

When a character attacks a creature, they must roll below their Strength stat for a Melee Attack or Dexterity for a Ranged Attack. Likewise, when an enemy attacks, the character must roll below its Strength against a Melee Attack and Dexterity against a Ranged Attack to avoid taking damage. The GM can determine the stat required for the test.

The damage an attack deals is based on the character's class. To make a Melee Attack, an opponent must be Close. Ranged Attacks against Close opponents are possible, but the attacker suffers a Disadvantage. Enemies deal damage based on their HD. Refer to the Enemy HD table.

## Critical Attacks and Fumbles

If a player making an attack rolls a 1, they double the result of the damage dice they roll. If they roll a 20 when avoiding an attack, they take double damage. Armor Points are used normally.

## Two-Handed Weapons and Dual-Wielding

Larger, more deadly weapons deal +2 damage, but also add +2 to the attack rolls you make with them (increasing the difficulty of attacks). The same holds true for wielding two weapons at once. Some ryu might negate the penalty when using that school's weapons of choice.

## Class Weapons

Each class lists weapons that PCs of that class are proficient in using. When using a weapon not listed in their class, combat tests have Disadvantage. Also, each combat-oriented ryu teaches a particular weapon. Your PC is proficient in weapons taught by their class and their ryu.

## Mass Combat

Samurai didn't make their name fighting in simple mob melees. The heart of the clan structure was born on the field of battle. Large combats are a staple of samurai fiction and history. Whenever you find yourself commanding a large group of soldiers against another large group (defined as such according to the GM's discretion), you're in mass combat. The goal, rules-wise, is to earn a sufficient number of Victory Points to defeat your opponent.

At the beginning of each mass combat round, roll Wisdom to try to outmaneuver your opponent. Having favorable terrain, larger numbers, superior training, or morale can grant Advantage, while you can suffer Disadvantage if your opponent boasts more factors in her favor than you have in yours. It's also possible, in the case of PCs commanding opposing armies or any other time the GM decides that an NPC should roll, for both generals to roll at Disadvantage.

If you succeed on your roll, you gain Victory Points equal to the amount under your Wisdom that you rolled. The exact number of Victory Points needed to win a battle depends on how long the GM wants the battle to last, how large the armies are, and how high the stakes of winning and losing happen to be. A good starting amount is 30 Victory Points, which tends to give medium-length battles.

If one PC is commanding the battle and others are participating as soldiers, allow the soldiers to participate in combats with various opponents between rolling for Victory Points. Fighting valiantly and successfully gives bonus Victory Points, based on the GM's interpretation of how effective the PCs were at securing objectives, eliminating enemies and demoralizing the other side.

Failing the Wisdom roll grants no Victory Points, and allows your opponent to roll 1d6 and gain that many Victory Points for their side. Enemy armies run by NPCs also roll 1d4 every mass combat round and gain that many Victory Points.

## Dueling

A formal duel issued between two opponents to settle a matter. It can happen in the heat of battle, the middle of court, or on a busy street. Not all duels are lethal, or legal, but honor is always at stake. Dueling is as much mental as it is physical.

At the beginning of a duel, roll Intelligence or Wisdom to Center yourself. Any Intensification made to this roll carries over as free Intensifications to the Strike phase. Failing your Center roll gives Disadvantage on your Strike. After Centering, make a Strike Roll. The Strike is a Strength roll to hit and a Dexterity roll to dodge. Use different colors of dice to keep track. Before you make the roll, declare how you're going to use your free Intensifications from Centering (as +2 bonuses to Strength or Dexterity in any combination, or to increase damage rolled, by +1 per Intensification).

AP don't apply in duels unless the source of that AP specifically states that they do. Once a player makes their first Strike, assuming that the very first Strike doesn't incapacitate the NPC, combat rules apply normally, though the interaction is still considered a duel.

*Atsumichi Yuranosuke is confronting his enemy, Morimoto Tadasuke, about the dishonorable tactics used by Tadasuke's ninja. This is in open court, so Tadasuke challenges Yuranosuke to a duel to settle the matter.*

*Yuranosuke is a Level 4 PC while Tadasuke is a Level 5 NPC. Yuranosuke has Wisdom 12, and he Intensifies once as he Centers, decreasing his Wisdom to 10 for this roll.*

He also receives a -1 penalty to his Wisdom since Tadasuke has 1 HD higher than Yuranosuke's level. He rolls 8, which means that he succeeds, and has a free Intensification for the Strike roll.

For the Strike, Yuranosuke's player rolls a red d20 for Strength to hit and a green d20 for Dexterity to dodge. Yuranosuke decides to use his free Intensification from the Center roll to increase damage by +1. He rolls 7 for Strength (against his Strength of 12) and 12 for Dexterity (against his Dexterity of 14). This means that he dodges Tadasuke's strike while hitting with his own. He rolls 6 for damage and applies the +1 from his Center Intensification for a total of 7. Tadasuke has 15 total HP, so he reels from the blow. Being the dishonorable cur that he is, Tadasuke decides to continue to fight rather than concede the matter. Combat ensues...

## Enemy HD

HD, or Hit Dice, are a measure of how powerful an enemy is. You roll 1d8 per HD to determine an enemy's HP (Hit Points). Attacking them until their HP is depleted causes you to be victorious in combat. This system gives variable levels of health to similar enemies to keep things unpredictable. To save time you can opt to instead assume that each enemy has HP equal to 4 times its HD. Attacks done by enemies do default damage to PCs based on the table below.

## Enemy HD Damage

HD	Damage	For HD beyond 10, simply add +1d4 at every even-numbered level.
1	1d4	
2	1d6	
3	2d4	
4	1d10	
5	1d12	
6	1d6+1d8	
7	2d8	
8	3d6	
9	2d10	
10	1d10+1d12	

### Powerful Opponents

For every HD above the character's level, add +1 to every roll the player makes for any attribute test that would determine the outcome of a conflict between them and an NPC. A level 3 character defending against a HD 5 enemy attack would add +2 to their roll. This holds true for combat, social interactions, or other tests.

## Death and Dying

When a character is reduced to zero Hit Points (HP) they get taken Out of Action (OofA), they are unconscious, and cannot make any actions. When the fight is over or the PCs are out of danger, a character that is taken Out of Action rolls Constitution to see if they survive. If they pass, they recover 1d4 HP.

## Healing

Characters can gain Hit Points from class abilities and ryu. They can never gain more than their maximum and can never go below zero. When healing a character who is Out of Action, just start at zero and count up. That character is now back on their feet and no longer Out of Action.

## Resting

When characters rest for about an hour, they regain the use of all their Armor Points. Also, once per day, after resting, they may roll a Hit Die associated with their class and regain that many HP. After eight hours of sleep, a character regains another HD of HP.

## Campaign and Miscellaneous Rules

The following section covers rules for the GM as well as concepts that don't relate directly to task resolution or combat.

## Experience

Adventurers learn through defeating and overcoming obstacles. For every session, quest, or major event the character survives, they gain a level. The GM decides the exact milestones. Keep it consistent for the players' sakes.

## Gaining Levels

When a character levels up, their maximum Hit Points increase by rolling the Hit Die for the class. Also a player should roll a d20 for each stat, if the result is higher, that stat increases by 1. There's no maximum level for characters, but 10, 15 or 20 are all good places to stop. Once a character gets too powerful, the game becomes less challenging, and thus less fun. High-level characters should ride off into the sunset, retire, go out in a blaze of glory, or do something dramatic.

## Random Encounters

Unless the characters are in the middle of a purpose-driven scene, every 15 minutes of real time, create a random encounter to keep things interesting. This should be appropriate to the scene (no bandit attacks during a session at court, for instance).

To create random opposition for the group to encounter, roll 1d6, 1d8, 1d10, 1d12, or 1d10+10 to create Weak, Competent, Threatening, Tough or Boss opponents, respectively. The result equals the enemy's Hit Dice.

You can create a single opponent at the listed HD, or you can split the HD up to create multiple opponents. Make as many enemies as you think the players might be able to reasonably fight off, rolling dice as necessary.

As stated in the Armor Points subsection, enemies have AP equal to their HD -1, to a maximum of 10.

## Urban Enemies

Criminal gangs, called ninkyo, and other ne'er-do-wells roam the streets. One thug is as bad as another. Roll 1d6 for Appearance, Weapon and Abilities.

1d6	Appearance	1d6	Weapon
1	Missing Limb	1	Kanabo
2	Missing Eye	2	Jitte
3	Large Scar	3	Sai
4	Impossibly Tall	4	Wakizashi
5	Bulky	5	Bo Staff
6	Very Short	6	Pistola or Granada

1d6	Ability
1	Intimidation: Make a Constitution save or have Disadvantage on attacks against this foe
2	Rouse: Call in a thug with half HD and no abilities on a roll of 1 in 1d6 each round
3	Sneak: Intelligence save or next attack from this enemy gives you Disadvantage to defend
4	Hidden Weapon: On 1 in 1d6 every round this enemy gets an extra attack with a small weapon
5	Toss Sand: Dexterity save or be blinded for a round
6	Crazed: -2 AP, +2 damage to attacks

## Court Enemies

While blades don't get drawn in court as frequently as they do on the field of battle, a lord's chambers are no less deadly. Enemies found in the court tend to be opposing courtiers and their retinue.

**Courtier:** The staples of any court are the various nobles who petition the lord for favor. Roll 1d4 for the courtier's intent, 1d6 for their assets, and 1d8 for their desire. None of this information is necessarily known by the players, but with careful roleplay they can suss it out.

1d4	Intent	1d6	Asset
1	Hostile	1	Secrets
2	Neutral	2	Wealth
3	Favorable	3	Ear of the Local Lord
4	Masked Hostility	4	Biting Wit
		5	Military Resources
		6	Underworld Contacts

1d6	Desire
1	Precious Item
2	Audience with a VIP
3	Relationship
4	Business
5	Alliance
6	Illicit Info/Items

**Yojimbo:** A samurai bodyguard for a courtier or other VIP. Attacking a character who has a yojimbo imposes Disadvantage on your attack roll. Roll 1d6 for the Yojimbo's abilities, or select one that makes sense for the samurai's clan.

1d6	Ability
1	Durable: +1d4 AP
2	Savage: +1d4 damage per attack
3	Swift: Impose Disadvantage on Initiative rolls
4	Duelist: Impose Disadvantage on rolls in a duel
5	Hardy: +1 HP per HD
6	Fast: Can move up to Far Away and still attack

## Wilderness Enemies

While trekking from city to city, you're likely to run into wild animals.

### Animals

The fauna (and megafauna) of Kaigaku are often indistinguishable from those of Earth, such as deer, bears, dogs, and so forth. Some of their more threatening creatures are more reminiscent of Terran dinosaurs or the dragons of myth. Roll 1d6 for the animal's Type, Aspect, Instinct and Abilities.

1d6	Type	1d6	Aspect
1	Reptile	1	Herding Herbivore
2	Avian	2	Easily Domesticated
3	Mammal	3	Exotic and Beautiful
4	Insect	4	Pack Predator
5	Amphibious	5	Lone Predator
6	Plant	6	Lone Herbivore

1d6	Instinct
1	Flee on Sight
2	Flee Stronger Foes
3	Flee if Attacked
4	Retaliate if Attacked
5	Attack Weaker Foes
6	Attack on Sight

1d6	Abilities
1	Attack from Far Away
2	Impose Disadvantage on Hiding or Running Rolls
3	Venom (Constitution save or take 1d6 for HD/3 rounds)
4	Call in Reinforcements (another of same creature with 1/2 HD and no abilities on a roll of 1 in 1d6 each round)
5	Heal 1d6 HP per round
6	Double Armor Points

### Star-Changed Creatures

One source of danger is the yearly Seirakka, where the stars of heaven crash to earth. Some of these stars bear kiseki, and if they happen to fall in a region populated with lots of wildlife, things can get perilous quickly. The kiseki bond with feral creatures, producing new variants of existing animals, usually more intelligent, stronger, and with new abilities. Some of these creatures are friendly, but many are quite hostile. Tracking down and eliminating these mutants is a noble calling.

To generate a mutant, you can create an animal using the tables above and then multiply its HD by 1.5. Herbivores tend to be benevolent, and predators malevolent, but this is not always true. Describe the change in appearance, usually a size increase accompanied by an exotic new coloration (metallic or jeweled skin and fur are common), a luminous glow, extra limbs, horns, eyes or other structures, and one or more powerful abilities (ascetic ryu abilities are a fantastic source of inspiration).

### Battlefield Enemies

Enemies created here are professional soldiers. While you won't normally roll for an enemy faction, in case you are fighting a coalition we've numbered the clans for random generation.

1d6	Type
1	Mounted Lancer (w/Yari)
2	Mounted Lancer (w/Naginata)
3	Infantry (w/Katana)
4	Infantry (w/Naginata)
5	Archer
6	Mounted Archer

1d8	Ability
1	Atsumichi: Imposes Disadvantage during duels
2	Kakujima: Does double damage on boats, beaches or within buildings
3	Kondo: Can heal HD*d6 HP once per battle
4	Morimoto: Has 2 granadas
5	Shirai: Wisdom check or suffer Disadvantage for HD rounds
6	Toguchi: Imposes Disadvantage when you roll Initiative
7	Watanabe: All HD rolled for HP equal 8
8	Lesser Clan: Select another ability from this list

## Battlefield Events

Use this section to simulate the chaos of war. You don't have to determine every event in the battle using this section, but you can use it when you want to create more drama or a possibility to turn the tide.

**1: Commander in Peril:** Create Adventure Level times 2 HD worth of battlefield enemies near the commander. You have to make it to your general before they get overrun. On each turn roll 1d4, keeping track of the total. Once the total equals 20 or more your commander is defeated and you suffer a heavy morale blow, if not an outright loss. If a PC is the commander begin combat immediately, and add the other PCs to the fight as they arrive.

**2: Comrade Under Pressure:** Create Adventure Level HD worth of battlefield enemies near your friend. On each turn roll 1d6, keeping track of the total. Once the total reaches 20 your ally is overcome. Make it to him before he's killed and fight off the attackers to save his life.

**3: Position Overrun:** Create Adventure Level times 1.5 HD worth of battlefield enemies near your fortifications or supply caches. On each turn roll 1d6, keeping track of the total. Once the total reaches 20 you lose the supplies (arrows, food, horses, et cetera) or the fortification, unless you make it there in time to stop the advance. This can break a siege if done wrong.

**4: Singled Out:** You must face Adventure Level times 2 HD worth of enemies. There are no secondary targets, just the party. Their attacks are brutal and do +2 damage with each hit.

**5: Eliminate Unit:** An entrenched unit sits at an important location. They have Adventure Level worth of HD. On reaching the unit roll 1D4, and on a 1 create an additional Adventure Level's HD of enemies.

**6: Nemesis' Arrival:** An old enemy surfaces, bitter about your last encounter. They challenge you to a duel. They have at least your character level in HD. Gain half their HD in Victory Points if you defeat them.

## Usage Die

Any item listed in the equipment section that has a Usage Die is a consumable, limited item. When you use a consumable, roll a Usage Die in the next Minute. If the roll is 1- 2 then the usage Die is downgraded to the next lower die in the following chain:

**d20 > d12 > d10 > d8 > d6 > d4**

When you roll a 1-2 on a d4 the item is expended, and the character has no more of it left.

## Contacts

At character creation, a player can create two level 1 contacts or one level 2 contact. After this initial point, all contacts must be gained through role-playing. A contact can be anyone useful to the PC, and it's up to players to create them. Contacts have Usage Dice; Level 1 begins at 1d6, Level 2 at 1d8 and Level 3 at 1d10. You can replenish this die, up to its default value, by engaging in missions that benefit your Contact.

**Level 1 Contacts:** Standard contact. You use them sometimes and they may remember you, but then again, they might not. They have no loyalty to you and would betray you at the first sign of trouble. Level 1 contacts never do something for free.

**Level 2 Contacts:** You see them on a semi-regular basis. You may have done a few favors for them, or passed enough zeni their way that they've become more endeared to you, and you've become friends. You reduce the number rolled on Charisma checks by 1 when attempting to get a Level 2 contact to do something for you. Sometimes a Level 2 contact will do something out of the kindness of their heart, but it's rare.

**Level 3 Contacts:** These are more than friends to you; they are stout friends who will stand by you. You may have grown up with this person, or saved their life. You see this person on a regular basis, and really don't even think of them as a contact anymore. Usually a Level 3 contact will do whatever they can to help you, even risking bodily harm. If you need to make a test to convince the contact to help you in some way, you have Advantage on the Charisma roll. There is a chance a Level 3 contact doesn't ask for something in return for a favor.

# Crafting Items and Weapons

Throughout history craftsmen have made some of the most elegant and stunning weapons, armor and works of art.

Kaigaku has more than its share of legendary artisans, with scores of traditions devoted to multiple disciplines. Even though the caste of craftsmen rank below samurai and farmers/infantry, those who create the highest-quality arms, armor and fine art command a level of respect comparable to that of high-ranking courtiers.

If you want to wield a weapon that you made yourself with hammer, tongs, and forge, use this system to create your masterpiece. You can also use it for generating "loot" items. Crafting uses Intelligence, or sometimes Wisdom.

## The Process

In order to make a weapon use the following guidelines:

**Crafting an average-quality item:** 2 weeks

**Inferior quality:** 1 week

**Superior quality:** 4 weeks, 2 Intensifications

**Gaijin design:** x2 time, 2 Intensifications

**Disposable item (shuriken, arrows, etc.):** 1 day for standard Usage die

**Increase Usage Die:** 1 day per step, 1 Intensification each

Note that you can choose to make shuriken, knives and other items of superior quality, but it does require 4 weeks, just like a blade would.

## Enhancements

**+1 Damage:** +1 week (Max +3), 1 Intensification

**+1 Damage Step:** +2 weeks (Max +2 die steps), 1 Intensification

Note that since weapons don't have fixed damage (that depends on character class), this means that you increase the damage done by a character when they use that specific weapon.

**Beauty:** +1 week per level, 1 Intensification

Beauty makes an item more elegant. Gain a +1 bonus to Charisma for rolls when trying to impress others, or when giving it as a gift.

## Kiseki Effects

Adding these powerful stones to your creation imparts incredible abilities. It takes three Intensifications to add these effects, plus actual kiseki to set into the weapon. Gathering these stones is often a full adventure in itself. Unless otherwise specified, you can only add each improvement once. You can't add kiseki to an Inferior item.

## Weapons Effects

**Added Damage:** Make an Intensification on your attack roll to do +1d4 damage. Failing this roll does 1d4 damage to you.

**Disruption:** Intensify your attack roll to shock your opponent. Gain a -2 bonus to your attack and defense rolls against this opponent. Each additional Intensification on the attack affects another Close or Nearby enemy.

**Force Wave:** For every two Intensifications on your attack roll this weapon can reach another range band.

## Armor Effects

**Added AP:** Gain +2 AP.

**Extreme Protection:** Make a Constitution roll after the first time you get hit in combat. If successful you don't lose any AP for absorbing the damage.

**Replenish:** Make a Constitution roll. Heal 1d4 HP per Intensification if successful. This ability is unavailable until the armor spends 12 total hours in sunlight after each use.

## Item Effects

These effects are useful for tools, gear and other items. With the GM's permission you can add them to weapons and armor.

**Utility:** Pick a stat, this item gives a +1 bonus to that stat when used for a specific task relevant to its function. You can add this effect up to three times.

**Durability:** Impose disadvantage on any attempt to break this item.

## Multiple Enhancements

Normally you can only make a maximum number of Intensifications on any roll equal to your Tier Rank in your ryu, which maxes out at five. This would make it impossible to create some of the more wondrous combinations of effects.

The solution is that you can spend time creating an item, say making it Superior quality and beautiful, and can improve it afterward as a continuation of the process. Improving existing items takes as much time as the base crafting for the item (depending on quality), as well as the time for any improvements added in this round of crafting. It also imposes Disadvantage, and if you fail on this roll you ruin the item. It's possible to enhance an item more than twice; for each time after the second apply a cumulative -1 penalty to the stat used to craft. A Superior item can only hold one kiseki effect. You can improve a Superior-quality item like you would a regular item in order to make it Supreme-quality. A Supreme-quality item can hold two kiseki effects.

## Selling Items

Items sell for one tenth of their listed cost if they are of Inferior quality, ten times the price at Superior quality, and 100 times the price at Supreme quality.

## Clan Treasures

Each of the clans of Kaigaku values various styles and items, and each is known for making their own distinct weaponry, armor and other pieces. All are at least Superior-quality items.

**Atsumichi: Atsumichi Obi:** The artisans of the Atsumichi create some of the most beautiful garments in Kaigaku. These obi (kimono sashes) embody the Atsumichi spirit: beautiful but deadly. They have two Beauty enhancements, plus the cut is designed to naturally correct posture for drawing swords, granting a +1 bonus to Dexterity and Strength when Striking and dodging in a duel.

**Chisaten: Royal Dao:** Based on the Imperial Sword, this older blade design is shorter and broader than a katana, as well as straight, but for rules purposes it plays the same. These golden-inlaid weapons are given to the most accomplished and virtuous members of the samurai caste. It provides advantage any time you declare that you are

acting in accordance with the Emperor's will. This symbol of authority also does +3 damage to dishonorable foes (bandits, mobsters, etc.) and has three Beauty enhancements.

**Kakujima: Tricky Kimono:** The Kakujima used to be a country at odds with Kaigaku. During their many trading visits they were often suspected of smuggling, and frequently searched. These kimonos are secret innovations with all manner of hidden pockets. When you wear one you can conceal anything that you were holding in your hands by making a Dexterity roll. There is no penalty for acting against an opponent of higher HD than your level when trying to hide something. Whenever you go out, name two items that searchers absolutely will not find unless they cut the kimono to pieces.

**Kondo: Monkey Spear:** The telescoping spears used by the most elite members of the Kondo clan are useful for both combat and the athletic maneuvers for which that clan's warriors are famous. They have spring-loaded inner shafts that extend them to up to 20' in length (within the Nearby range, but not to the extent of it. They also do +1d4 damage when you thrust forward with the telescoping action, and they provide +1 to Dexterity whenever you use it as a lever (pole vaulting or other athletic feats).

**Morimoto: Grand Fan:** Fans are important to members of Kaigaku's society. In court they allow you to hide your facial expressions and on the battlefield they're useful for signalling troops. Some warriors even use them as defensive weapons. Artisans in service to the Imperial Families create magnificent fans that are highly valued by any samurai. A Morimoto Grand Fan is a Superior-quality item with two levels of the Beauty enhancement. You can use them in place of sai, jittle and other small weapons for the purposes of class abilities and Weapons of Choice for ryu. A general gains +1 to the stat that they use for rolling to gain Victory Points in the mass battle system.

**Shirai: Ingeom Swords:** These straight-bladed weapons are, for game purposes, functionally identical to katana. They have short cross guards instead of rounded tsuba and ring-shaped pommels. The Shirai give them as gifts to exceptional members of the clan, or to flatter high-ranking Imperials and other samurai. The gift-giver may attach colored braids to the pommel, each with various



significance. An honorable samurai never, ever adds a braid to their pommel, only doing so at the allowance of a Shirai or Imperial lord.

All ingeom are at least Superior quality. Someone bearing a ingeom given to them by the Shirai has Advantage when engaging in negotiations with members of that clan. They're also balanced to provide a +1 bonus to Dexterity or Charisma when performing kata (swordsmanship forms) to impress onlookers. Lastly, ingeom have at least one level of the Beauty enhancement.

**Toguchi: Toguchi Masks:** These ingenious kiseki-bound items have at least one Beauty enhancement. They also have a startling effect. The user can, at will, cause the mask to record up to one minute of conversations, which it can then play back when worn. The mask doesn't have to be worn when recording. It's most commonly used to collect blackmail evidence on a subject.

**Watanabe: Tortoise Shell:** This Heavy armor is designed to help the Watanabe fulfill their duty of protecting the Empire from the Kherin threat. It features a sloped design that provides an extra 1 AP against all arrow attacks (which never gets reduced). It also inflicts Disadvantage to any attempt to shatter it, and the base AP (not including the arrow protection) is 8.

## Languages

There are many languages spoken throughout this world, including several in Kaigaku alone. Each character begins the game knowing a number of languages equal to their Intelligence/5, rounded down (minimum of 1). Each time your Intelligence increases during level up you can learn a new language. If this proves to be too time-consuming for your campaign the GM can also rule that every level or two allows you to learn a new language. Here is a list of languages:

**Kaigaku:** The tongue of most people within the Empire.

**Shirai:** The tongue of the Shirai clan before the formation of modern Kaigaku. Famous for its hangul system of writing that is far easier to learn than Kaigaku's kanji characters.

**Turkhel:** The language of the Kherin and other steppe peoples, including the Nuurgen tribe that lives within the Watanabe territory.

**Albish:** A difficult language spoken by the pale-skinned gaijin from Albar. It's full of rules and exceptions to those rules that make most Kaigaku loathe to study it.

**Cordovan:** The tongue of Cordova. Very, very distantly related to Albish, it uses the same alphabet. Cordovan is far easier for a native of Kaigaku to learn than Albish.

**Achal:** The language spoken by the Achaem. This remote empire lies beyond the Kherin, and there is very little contact between them and Kaigaku.

**Marui:** The tongue of the jungle nation of Maru. They lie to the south of Achaem, and while there is no direct contact between them and Kaigaku, Cordovan traders bring luxury goods from Maru to Kaigaku.

**Uriwane:** Spoken by the Uriwane people displaced by the formation of Kaigaku. It's generally only learned by merchants or the occasional diplomats and generals sent to keep the Uriwane in line.

## Social "Combat"

Courts are a space as deadly and hostile as the field of battle, only the weapons used are words: innuendo, veiled and naked threats, blackmail and subtle insults. This system models the back-and-forth between courtiers as they jockey to shame or put down their enemies for self-aggrandizement or to further the goals of their clan. It's an optional bit of flavor that you can use to add flair to your more political games.

### "Attacking"

You attack your foe using Charisma. This can represent anything from polite persuasion to a rude jab. It's considered gauche in polite society to out and out insult someone. A courtier is more likely to comment on an enemy's poor behavior in a roundabout way, referencing a tale of a clumsy ox immediately after that person drops their cup of tea. As the debate rages on it's not uncommon for the losing side to become more and more heated.

### "Defending"

Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens. Countering a verbal attack means rolling under your Wisdom stat. This entails, in terms of the game fiction, that the attacker failed to convince you, could not raise your hackles or that you swiftly countered their argument. It doesn't mean that you're right, only that you've better defended yourself in this instance.

### "Damage"

Each character has a pool of "social HP" equal to twice their Intelligence score. For NPCs roll the same dice for this pool that you used to roll for HP. Cut the pool in half unless the NPC is a courtier. Default damage is 1d8 for courtiers, 1d6 for samurai and ascetics and 1d4 for ninja. NPCs do half their listed damage in social combat (courtier NPCs do full damage).

### "Defeat"

If you or your opponent loses in social combat, there can be any number of consequences. Generally it represents loss of the will to continue, loss of face in front of others or simply being convinced that you're wrong. Defeat might mean that you get convinced of something new, or it could be permanent damage to your reputation or anything in between.

## Customs and Etiquette

Samurai are a complex lot. Their courtiers follow a strict code of conduct with a myriad of complicated rituals and requirements for polite social interaction. In the high-stakes world of Kaigaku politics not knowing or simply ignoring these customs can be the difference between life and death.

There's not enough space in this book to detail everything that goes on in a daimyo's court and what's expected of polite samurai, and many players might not be interested in exploring social nuance. Here are the basic things that every samurai should know and obey:

\* Always bow in greeting. Standing and bent from the waist if addressing an equal, prostrated to the floor if addressing your lord or an Imperial Personage.

\* Address equals as "X-sama", and subordinates as "X-san". These are the same word, but "san" is a contraction that you wouldn't use with someone at your own station. Lords (daimyo and above) are "X-dono".

\* Family name, then given name. You never address someone with whom you're unfamiliar by their given name, nor do you address those of higher station (from another clan or family) by their given names, but as "Family-sama" or "Family-dono".

\* Never wear your shoes indoors. Change out of them at the entrance of any building and put on slippers from a cubby.

\* Never accept a gift when it's first offered; refuse politely, referring to yourself as unworthy of such a magnificent work. Refuse twice before accepting gifts from highly stationed individuals.

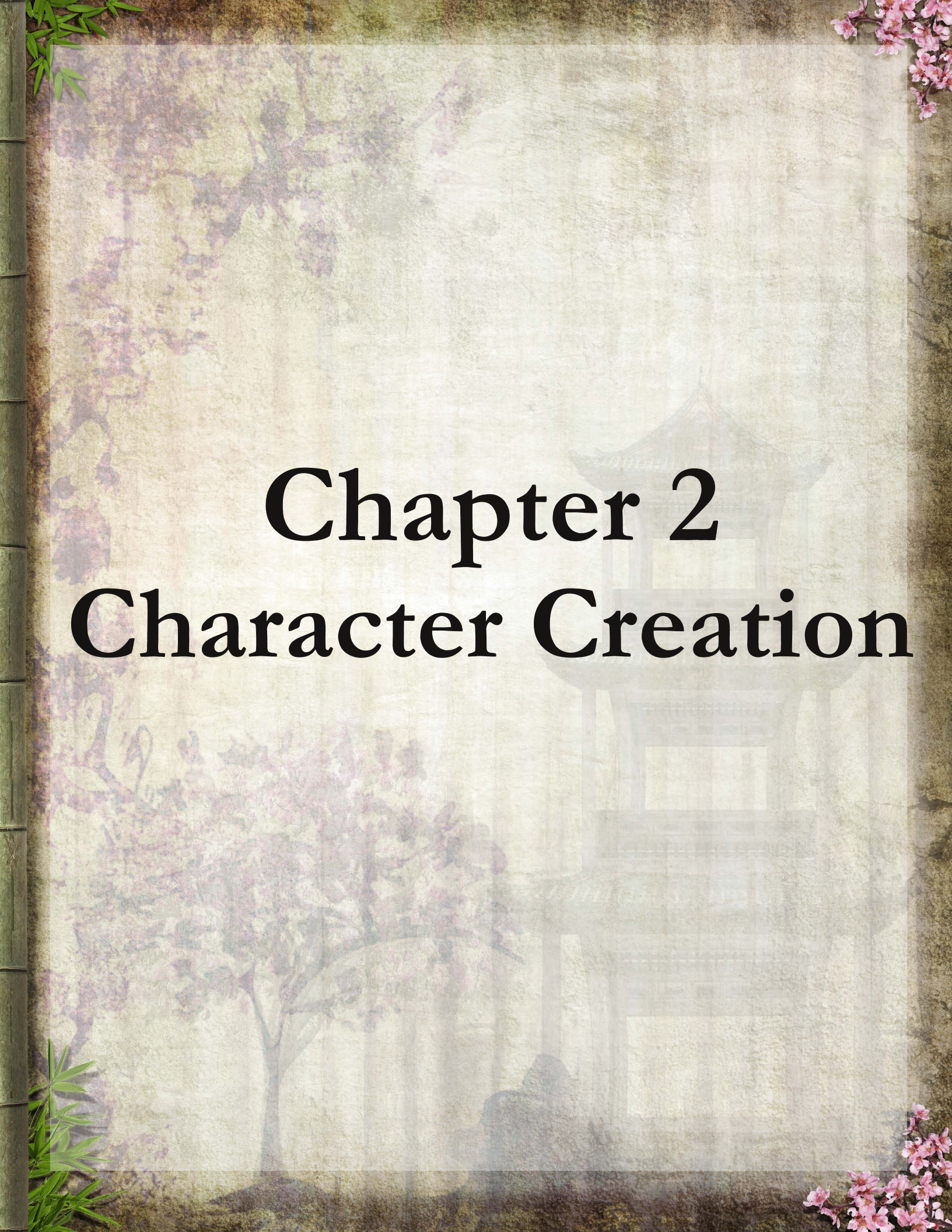
Playing as scheming courtiers can be a lot of fun, but it's not for everyone. Not all players have extensive knowledge of the real-world cultures from which Kaigaku derives inspiration, so it's not fair to use real-world customs to cause in-game problems for another PC. Be positive to one another so everyone enjoys all aspects of the game, from the field of battle to the stately court.

## Final Thoughts

If there's a situation that's not covered in this section and you're unsure of what to do, go with the fastest, simplest option. Kaigaku and its Black Hack predecessors are all devoted to simplicity and fun above all else.

If you're looking for ideas as to where to go next in the story, call in one of your players' Contacts. That NPC is in trouble and needs help. If there's a recurring villain that you haven't used in a while, they are the source of the Contact's problems.



The background is a traditional East Asian ink wash painting. It depicts a landscape with a pavilion on the right, a large tree on the left, and a bamboo fence on the far left. The style is soft and atmospheric, with muted colors and a textured, paper-like appearance. The text is overlaid on this background.

# Chapter 2

# Character Creation

# Character Creation

To create a character, begin by rolling up your stats. Roll 3d6 for each stat (in order for a challenge, or create a pool of six results and assign them as you like). The stats are as follows:

## Stats

**Strength (STR):** A measure of your character's ability to work and cause damage in combat.

**Dexterity (DEX):** Your character's athletic ability, nimbleness and skill with ranged weapons.

**Constitution (CON):** How well your character rolls with the punches and takes damage.

**Intelligence (INT):** The ability that allows you to see patterns and solve puzzles.

**Wisdom (WIS):** How much you know, and how well you notice things.

**Charisma (CHA):** That special something that helps you influence other people.

If you roll 15+ for a stat, roll the next one using 2d6+2. If you're used to playing other OSR games, don't worry about the slightly lower starting stats, as they can skyrocket in this game. Once you're done, you can switch two stats of your choice.

Pick a clan. Clans are the major ruling force in Kaigaku. Some members of the samurai caste are ronin, wave men, who are masterless and without purpose in life. Lots of ronin find employment within various clans, and those who work hard are treated with respect. The various clans are detailed in the next chapter.

Choose a class, which provides a framework that expresses your character's profession and abilities. The classes in this game are Ascetic, Bushi, Courtier and Ninja.

Choose a ryu, or school, whose discipline your character practices. Each clan has their own ryu, plus there are some that are more or less universally available. Ryu help you to specialize your character and make them more powerful. Ronin can choose to take a warrior's pilgrimage, beginning the game enrolled in the ryu of their current patron clan and then moving on to a new ryu as they fall in with another clan. Each ryu has to be learned in order.

Each character gets 1d12x100 zeni to buy their gear. Their class also provides some items in addition to what they purchase. Gear doesn't do anything on its own, but it describes the resources available to a character. In other RPGs, weapons tend to have listed values that show how much damage they do. In Kaigaku, damage comes from a character's class. The bushi wielding a katana is going to do more damage than a courtier. See the list of equipment following the Classes subsection for more info.

## Skills

As an added way to make your character more distinct from other PCs and to increase their capabilities, you can give them three Skills. Skills represent the knowledge that they've picked up from their life course.

Each character has three Skills: their Station, their Passion and their Duty. Station refers to your birth or upbringing. If your character was born to privilege you could name your Station Skill: Wealthy Scion, for instance. Passion is a character's hobby. This can be anything from flower arranging to horseback riding or more. Duty refers to a character's job within their clan (or the job they perform for their employer in the case of ronin). A Duty might be blacksmithing, acting as a bodyguard or being a merchant liaison.

Two Skills begin at Rank 1 and the other begins at Rank 2. You may increase one Skill by +1 Rank every time you hit an odd-numbered character level. No skill can climb to over Rank 3. When you are about to make a roll one or more of your Skills could logically assist you performing the task represented by the roll, then you add the highest relevant Skill Rank to the stat you're using for the task.

## Ryu

A character gains their basic skills from their class, but they specialize by attending a ryu. Clans sponsor one or more of their own exclusive ryu, though nothing prevents a samurai from attending an unaffiliated ryu. Each Ryu has five tiers. You get your first tier ability at the second character level, and gain another tier at every even-numbered level after that. If a ryu lists a weapon of choice or some other condition before the tier abilities, practitioners have Disadvantage when using the techniques with non-favored weapons.

## Classes

### Ascetic

Ascetics focus on helping others. Some remove themselves from the world to train until the time is right to venture out.

**Starting HP:** 4+1d8

**Per Level/Resting:** 1d8

**Weapons and Armor:** Reinforced gi, combat gloves, staves

**Attack Damage:** 1d8 Armed or Unarmed/1d6 while Improvising

### Special Features

Gain Advantage on Dexterity tasks to jump, roll or perform other feats of athleticism.

Gain 4 AP. This is your natural dodging ability and can only stack with a reinforced gi.

Gain an additional attack per turn when fighting unarmed or with a class weapon. Gain a further attack (3 total) per turn on reaching the 5th level.

### Leveling Up

Roll twice for Strength or Dexterity, roll once for other stats.

### Starting Gear

**Weapons:** Bo staff

**Armor:** None

**Additional:** Training gi, wide-brimmed hat

### Bushi

Bushi are warriors and servants of their lords. A bushi uses his body and physical abilities to accomplish his tasks.

**Starting HP:** 4+1d10

**Per Level/Resting:** 1d10

**Weapons and Armor:** Any

**Attack Damage:** 1d8 Armed/1d6 Unarmed or Improvising

### Special Features

As part of their action, a samurai can make a number of attacks equal to half their level, rounded up.

### Leveling Up

Roll twice for Strength and Dexterity, roll once for other stats.

### Starting Gear

**Weapons:** Katana and wakizashi, bow

**Armor:** Tatami armor

**Additional:** Quiver and arrows, chop, tea set, average kimono and average jimbei

## Ninja

A ninja is the underhanded servant of her lord. Beyond the popular notion of black-clad assassins, many ninja are simple agents who conduct nothing more than surveillance missions.

**Starting HP:** 4+1d6

**Per Level/Resting:** 1d6

**Weapons and Armor:** Ninja-to, shuriken, blowgun, knives, light armor

**Attack Damage:** 1d6 Armed/1d6 Unarmed or Improvising

### Special Features

Advantage when attacking while undetected or unexpectedly and while leaping and climbing

Attacks from concealment do 2d6 Armed/2d4 Unarmed or Improvising+Ninja level damage

### Leveling Up

Roll twice for Dexterity or Wisdom, roll once for other stats.

### Starting Gear

**Weapons:** Ninja-to, 6 shuriken, caltrops

**Armor:** Tatami armor (concealable)

**Additional:** Dark blue or green gi (reversible to white in the snow), wigs and makeup, climbing claws

## Courtier

Courtiers in service of a clan are also samurai, and even some ronin make their living as for-hire advocates. They spend their time building up their clan's political strength.

**Starting HP:** 4+1d6

**Per Level/Resting:** 1d6

**Weapons and Armor:** Wakizashi and knife

**Attack Damage:** 1d6 Armed/1d6 Unarmed or Improvising

### Special Features

Advantage on Charisma tests made to influence people and to resist emotional and mental manipulation.

Begin the game with a Level 2 Contact within your clan in addition to your other Contact(s)

### Leveling Up

Roll twice for Charisma or Intelligence, roll once for other stats.

### Starting Gear

**Weapons:** Wakizashi and knife

**Armor:** None

**Additional:** Chop, tea set, fine kimono, cosmetics

## Encumbrance

A character can carry a number of items equal to their Strength with no issues. Carrying over this amount means they are encumbered and all attribute tests have Disadvantage. Encumbered characters can also only ever move to somewhere Nearby. A character simply cannot carry more than double their Strength.

Item	Cost (zeni)	Usage Die	Notes
Armor, Light	10		Can fold into a small square. 2 AP.
Armor, Medium	100		4 AP.
Armor, Heavy	200		6 AP.
Arquebus	250	d6	2-handed gaijin rifle. Takes 2 turns to reload. Accurate to Far Away. Does double damage.
Arrows	5	d8	
Bo Staff	10		2-handed utility weapon.
Bow	100		2-handed. Uses arrows. Accurate to Far Away.
Granada	20	d4	Gaijin. Throw Nearby. Explodes and damages everyone Close to the target.
Jitte	100		Grants Advantage on defense against swords.
Kama	50		Blade shaped like a mantis claw.
Kanabo	150		Heavy 2-handed studded club.
Katana	200		Traditional samurai sword often provided by one's lord.
Knife	15		Use in melee or throw. Accurate to Nearby.
Kusarigama	80		Kama with a weighted chain. Gain Advantage to bind or trip enemies.
Naginata	100		2-handed bladed staff.
Ninja-to	100		Sword with a utility kit in the tsuka (handle).
No-dachi	200		Long 2-handed sword. Grants Advantage to attack horses and mounted enemies.
Pistola	100	d6	Gaijin gun. Takes 1 turn to reload. Accurate to Nearby. Does double damage.
Reinforced Gi	5		1 AP.
Sai	10		Utility three-pronged peasant knife.
Shuriken	3		Thrown. Accurate to Nearby.
Wakizashi	100		Short sword that normally complements the katana.
Yari	125		2-handed spear. Can throw to Nearby.





The background of the page is a traditional Japanese ink wash painting (suiboku-ga) depicting a landscape. In the center, a multi-tiered pagoda with a curved roof stands on a rocky base. To the left, a large, flowering cherry tree (sakaki) with pink blossoms is visible. The scene is framed by bamboo stalks on the left and more cherry blossoms in the top right and bottom right corners. The overall style is soft and atmospheric, with a muted color palette of greens, pinks, and greys.

# Chapter 3

## The Empire of Kaigaku

## Setting

Kaigaku is a nation whose culture is inspired mainly by feudal Japan, but with elements of Korea and China mixed in. I chose to go this route (as opposed to a strict historical game) to give GMs and players the freedom to deviate from established history.

Kaigaku is a peninsula jutting from the eastern edge of a high mountain range that terminates the western steppe. It's surrounded by the sea on the North, East and South, with various islands and archipelagos nearby.

The nation is run by an Emperor of the Daiten royal line. A schism several generations ago led to a power-sharing arrangement, where succession varies between two lines, the Hidari no Daiten in the West and the Migi no Daiten in the East. The current monarch is known as the Emperor or Empress of the Right or Left (depending on whether they're in the East or West), and the noble in waiting is the Prince or Princess of the Right or Left.

While the Emperor runs the Empire at the highest level, the job of administering the provinces lies with the clans. The clans are each led by a daimyo, a hereditary samurai ruler with a rank usually equal to a count or an earl. Each clan received its power sometime in the past, often ascending to prominence for valor in battle or through some other service to the throne.

## Castes

Players generally portray members of the samurai caste (Ascetics might be from other castes), which is the dominant social level of Kaigaku's society. As such, their lords expect absolute obedience, and the lower classes rely on them for protection from invaders, as well as to mete out justice to criminals. Samurai courtiers serve as bureaucrats who oversee public works, including farm and city administration.

Below the samurai are farmers. These people feed the samurai, so the samurai consider them important. Farmers have the opportunity to serve as ashigaru, or peasant warriors. Ashigaru get more respect from samurai, and are sometimes seen as low-ranking samurai. It's not unknown for a farmer to rise the ranks and ascend to the higher caste.

The next people on the list are the artisans. Since they make goods that the samurai use, including weapons (though the high-ranking samurai usually prefer samurai bladesmiths) and armor, but don't provide the necessities of life, they're below the farmers. A craftsman who is skilled enough might have a place at a lord's court.

Merchants fare little better than the Untouchables. Samurai have a distaste for money because debt puts one in the service of their creditor, rather than their lord and because they're loathe to the idea that their "inferiors" might gain prestige. The merchants are both patrons and victims of the ninkyo, or criminal families, that plague Kaigaku.

The Untouchables are people who perform duties that everyone from polite society considers unclean. The fact that such jobs, including tanners and sanitation workers, are necessary for society to function doesn't enter the minds of most samurai. Untouchables, called burakumin in Kaigaku, are forced to live in separate villages on the outskirts of larger cities. They're always easy to spot because their clothing tends to be shabbier than that of the poorest merchant.

If this doesn't sound fair to you, you're right. It's not. The fact of samurai history in the real world is largely one of oppression and violence. While the samurai ostensibly protected the lower classes, they were responsible for most of the civil wars in Japan to begin with. This is a pattern of behavior found in any society that classifies itself as a "warrior culture". Feel free to explore this. Maybe your characters have compassion for the people beneath them and want to elevate everyone to a better standard of living.

## Organization

Each village is run by an ashigaru headman, though he reports to his samurai governor. The headman is responsible for keeping the settlement clean and functional. Larger cities fall under the direct authority of samurai. A single samurai is the lord of the city, though he has several people below him who administer large districts. The districts are broken up into smaller sections where a lower-caste person usually organizes day-to-day affairs.

Samurai also run offices where members of various trades report. This includes miners, farmers, and merchants. Law

enforcement falls to the samurai, who run police forces where a bushi has the power to arrest any criminal, and to prosecute certain crimes, depending on the level of their authority. Their peasant assistants, called doshin, can break up low-caste fights and administer some corporal punishment.

## Terms

The Kaigaku word for most samurai officials who work in some form of local government is bugyo. To make it easier to differentiate, instead of using Kaigaku words, we call the heads of cities governors, the heads of districts magistrates (who also run the police force), “beat cops” or “detectives” are yoriki, peasant cops who are assistants to the yoriki are doshin, and overseers of commercial offices are commissioners.

Criminal families are called ninkyo, and their members are hanzaisha.

A samurai without a master is a ronin, or wave man. He gets very little in the way of respect, as his only privilege is to bear his arms. Many ronin become bodyguards for merchants, hanzaisha or freelance mercenaries.

## Timeline

Historical timelines in RPGs are a tricky concept. As a writer, I’ve got an idea of how and when the major events in Kaigaku’s story unfolded. Committing them to print tends to restrict future storytelling to fit within a narrow framework, though. If I want to tell a story about a lesser clan that originated in the aftermath of The Battle of Rose Mountain, I have to go and consult the timeline to make sure that I don’t contradict myself.

More important than that, however, is that it can handicap you, as a GM. Sure, you’re free to go against established canon, but it only takes one player complaint for this to become a headache that you don’t need. I’m excluding a detailed timeline for everyone’s benefit. That said, future adventure supplements might flesh things out a bit, but I’ll keep it generic.

Here’s what you need to know. The Empire is centuries old. The Atsumichi are among the oldest of the clans, while the Kakujima are one of the newest. The Empire has always been aware of Kherin, and vaguely aware of the desert empires to the east, as well as the tropical islands and

peninsulas to the south. Traders from Cordova and its neighbors arrived only in the last few decades, and they’ve only had a presence in the Empire for a few years.

Recorded history of any empire of this world is only accurate for perhaps the last 500 years. After that, it gets mythical. Nobody has any record that can be considered even remotely truthful past 1,500 years. The reason for this is up to you. As I imagine it, the planet on which Kaigaku is located was forcibly settled by a vastly powerful intelligence that transplanted humans and animals from Earth onto a new world in some observational experiment about cultural development. That’s just my thought on the matter and way to explain the biological and cultural parallels, and since you’re telling your own story, feel free to make up whatever you like.

## Historical Notes

Students of history should note some anachronisms in this setting. The dual-Emperor setup is inspired by the North and South courts, while the contact with gaijin powers and technology and the tension of the clans, are inspired by the Azuchi Momoyama period. There is no shogun, which harkens back to the Heian period (the Rise of the Shogun is a forthcoming campaign). The Kherin are inspired by the Mongols of 300 years before the Azuchi Momoyama. All of this is designed to create maximum dramatic tension in the arenas of politics, foreign relations, and inter-clan warfare.

## Firearms in Kaigaku

The state of firearms in the Empire is one of early emergence. The gaijin tightly control how many they release into Kaigaku, and who gets them. While most clans have their own engineers busy working to create their own arquebuses and pistols, the sages of the clans still don’t know how to make gunpowder. As it currently stands, guns tend to be used mainly to fire off one or two opening volleys before the battle is joined in close quarters. Ronin, ninja, and some samurai carry pistols, which they can use to devastating effect at the beginning of a melee.

None of the clans currently have access to cannons or to the metalworking processes used to refine the steel used in cannons, as well as reinforcing them. The iron in the mountains of Kaigaku is not suitable for these purposes. The best hope any clan has of getting cannons is to curry favor with the gaijin, in what would likely be an unequal treaty favoring the foreigners.

## Kiseki

The cultures of the world in which Kaigaku exists are all, to one extent or another, influenced by the kiseki. These powerful stones give their wielders great power when implanted within their bodies, and they can also do the same for weaponry. The gaijin are far less adept at internalizing the kiseki, but more advanced when it comes to creating mechanical devices that are powered by the shimmering gems.

It takes a great deal of study to learn how to manipulate the kiseki into predictable behaviors. In Kaigaku these scholars become ascetics, revered for their incredible powers. While a member of another class could wield a weapon powered by the kiseki, they simply don't have the knowledge or self control to bend them to their will in other ways. A layman could pack a granada with kiseki, which would double their damage and triple the range they cover. Using one of these granadas is generally very harmful to its thrower.

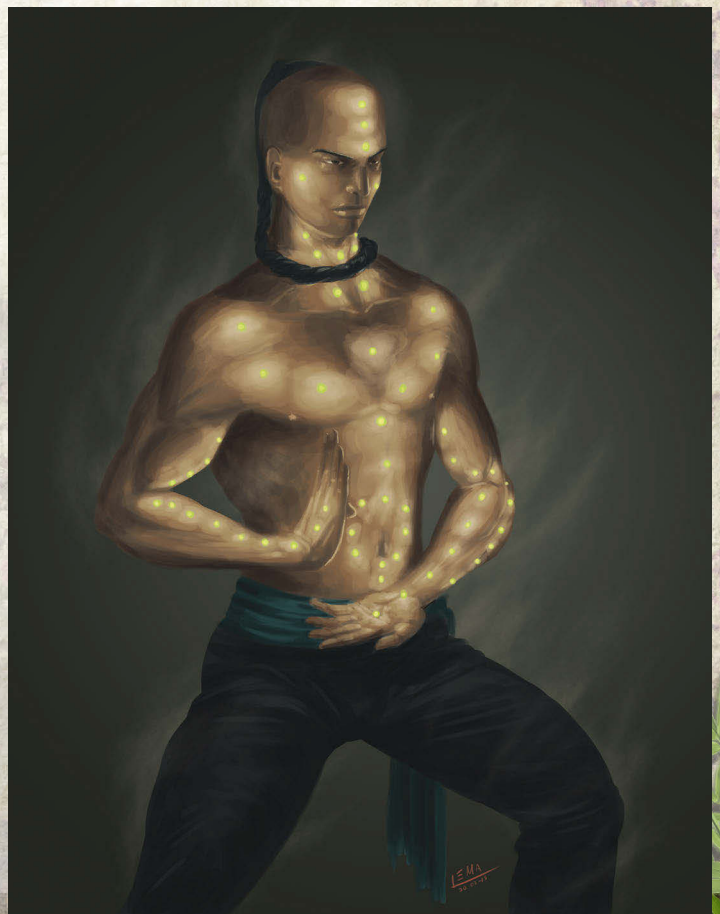
Most people harvest kiseki from meteor strikes. These strikes, called seirakka, also tend to mutate the animals in the nearby area, and with difficulty (suffering Disadvantage on a Wisdom roll) an ascetic can harvest Kiseki for their own use if they take them from vanquished creatures. Kiseki can't safely be taken from humans once they're implanted. There seems to be some measure of intelligence in an ascetic's kiseki, and transferring them between another person leads to the Madness.

### The Madness

Non-ascetics who implant kiseki within themselves gain random abilities (which more often than not manifest as gout of flame shooting from their bodies), but have very limited control. It takes a Wisdom roll every day to stave off the madness, and the difficulty of the roll reduces the affected character's Wisdom by 1 for every day that goes by (for the purposes of this roll only). Once it's failed the character's abilities take over, causing them to lose their minds and devastate their surroundings. Failing three rolls to resist madness sends a character over the edge forever. NPCs automatically resist for a number of days equal to their HD.

Madmen in the empire do sometimes regain a measure of functionality, if not sanity. If they find one another they tend to organize into small bands and attempt to sow havoc wherever they run. Some magistrates are tasked with tracking these poor souls down, and either bringing them in for trial and possible care, or to take them down if no other options exist. Many clans prefer to let the madmen live in guarded seclusion to study and learn ways to effectively counter the Madness.

There are rumors of criminal organizations, gaijin factions and even clans who attempt to twist the Madness for their own ends, unleashing these poor men and women on unsuspecting villages in an attempt to hurt their enemies while remaining unaccountable. So far there is no truth to these rumors.



The background features a traditional Japanese ink wash painting style illustration. A multi-tiered pagoda stands in the center-right, partially obscured by mist. To the left, a large, flowering cherry tree with pink blossoms dominates the scene. The ground is covered with rocks and bamboo stalks. The overall color palette is muted, with greys, browns, and soft pinks.

# Chapter 4

## The Clans of Kaigaku

## Atsumichi: Iron Flowers

The Atsumichi are one of the oldest clans in Kaigaku. Their courtiers were among the founders of the Imperial Court, and as such they've influenced culture and etiquette throughout the Empire for centuries. Atsumichi leaders focus on winning battles at the political level, so they seldom have to fight in wars of steel.

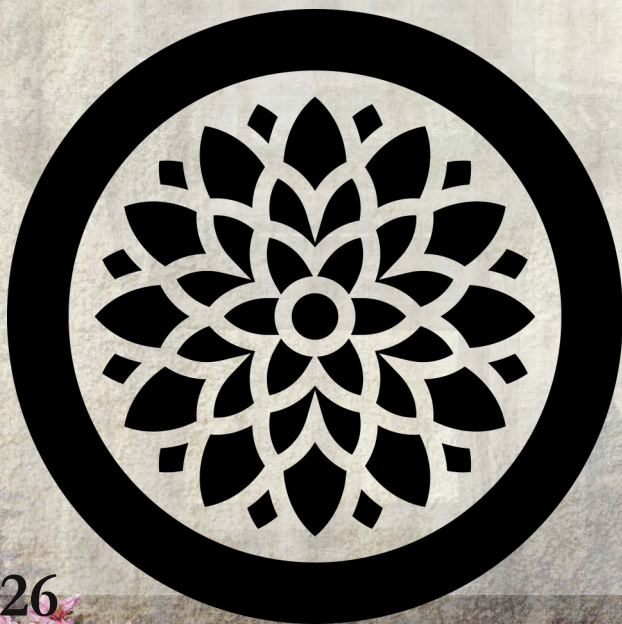
### Atsumichi Leadership

#### Atsumichi Hikaze, Chivalrous Warrior

The ancient Atsumichi seem to be in good hands thanks to the traditional values of their leader, Hikaze. Able to capture the hearts of courtiers with his wit and the spirits of bushi by means of his dueling skills, this newly-appointed daimyo is one of the Empire's rising stars.

His biggest fault is what others view as his trusting nature. Hikaze is the sworn brother of Kimura, the notorious daimyo of the Kondo. The two have entered into a series of treaties, and outsiders claim that Kimura's reckless course is going to drag Hikaze, and thus the noble Atsumichi, down with him.

**Adventure Hooks:** Hikaze hosts a storytelling and poetry competition, with generous rewards for the winner. The lord wants a way out of his treaties and needs agents to cause Kimura to shame himself in public. A rival clan is trying to amend Imperial law to lessen the Atsumichi's political influence.



## Atsumichi Ryu Swift Stag

Perhaps none are so feared for their ability in the quick-draw duel as the practitioners of the Swift Stag style. A member of this school waits until he sees his opponent flexing and draws first, interrupting the strike.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Katana

### Tier 1: Clashing Strike

You gain a +2 bonus on any attack made when drawing your sword for the first attack of a round or the Strike of a duel. You sheathe your sword at the end of every round.

### Tier 2: Strike Before the Strike

Even if you're not in a formal duel you can Center (see the Dueling rules) during the first round you engage an enemy. This takes the place of half of your allotted attacks for the round, rounded down.

### Tier 3: Through the Forest of Steel

Whenever you Center, you gain a +2 bonus to Dexterity to avoid your opponent's attack in combat or Strike in a duel.

### Tier 4: Pass Unscathed

When you Center in battle, you can forgo all of your attacks to run towards a specific enemy. If that enemy is within Tier rank times 15 feet, you can make a single attack against that opponent at the end of your run. While running, any Intensifications from your Center this round that you apply to dodging apply to all attacks made as you run by.

### Tier 5: Stag's Majesty

When you issue a challenge at the beginning of a battle or duel before Centering, make a Charisma roll against your opponent. In a regular duel, any Intensification made to this roll reduces the number of times that your opponent can Intensify when they Center by one. In a battle, if you pass this roll, the opponent accepts you as a challenger and they refuse to attack anyone else. The Intensifications from this roll each provide a +2 bonus to Dexterity for rolls made to dodge attacks on the way, but not melee attacks from your target. You can't attack anyone else until you resolve the personal combat.

## Chrysanthemum

This is one of the oldest courtier ryu in Kaigaku. Members of this school of thought had a hand in establishing many of the courtly traditions that are ingrained in the culture. They are masters of manipulation and exclusion.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: Universal Observation

You never suffer Disadvantage due to being in an unfamiliar social situation. In a truly exotic environment, such as the court of the Cordovan monarch, make a Wisdom roll to determine social mores.

### Tier 2: Make a Reputation

In any social situation, you can roll Charisma to praise another character for their taste (bringing back a classic trend, starting a new fashion, et cetera). For each degree of Intensification, you make a more flattering comment that increases the esteem of that character for the day, and also increases their disposition towards you.

### Tier 3: Break a Reputation

Make a Wisdom roll to recall an esoteric rule of courtly attire or etiquette that a rival is somehow breaking. You can subsequently make a Charisma roll, Intensifying as you like, to make others aware of the faux pas.

### Tier 4: Disguised Words

You have learned to conceal your words. For each time you Intensify a slanderous or mean remark made to others about a third party, anyone else has to Intensify an equal number of times to trace the remarks back to you.

### Tier 5: Dictate Customs

Whenever anyone (another PC, a local lord, et cetera) is planning a social event, you can roll Charisma to modify the guest list or set the theme (dress code, games, et cetera). Excluding someone of higher social rank means that you roll with a penalty equal to the difference between their HD and yours.

## Unseen Web

This ryu teaches interconnectedness of energy and matter. It's a lesson learned after untold years of study of the kiseki. Students of the Unseen Web focus their attention on a single state of matter. While most ascetics harness power within, the Unseen Web's teachings relate to the world around the practitioner.

**Type:** Ascetic

**Weapon of Choice:** Unarmed

### Tier 1: Phase of the Web

Choose fire, gas, liquid or solid to be your specialty. So long as you bear a sample of your specialty on your person you can manipulate that matter or energy at Nearby distance, up to half your body size. This matter can attack, doing 1d6 damage, and it can act with half your Strength.

### Tier 2: Wrap Within

You get a special set of AP that applies only to damage caused by natural sources of that specialty (lava, poison vapors, drowning, falling rocks, et cetera). This AP is equal to your Tier rank.

### Tier 3: Tug the Web

Roll Wisdom up to your Tier rank number of times per day to create a portion of your specialty equal in size to your fist. This matter takes any form that you reasonably know, but it is only one type of material (pure water or gold as opposed to composite materials). This matter disappears after five minutes, but any water you drink remains in your system. You can Intensify to create additional portions of matter per Intensification.

### Tier 4: Weave the Web

Double your AP against your specialty, and it now applies against synthetic forms (explosions, distilled poisons, weapons and so forth).

### Tier 5: Master the Web

You can now manipulate matter up to Far Away and it can now be as large as you. Make a Wisdom roll and Intensify to increase your control size by a number of times equal to how many times you Intensified. This larger volume of control lasts for a minute. Increase its damage to 2d6 and it acts at your full Strength or Strength 12 (whichever is higher).



## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Chisaten:** They are our "elder brothers". We see one another as above the rest.

**Kakujima:** Useful for what they bring to court, but they must learn their place.

**Kondo:** Scruffy forest hermits. They are harmless enough.

**Morimoto:** Two-faced boors we would like to see expelled from court.

**Shirai:** True friends and allies, thanks to their traditional ways and vast body of knowledge.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** Keep watch on the marches and stay away from the rest of us.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** They smell of pork and have the manners of the same.

**Cordova:** See Albar.

**Kherin:** These barbarians will find that there are worse things than a Watanabe army if they ever pierce our borders.

**Uriwane:** When the Atsumichi founded Kaigaku's courtly society, these were the last few people who resisted being lifted up from a primitive state.

### Territory

**Capital:** Ginmachi, a city famous for its gilded gates and walls. It's situated on the banks of the Daigawa River, and has a population of about 50,000 people. The main draw of the city is Gin-jo, the Golden Palace, whose beauty rivals that of the Imperial Residences.

**Trading Goods:** Textiles and garments, fine art.

**Terrain:** Rolling hills and valleys, with small tributaries feeding into the Daigawa.

## Notable People

### Atsumichi Goemon, Greatest Lover in the Empire

Goemon is the younger brother of Hikaze, only 19 years of age. He's a slave to fashion and to his passions. Goemon spends much of his time in sake houses, where he met Kimura, daimyo of the Kondo, and later introduced the hard-partying lord to Hikaze. The young man gets away with his behavior because he patronizes and promotes the arts within the Atsumichi territory and wherever he travels. He claims that his time spent in sake houses is to help search for budding artistic talent, and the fact that he's discovered several promising singers and dancers means that Hikaze is eager to overlook his brother's faults. One day his behavior is going to place the lord of the Atsumichi in a compromised position.

### Hikaru, Ronin Duelist

Many ronin serve the clans on a for-pay temporary basis. Hikaru chose the life of a wave man and ended up in Atsumichi territory. He's undefeated in duels, and his reputation is a fearsome one, since none of his opponents have survived their encounters. Hikaru kills on the first strike, cleanly, so vengeful lords and relatives have thus far been unable to get revenge for their slain kin.



## Chisaten: Lesser Imperials

The Emperors of Kaigaku only pass on their status and family name of Daiten, which is rarely spoken aloud, to the heir. Chisaten is the house of younger sons and daughters not in line to inherit the throne. These youths usually spend their young adulthood living in remote areas as guests of various clans. Chisaten who are farther from the current line usually serve as governors and bureaucrats.

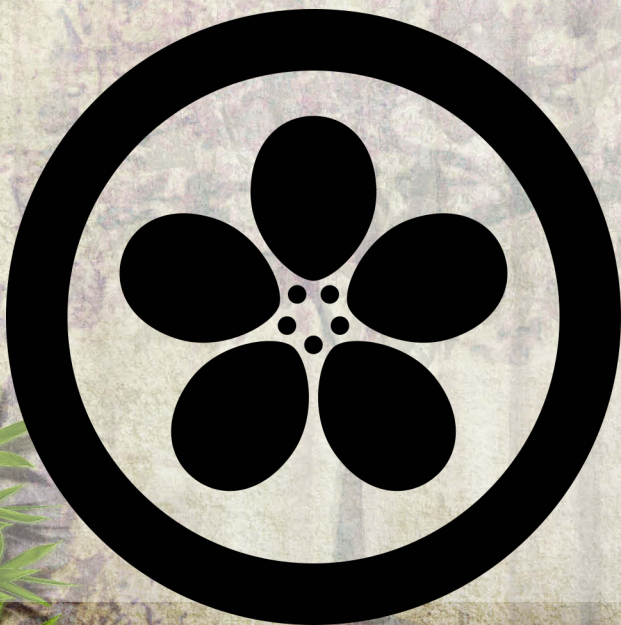
### Chisaten Leadership

#### Chisaten Daiichi, Slimy Governor of Harayama

The Chisaten are held up as paragons of virtue for the rest of the Empire to admire and emulate. Their example of setting aside their own desire for power for the good of society makes them well-liked among the populace. There's an exception to every rule, and in this case, it's Chisaten Daiichi.

The people of Harayama live in fear of Daiichi's greedy policies. He is in league with several local ninkyo to extort money from merchants and smuggle contraband throughout the Empire. Everybody suspects something, but so far, there's been no definitive proof.

**Adventure Hooks:** Daiichi has a document showing that he is actually third in line for the position of Emperor of the Left, and he'd love for someone to help him move up in line. Rebellious hanzaiasha are forgetting their place and attempting to cut Daiichi out of their dealings. Gaijin priests are becoming problematic, and Daiichi needs them removed from his city without any public spectacles.



## Golden Peacock

A style of speech and mannerisms that instantly commands the attention of others. Golden Peacock practitioners are authoritative and charismatic. Members of any clan may join, and often find themselves on a fast track to prominence, but also with deep obligations to their patrons.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: Splendid Entrance

Upon entering a room or social situation, roll Charisma and Intensify. You gain a number of +1 bonuses that you can use on social or mental rolls in this situation equal to the Intensifications called.

### Tier 2: Command Respect

When you see two or more parties arguing or negotiating, make your presence known with a gesture or word and roll Charisma. If successful, you join the conversation as if you had been invited to it.

### Tier 3: Still The Room

When you want an interaction to cease temporarily, roll Charisma and Intensify a number of times equal to the difference between your level and the HD or character level of the highest-level character involved in the interaction. If successful you get to say your peace and frame the matter in terms of Imperial Law, and the parties are now inclined to refer to your judgement.

### Tier 4: Judgment of the Noble Line

Make a successful Wisdom roll when the conversation pertains, even marginally, to an area of your expertise (GM's discretion) and others regard you as an authority. For the rest of the conversation, you can make a Charisma roll, intensifying a number of times equal to the difference between your opponent's HD or level and your own (minimum 1 Intensification) to have that person's most recent relevant statement be untrue, gauche, or otherwise inappropriate.

### Tier 5: Supreme Entrance

The bonuses from Intensifications related to your Tier 1 ability increase to +2.

## Shining Carp

Members of this ryu are paragons of bushido, the warrior code. As with most of their institutions, the Chisaten do admit students from outside the family. The clans pay the Imperials in great favors to have the prestige of one of their own in the school. Members learn how to use their own honor and willpower as a weapon.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Katana and jitte (wielded simultaneously)

### Tier 1: Honor is my Sword

You can act for your honor one more time per game session.

### Tier 2: Left and Right Hands of Justice

You only add +1 to your attack rolls when dual-wielding your weapons of choice.

### Tier 3: Honor is my Armor

You can act on your honor two more times per game session. This replaces the Tier 1 benefit.

### Tier 4: The Wicked Cannot Stand

You have no penalty to attack rolls when dual-wielding your weapons of choice. You can choose to Intensify your attack rolls a number of times equal to the difference in your level and the enemy's HD, minimum 1, to cause them to drop their weapon.

### Tier 5: Victory by Virtue

You can call on your honor a total of five times per game session.

## Brilliant Dawn

The Imperial Families are not known for their martial bent, but instead pursue more gentle interests. The Brilliant Dawn is their artisan ascetic school, known for producing magnificent works infused with the power of kiseki.

**Type:** Ascetic

**Weapon of Choice:** Barehanded or self-crafted weapons

### Tier 1: Perfection Made Real

You get free Intensification for all rolls to craft a permanent item, such as a sword, piece of armor or saddle.

### Tier 2: Exceed Possibilities

The maximum number of Intensifications you can make on any crafting roll is now capped at twice your Brilliant Dawn tier rank.

### Tier 3: In the Hands of a Master

Whenever you wield a weapon you've made you gain advantage on attacks, and your self-crafted Armor gives you +AP equal to your Brilliant Dawn tier rank.

### Tier 4: Child Calls Parent

Make an Intelligence roll. You can tell if any of your creations are within Long distance. Make one Intensification to learn their direction and another to learn which item it is without even seeing it. You can also increase the distance by 40 feet per Intensification.

### Tier 5: Pass Along Perfection

Anyone who wields an item made by you suffers no penalty for being of the wrong class. Members of the appropriate class gain Advantage on their rolls using your weapons or +2 AP when wearing one of your armors.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** Their devotion is touching, but they really must disabuse themselves of the notion that they approach us in terms of nobility.

**Kakujima:** We're glad to have these merchant sailors within the fold. Several of our members have agreements for protection on the islands if things get rough on the mainland.

**Kondo:** Who can say? These inscrutable samurai don't like to associate with the rest of us.

**Morimoto:** Brave and resolute, even if they're a bit duplicitous.

**Shirai:** Wise and noble, but their concept of treating commoners well weakens all samurai.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** They failed their duty when they admitted the Nuurgen into Kaigaku. There will be a reckoning.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** Arrogant and rude. Like the Morimoto but without a warrior's code.

**Cordova:** Respectfully scholastic, but overzealous with their religion.

**Kherin:** They live without fear of the Emperors. They attack our border. They are non-people who must be crushed.

**Uriwane:** The antithesis of honor and order. If they stay in their place we will tolerate them to hold up as an example of why bushido is necessary for civilization.

### Territory

**Capital:** The Chisaten have no true ancestral lands. They're often found as city governors, though. The current most prominent city under their care is Harayama, located on the southern coast, where gaijin come to trade.

**Trading Goods:** Usually selling admission into their ryu or lessons in art and courtliness.

**Terrain:** Varies, as the Chisaten live throughout Kaigaku.

## Notable People

### Chisaten Hanzo, Royal Executioner

Hanzo is a dour man with a long face and a thinning head of hair. His official job is to act as the top magistrate in the empire. He travels from city to city as needed and passes judgement on high-level samurai accused of crimes. More and more he's come to hate his position. He is held up to be the paragon of bushido by all who know him, but the fact that he so frequently has to judge so-called virtuous samurai for their indiscretions makes him wonder if there are any true adherents of bushido left. His distress is compounded by the fact that his assignments seem to be based more on punishing supporters of whomever happens to be on the current "wrong" side of the conflict between the Left and Right Emperors. He plans to retire soon and is looking for a worthy successor.

### Shang Ze, Brilliant Strategist

Shang Ze serves the Emperors by means of training the various clan armies in tactics. The Imperial Families intentionally changed his name and obscured his family origin to keep any of the clans from trying to influence him. Shang Ze goes where he's assigned, running mock battles between various armies with the purpose of determining where any weaknesses in the Empire's defense might lie and how to best shore them up. A pudgy man with wide smile and a bald head, Shang Ze rarely speaks, but never stops watching.



## Kakujima: Wily Traders

Not a clan in the same right as most others, the Kakujima are actually the royal family of a small island kingdom that was subjugated by Kaigaku generations ago. Their place in the Empire is to provide luxury hardwoods, flowers, spices, and other rare items found only on their home islands to the mainlanders. It's a testament to their savviness that they were able to maintain a modicum of independence and integrate into Kaigaku's society.

### Kakujima Leadership

#### Kakujima Hitomi, Voice for Unity

A growing movement calls for the Kakujima archipelago to reassert its independence from the mainland. Many samurai and peasants refer to their daimyo as "Queen Hitomi" in private conversations. Hitomi herself is aware of some of the whisperings, and does her best to suppress such thoughts in the name of loyalty and survival.

The lady of the Kakujima knows that together her clan and the Empire are stronger than they are alone. Her three daughters, Himiko, Takako and Emi, each support the independence movement. To quell their rebellious desires, Hitomi had them each break a single arrow in half. After this, she told them to snap a bundle, which the strong warriors were unable to do. Hitomi is an old woman, and she can only hope that the lesson isn't lost on whichever of her daughters succeeds her.

**Adventure Hooks:** Pirates are preying on fishing and merchant boats. Someone (definitely not the upstanding Hitomi) needs something smuggled into the mainland. A rival merchant faction is causing trouble.



## Island Spider

Do you need something that's in short supply? A disciple of the Island Spider ryu can get it for you, for a price. This school teaches courtiers how to navigate the complex maze of supply and demand in order to get what they want.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: Dew on the Web

Make a Wisdom roll when you or someone you're speaking with needs something material, such as a bottle of fine sake or an exotic perfume. The GM determines how many, if any, Intensifications you need to make in order to find the nearest source of that resource.

### Tier 2: Tapping the Web

Whenever you do a favor for someone who is not overtly hostile to you by getting them something that they need, you can use them as a Level 1 Contact for the next week.

### Tier 3: Spinning the Web

The default Usage Die of your Contacts increases by one step, including both those you currently have and Contacts you develop later.

### Tier 4: Expanding the Web

When you do a favor for a Contact, you increase your Usage Die with them by one step, up to the default value. If you do a significant favor for a Contact whose Usage Die is at its default value, increase their Contact level by 1. You can only do this once per month per Contact.

### Tier 5: Mastering the Web

Contacts created from your Tier 2 ability now begin as Level-2 Contacts.

## Frenzied Shark

Their clansmen call them marines, sailors or just bushi; their enemies call them pirates. Members of the Raging Shark serve most often on naval vessels, but their skills at fighting on the open sea translate well to the battlefield.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Knives or jitte

### Tier 1: Sure Positioning

You never suffer Disadvantage for fighting on boats, horses, or any other uneven or moving terrain.

### Tier 2: Teeth Always Bared

Increase by one step the Usage Die for your sets of throwing daggers you currently possess, and any that you obtain later.

### Tier 3: First Bite

When you attack an enemy who is unaware of your presence, immobilized, fallen, or whom the GM judges would suffer Disadvantage if they were a PC, you roll a die one step larger than normal for damage.

### Tier 4: Hobble the Weak

If you make an attack and Intensify, you can trip up your opponent. You gain Advantage for your next attacks on them, up to a number equal to the number of times you Intensified for this effect.

### Tier 5: Final Bite

When you use your Tier 3 ability, the damage die now increases by two steps.

## Spitting Cobra

What is the best defense against your enemy? Never let him get close enough to strike. Like the snake from which this ryu takes its name, these ninja are capable of causing terrible damage at a distance with incredible speed.

**Type:** Ninja

**Weapon of Choice:** Bow

### Tier 1: Devastating Shot

When attacking with a bow and arrow, do additional damage equal to your Spitting Cobra Tier rank.

### Tier 2: Stealthy Hunter

When you shoot from a hiding place, you may roll Dexterity to quickly move to another place out of sight if there is cover nearby.

### Tier 3: Speedy Shot

Gain an extra attack per round usable for shooting bows.

### Tier 4: Rule the Air

You can defend someone else against a ranged attack by shooting the arrow out of the air with your own arrow by rolling Dexterity. This uses one of your attacks for the round.

### Tier 5: Supreme Shot

You gain an extra attack per round, in addition to your Tier 3 ability, usable for shooting bows.



## Relations with Others

### **Kaigaku**

**Atsumichi:** They don't care much for us, but it's only a matter of time before they acknowledge our noble nature and help us get more legitimacy at court.

**Chisaten:** Our original sponsors into the Empire. It could have gone much worse, so we're grateful for the opportunity to prove ourselves.

**Kondo:** They hide themselves away. Who can respect that?

**Morimoto:** We have no qualms with their tactics, only that they're more than a match for our land-based forces.

**Shirai:** Good for them, being so smart. But why do they do so much for free?

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** So sad that they're stuck in eternal warfare, but that keeps them buying our weapons.

### **Gaijin**

**Albar:** They bring the goods, and they pay very, very well for what we have.

**Cordova:** We don't care for their zealotry, but they're generally respectable.

**Kherin:** They take what they want and have no concept of money. This is unthinkable.

**Uriwane:** Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. If the rest of the Empire, and the Uriwane themselves, knew the value of their resources, we'd all be a lot worse off.

### **Territory**

**Capital:** Kakutoshi, a large port on the norther side of Kakujima, the island from which the clan takes their name. It has an expansive "port city" made up of floating boats in the harbor, where traders can buy and sell without ever setting foot on land. The population is approximately 97,000 individuals.

**Trading Goods:** Spices that grow nowhere else on the planet. Iron and gemstones.

**Terrain:** A lush island jungle. Central mountains surrounded by dense vegetation.

## Notable People

### **Kakujima Himiko, Tempestuous Warrior**

Himiko is Hitomi's eldest daughter. She is also the premiere warrior of the Frenzied Shark school, a fact that she proves time and time again during her daily sparring matches with the crew of her flagship, the *Green Cloud*. Himiko knows that her mother expects her to fall in line with Kaigaku social mores, but this young woman is enamored with the sea, fighting and profit, and she views the Kakujima as masters of all three. She respects warriors from any of the clans, so long as they can prove their skills to her, and she recruits from all over for her growing fleet. Thanks to her violent nature Himiko also has a paranoid nature and distrusts her sisters, whom she feels are plotting to keep her from becoming daimyo when their mother dies.

### **Kakujima Takako, Free-Spirited Explorer**

Takako shares her sister's love of the sea. What separates the two women is that Takako's passions are less martially inclined and generally lead her to seek new knowledge and experiences. Takako is a slightly built, but athletic young woman who so far has never set foot on the mainland of Kaigaku. She spends most of her time at sea and is one of the few samurai to have visited the nation of Maru. Takako's wanderings are also fueled by her mother's ambitions to marry her off to start producing grandchildren and secure the family line. While there is no restriction on what samurai women can do, Takako fits into Kaigaku's notion of an ideal "courtly wife", which means that there are all sorts of suitors for her hand. This is a life which Takako herself has no desire to experience, so she stays as far away from the courts as she can.

## Kondo: Forest Wardens

Masters of the great Midorina Forest, the Kondo spend most of their time in solitude and study of nature. They tend to stay in the woods unless something drastically important calls them away. Kondo tend to be hospitable, if aloof, hosts to visitors within their own lands.

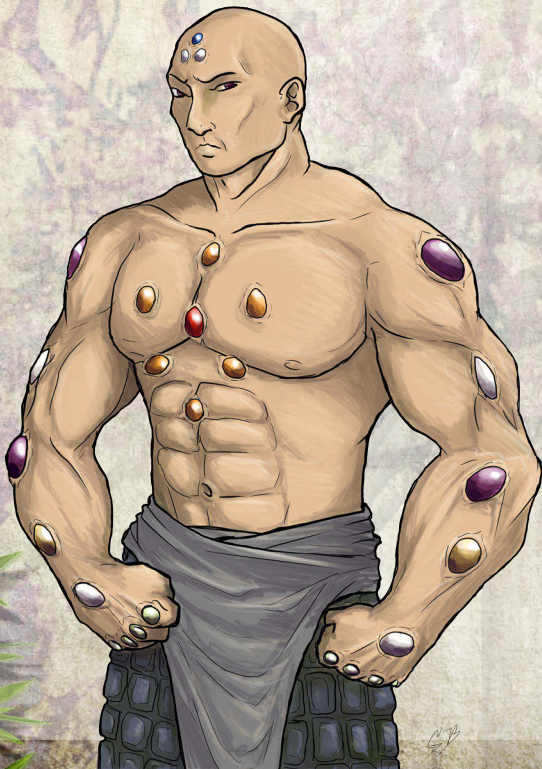
### Kondo Leadership

#### Kondo Kimura, Fool of Ayama

The Kondo clan tends to keep out of the affairs of others, but under their new daimyo, Kimura, they seem to be facing a new era. Unlike his ancestors, Kimura is eyeing the rest of Kaigaku with the gaze of a ravenous wolf. He's invited some gaijin scholars to stay in his territory, and has taken to dressing in their strange clothes, all in what appears to be an attempt to get a supply of hundreds of arquebues.

He spends much of his time watching plays in kabuki houses and keeps company with the same commoners who served as his boyhood servants. This is causing a rift within his clan. There are rumors of more powerful warlords seeking to invade his provinces, using his conduct as an excuse.

**Adventure Hooks:** Kimura is throwing a parade and needs security. An invading force is incoming and his forces are stretched thin. Assassins, disguised as theatrical stagehands, make an assault on Kimura.



## Wooden Monkey

The Kondo's Wooden Monkeys are the foremost rangers the Empire. They train in darkness, enclosed spaces and with the constant threat of attack from unseen quarters. The skills this training imparts makes them very adept at anti-ninja tactics.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Yari

### Tier 1: Vigilant Sentry

You gain Advantage whenever you look to determine if you're being followed or watched.

### Tier 2: Scan the Battlefield

Roll Intelligence at the beginning of combat. You get a number of +2 bonuses equal to the number of times you Intensified. You can apply these bonuses to the stat that you use for evading attacks or making athletic maneuvers.

### Tier 3: Never Unprepared

If your enemy manages to strike at you from a hidden position you can make an immediate counterattack if you roll Dexterity to evade the attack.

### Tier 4: Nothing Unseen

You gain Advantage when rolling for your Tier 2 ability.

### Tier 5: Flank and Destroy

Any Intensifications made on your successful rolls to dodge attacks give you a +2 bonus to damage on your very next attack against the enemy.





## Harmonious Earth

Harmonious Earth shows the ascetic how to enhance their own natural abilities in service of others. Kiseki located all over their bodies in colorful patterns make these ascetics the object of much fascination and curiosity.

**Type:** Ascetic

**Weapon of Choice:** Bare hands, combat gloves or bo staff

### Tier 1-5: Accept the Energy

You embed portions of kiseki into your body. Their strange pattern and vast stores of energy alter your abilities in wonderful ways. Take a Design below. You can use each design a number of times equal to twice your Harmonious Earth tier rank per day.

#### Designs

##### Boundlessness

You can release the power of your Designs through your feet and leap a number of feet equal to 10 times your Harmonious Earth Tier rank. This also allows making safe falls from heights.

##### Bubble

Each activation of this Design gives you 1 minute of breathable air per Harmonious Earth Tier rank. You can use this to breathe underwater or in toxic environments.

##### Connection

Activate this Design to either become aware of how not to violate taboos in your current environment, or to gain a +2 bonus to Charisma for a round.

##### Curve

Activate this Design immediately after being attacked to redirect damage that your AP soaked up, plus 1d6, to any opponent or structure within Close distance.

##### Infinity

Activate this Design to take the place of eating one meal, drinking one-half of your daily water or sleeping 4 hours.

##### River

Your movement speed is increased by a factor of 2 per Tier rank for one round (up to 600 feet at Tier 5). If not used in combat, this bonus applies for one hour per Tier rank. It ends once you stop for more than a few seconds. You need

to eat a meal's worth of food and drink half a day's worth of water for each hour you run.

##### Vitality Well

Concentrate for a round and heal a number of d4 HP equal to your Harmonious Earth Tier rank.

##### Wall

Activate to gain a +2 bonus to Constitution for one roll.

## Watchful Owl

This school teaches one of the most obvious but underappreciated truths: you can learn a lot by watching. While they train to be masters of the game of Go, in most situations what's most important isn't winning, but watching how their opponent reacts to stress and varying strategy.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: First Observation

You gain Advantage when playing Go (usually an Intelligence or Wisdom roll). You can Intensify on your roll to create a penalty for your opponent's Go roll equal to the number of times you Intensified.

### Tier 2: Beyond the Game

Once per week per opponent, you gain a bonus to a Wisdom or Intelligence roll to discern something about that person equal to your Watchful Owl Tier rank, provided that you beat them at a game of Go in the last week.

### Tier 3: Draw in the Unwary

You can engage a stranger or someone hostile to conversation in a game of Go once per day, even if they're not normally open to talking with you.

### Tier 4: Wall of the Mind

If someone is trying to discern your true intentions, or the truth of a matter, you may roll Charisma with a -2 bonus if you have ever played a game of Go with them, observed them play a game of Go, or observed them from afar for at least one hour.

### Tier 5: Uncanny Observation

You may now use your Tier 2 ability twice per week, per opponent, against anyone you have ever beaten at Go.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** Those that care so much for material things lose out on the beauty of the natural world.

**Chisaten:** He who seeks to profit from his knowledge and position does so at the cost of the greater good.

**Kakujima:** To accept a change in one's circumstances with grace and determination is the root of honor.

**Morimoto:** A truly powerful man hides his true abilities and intentions behind an invisible mask.

**Shirai:** A wise man can always learn more by admitting he knows nothing.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** There is no greater tragedy to fight so hard to defend one's home only to lose one's spirit in the process.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** The purveyors of exotic goods sell useful information to those willing to listen.

**Cordova:** There is no limit to what they could achieve if they would only throw off the shackles of their illusions.

**Kherin:** True freedom comes from able to see truth and work for others. The horsemen of the open plains are prisoners.

**Uriwane:** It is also not freedom to throw off order at the expense of your people.

### Territory

**Capital:** Mokunichi, the Castle in the Woods. It's designed in earth tones and rises out only high enough from the tall trees to have a view of the surrounding area. This castle town holds around 38,000 people in an expansive city designed around the trees.

**Trading Goods:** Gold from the rivers, hardwoods (though harvested conservatively).

**Terrain:** Desnely wooded with criss-crossing streams and waterfalls.

## Notable People

### Kondo Reiko, Concerned Sister

Reiko is Kimura's younger sister. She is a member of the Harmonious Earth ascetic school who follows the traditional ways of her clan. For this reason many of her kinsmen favor a coup and installing her as a replacement daimyo. Despite the ideological rift, Reiko loves her brother very much, and she steadfastly refuses to act against him. Others pressure her, but she maintains that Kimura is following the path dictated by his true nature, and she is following hers. Reiko knows that Kimura will stop at nothing to achieve his goals, even if they come at the expense of his family, including her. For now she attempts to guide his actions as best she can and to seek ways to divert the coming bloodshed from affecting her and her loved ones.

### Kozue, Gaijin Samurai

It's a rare thing indeed that any foreigner could be elevated to the status of a samurai. Nobody seems to know Kozue's birth name, as he doesn't seem inclined to share it with anyone. He came to Kaigaku with a recent delgation from Cordova, though his onyx-black skin means that he's from a land to the south of Cordova, wholly unknown to Kaigaku. Kozue was a slave to a priest on the mission. Kimura saw the massive man, who stands a head taller than the largest Kaigaku native, and was impressed by his impossibly muscled physique. The Kondo lord arranged for Kozue to become his retainer and had him trained in swordsmanship. Kozue uses a massive no-dachi in the same manner that a regular samurai uses a katana. He's now Kimura's yojimbo and accompanies him everywhere. Most members of Kaigaku society accept him cordially enough, though calling a foreigner a samurai is a bone of contention between the otherwise friendly relationship of Kimura and Atsumichi Kikaze.

## Morimoto: Snakes

The Morimoto are a clan of sailors and warriors. They have relatively good relations with the Southern Gaijin from Albar and Cordova. This clan has a reputation for craziness and manipulation. They recently acquired writings from the gaijin detailing a hypothetical innovation called an “engine”. Where that leads them is uncertain for now.

### Morimoto Leadership

#### Morimoto Yasanobu, One-Eyed Dragon

Yasanobu embodies the ideal of the Morimoto clan. He's ambitious, outspoken, and shrewd. His opponents revile him openly, as his brash manner affords them the opportunity to do so without loss of face.

As a young man, Yasanobu and his family were kidnapped by ninja. The boy samurai was able to fight his way to freedom. Yasanobu lost his eye charging the assassin who held his father at knifepoint. At his father's command, he charged wildly, running his blade through both his father and the ninja.

**Adventure Hooks:** The players are go-betweens for Yasanobu and gaijin smugglers. Yasanobu is preparing a grand mission to the gaijin land of Cordova and needs a few emissaries. Ninja assassins are everywhere and Yasanobu wants help rooting them out.



## Soaring Crow

The Soaring Crow school teaches its practitioners how to leap and climb, and to remain nearly invisible while they sneak. This school is perhaps single-handedly responsible for the legends of ninja with supernatural physical abilities.

**Type:** Ninja

**Weapon of Choice:** Shuriken and ninja-to

### Tier 1: One with the Shadows

If there is any amount of cover or shadows that you can reasonably fit within, make a Dexterity roll and you can remain in hiding until you move or attack. Only a detailed search from someone expecting to find you can reveal your location.

### Tier 2: Flight of the Crow

For every time you Intensify a Dexterity roll to jump, you add 10 feet to the distance you can cover.

### Tier 3: Talon Strikes

Any attack that you make by throwing scatters of shuriken affects a number of targets within throwing distance equal to your Soaring Crow Tier rank. They all have to be aimed at different targets. Make one roll for all attacks.

### Tier 4: The Hidden Flight

Intensify once when you leap from a hidden spot to remain hidden if you jump into another place of concealment.

### Tier 5: Ambush Flurry

If attacking from concealment, you can aim all of your shuriken at a single or separate targets as you wish, within normal throwing distance.

## Rising Badger

These warriors have a reputation for fearlessness that's only matched by their infamy as madmen. The Rising Badger don't care what others think so long as they truly dread facing them in combat. A bushi from this school charges an army without a second thought and often walks away unscathed.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Katana or no-dachi

### Tier 1: The Bigger They Are...

The penalty for combat against opponents with higher HD than your level is decreased by your Rising Badger Tier rank.

### Tier 2: Fortune Favors the Bold

Once per session, you can reroll a roll made during a daring or foolhardy action such as jumping off a cliff or charging a row of gunmen.

### Tier 3: Armor of the Mad

Any harm you take from crazy stunts, such as leaping from one running horse to another or something similar, besides actual attacks from enemies is halved.

### Tier 4: To Fight Another Day

You can now use your Tier 2 ability twice per session.

### Tier 5: Devastating Strike

After you make an attack roll, you can declare Intensifications as if you had made them before your roll.



## Savvy Fox

A lord's court is a battlefield unto itself. Savvy Fox members appreciate this truth more than others. They study tactics that range from mass warfare to public debate. A student of this ryu learns how to assess a situation and work the room to his advantage.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: Read the Room

When you enter a courtly setting make an Intelligence roll. For each Intensification you make you may ask the GM one question about the disposition of a group of up to your Tier Rank of individuals. The GM must honestly tell you if the group is friendly, neutral or hostile to your party or clan and to what general degree.

### Tier 2: Canny Tactician

You gain Advantage when rolling Wisdom for mass combat.

### Tier 3: Determine Enemies and Allies

When using your Tier 1 ability you can Intensify once to be able to use any of your questions to determine how one group of individuals in the room feels about the other and get a general sense of why.

### Tier 4: Overwhelm the Foe

When rolling Wisdom in mass combat gain half your Tier Rank in Victory Points each turn (rounded up).

### Tier 5: Control the Court

When using your Tier 1 ability you can also use any of your questions to have the GM tell you in broad terms what you might be able to do or say to improve or harm the disposition one individual or entourage has towards another, provided you used your questions from Tiers 1 or 3 to determine their current disposition.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** They twist tradition and courtly rules as a way to keep those stronger than them from excelling.

**Chisaten:** Our enemies like to defame our motives, but we respect the work of the Imperial Families.

**Kakujima:** Respectable warriors at sea and on land. Just so long as they get no delusions of conquest we'll be fine with them.

**Kondo:** They stay out of our way, and we've been able to call on their for help in the past, though now things are changing, and change brings chaos.

**Shirai:** A waste of truly brilliant tactical potential.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** We send our raw troops to help protect their wall in return for training. This is good for both of us.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** We respect their tactical acumen, and the quality of their ships.

**Cordova:** What have you heard? We're not "colluding" with any gaijin...

**Kherin:** What we wouldn't give to possess their herds of stallions.

**Uriwane:** This is what happens when you fail. The Uriwane are the stuff of our nightmares.

### Territory

**Capital:** Raitoshi, a city of 20,000 souls. It's set on a high ocean-facing cliff and the land approach is difficult thanks to a series of steep switchbacks cut into the hillside as a defensive measure.

**Trading Goods:** Stone, whale meat and ivory.

**Terrain:** High bluffs and plains at the southeastern edge of the Empire.

## Notable People

### Morimoto Shizuka, Intrepid Ambassador

The gaijin come to Kaigaku. They bring wondrous items, but they leave with gold and knowledge. Why are Kaigaku's samurai not visiting the gaijin? Shizuka is a young courtier who recently made her debut in the Morimoto lord's court. She spends her free time speaking with the Cordovan consul that Yasanobu hosts. Her observation skills have taught her much about the foreigners and she has a plan that she's presented to her daimyo. Shizuka is going to make the long journey to Cordova, along with retainers, and spend time in the court of that empire. While she doesn't believe it in her heart, Shizuka is making overtures to the religious missionaries in hopes of currying special favor for her clan from the gaijin.

### Tsubame, Ronin Rifleman

Tsubame is a life-long friend of Yasanobu. His father was a disgraced warrior, also named Tsubame, who made his way in life by selling his services as a teppouka, or gunner. Tsubame the elder passed along his skills to the young warrior, who proved to be a natural. As the father and son made their way along the width and breadth of the Empire they made many enemies and a few allies. Young Tsubame found a kindred spirit in Yasanobu, the young prince who envied the ronin's ability to travel the country at will. The Tsubames moved on for many years until both Tsubame and Yasanobu found themselves fatherless. Tsubame returned to Morimoto lands and entered service as one of Yasanobu's most trusted retainers. He's a serious and quiet man known for his ability to stand back and size up a situation before acting. While he fights for a living, this teppouka is also regarded as the finest native gunsmith in Kaigaku.

## Shirai: Keepers of Wisdom

A genteel clan, the Shirai are not aggressive, but by no means pacifists. Many of their warriors have a scholarly bent. The Shirai's position as Imperial archivists gives them a vast amount of knowledge from which to draw, including such esoteric topics as kiseki manipulation and gaijin cultures.

### Shirai Leadership

#### Shirai Junko, Sage Tactician

The stereotypical Shirai spends her life reading scrolls in a library. Junko spends her time reading the terrain of her territory as she rides her horse, Matsuto, through the rolling hills. While the Shirai are not prone to aggression, no one doubts their ability to defend themselves from any attack while under Junko's guidance.

A middle-aged woman of imposing size, Junko seeks nothing short of martial perfection. To her, the art of war and personal combat are just as much matters of the mind as medicine, science, and literature. Junko is deeply rooted in the traditional ways of her people, and she has a deep distrust of the gaijin and their allies. Her patience with their intrusions on her homeland can only stretch so far before she abandons her policy of non-aggression.

**Adventure Hooks:** The gaijin are up to something, Junko needs spies to infiltrate them. There is a spot open for tactical officers in the Shirai military, if they can best Junko in a war game. Ninja stole Junko's horse and she wants it back, unharmed.



## Soaring Heron

The Soaring Heron are the elite youths of the Shirai. The best of those samurai who choose the life of a warrior train in this school that teaches graceful form, in combat and in social matters. They form lifelong bonds with other bushi, their Sworn Brothers, with whom they often rise to legendary status.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Naginata

### Tier 1: Oath of Brotherhood

Designate another PC or an NPC as your Sworn Brother. While fighting back-to-back with your Sworn Brother you can each take wounds meant for the other, and you gain a free Intensification to attack anyone who attacked your Sworn Brother.

### Tier 2: Force of Beauty

Roll Charisma at the beginning of a duel or combat. For each Intensification you make on the roll gain a free Intensification that you can use to either Center or avoid an enemy attack in the combat. You can use this technique with a katana.

### Tier 3: Completed Pact

You and your Sworn Brother make a new oath with a third member. If two or all three of you are fighting together you gain the bonuses of the Tier 1 ability.

### Tier 4: Charm of Grace

Roll Dexterity when you engage someone socially, such as in verbal sparring match, an attempt to woo them, or when trying to intimidate the other person. For each Intensification you make on the roll gain a free Intensification that you can use on your next roll in the conversation.

### Tier 5: Oath of Heroes

Whenever either of your Sworn Brothers are in trouble you move (or your mount moves) at twice the normal speed to reach them. When all three of you fight together you all gain a +1 bonus to your Constitution, Dexterity and Strength stats.

## Heavenly Fist

This ryu teaches the student how to affect others with his kiseki talents. He concentrates the gemstones within his hands and utilizes methods that are both helpful to his allies and harmful to his enemies.

**Type:** Ascetic

**Weapon of Choice:** Unarmed

### Tier 1: The Giving Fist and the Taking Fist

Select one Elemental Strike from the list below. You can use each of its effects a number of times per day equal to your Tier rank in this ryu.

### Tier 2: Deepening Knowledge

Select an additional Elemental Strike.

### Tier 3: Power Through Diversity

Select a third Elemental Strike. Additionally, you have Advantage when activating a single Elemental Strike of your choice. You can change the selection each time you gain a new tier.

### Tier 4: Confluence

Select a fourth Elemental Strike.

### Tier 5: Perfect Fist

Select the final Elemental Strike. You may now harm or heal targets within Nearby distance Void Strikes can now target people Far Away.

### Elemental Strikes

**Air:** You may choose to harm by making a Dexterity check and Intensifying. Your opponent flies back from Close to Nearby Range in the direction of your choice. For each Intensification add 20 feet of distance.

To heal with an Air Strike, make an Intelligence test and Intensify. A jolt of lightning travels from your hand to the recipient's heart, restarting it if it's stopped. You have to Intensify a number of times equal to the number of minutes since their heart stopped (minimum of 1 Intensification).

**Earth:** Harm your opponent by making a Strength check and Intensifying. This hit bypasses a number of AP equal to the number of times you Intensified. The enemy's AP goes down only by one, as usual.

To heal with an Earth Strike, roll Intelligence and Intensify. Stone-like substances flow into the recipient's body, mending broken bones. This heals HP equal to  $1d4 +$  the number of times you Intensified.

**Fire:** Harm by rolling Dexterity and Intensifying. This hit does your regular damage, plus burning damage over a number of rounds equal to the number of times you Intensified the strike. The burning damage begins at a value equal to the the number of times you Intensified and reduces by 1 every round. Buildings and inanimate objects can catch fire and spread the blaze, which grows at a rate that the GM determines (faster for paper buildings, more slowly for durable materials, but always dramatic).

Fire Strikes can heal by purging out poisons and venom. The toxic chemicals neutralize as the recipient sweats them out. This also restores HP equal to  $1d4 +$  the number of times you Intensified.

**Water:** Harm your opponent by rolling Strength and Intensifying. Anyone gains Advantage on attacks made against the victim and also gets 1 Free Intensification against the enemy for each action they take for a number of rounds equal to the number of times you Intensified.

Heal with a Water Strike by rolling Intelligence and Intensifying. Healing blue waters shore up blood loss from cuts and mend tissue damage. This restores HP equal to  $1d8 +$  the number of times you Intensified.

**Void:** Harm by rolling Dexterity and Intensifying. This strike can hit anything in Nearby range. Additional Intensifications above the first allow you to strike another target in range.

Heal with a Void Strike by rolling Intelligence and Intensifying. This ends any ongoing mind-altering effects and prevents the recipient from gaining Disadvantage on any mental-based roll for a number of rounds equal to the number of times you Intensified.

## Gray Mouse

This ryu teaches its students to observe and remember, as well as how to use the Shirai's superior filing, recording, and research techniques. Far from the stereotypical image of the fussy librarian wiling away her days in a dusty records hall, many members of the Gray Mouse actually explore the breadth of the Empire seeking new knowledge to record.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: Investigative Network

Make an Intelligence roll to get the answer to any fact-based question, within five days, unless the question involves something like a clan's military secrets. The required time is reduced by one day per Tier rank, with it taking just eight hours at Tier 5.

### Tier 2: See What's Hidden

You gain Advantage when attempting to decipher any information written in a secret code, including ciphers hidden within the text of a seemingly innocent document.

### Tier 3: Knowledge Brings Power

When you or your ally face an intellectual dilemma, a duel, or another challenge where a shred of knowledge might help them, make an Intelligence roll to come up with a useful fact. This can be anything that's general knowledge, such as the weakness of a dueling school or an effective running technique. For each Intensification made on this roll, you or your ally may add +1 to a stat used for a single roll related to your knowledge.

### Tier 4: Command the Truth

You can tell whenever anyone is lying if they make a fact-based error when they speak. This could be catching someone in a lie when they say that they saw a bronze statue spark when it was struck, since bronze doesn't spark, or something else that's contradicted by science or reason, or that doesn't jibe with earlier testimony.

### Tier 5: Utmost Knowledge

Whenever you write a scholarly paper and present your work in court, you are permanently considered an authority on that topic. Your word is taken as fact when you speak about something you've written about in a thesis.





## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** Ostentatious displays to prove dignity always work against that purpose.

**Chisaten:** As teachers of the Empire the Chisaten still manage to keep the lower classes in the dark.

**Kakujima:** At least these moneygrubbers respect their peasants.

**Kondo:** Their ability to live in harmony with the land makes them truly wise.

**Morimoto:** They outwardly scoff at study, but such accomplished tacticians are scholars worthy of renown.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** Others pity their duty to make constant warfare; we pity that they cannot learn from our neighbors.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** They bring much knowledge, so we wish to deal with them.

**Cordova:** It seems that their devotion to their ideals puts them at odds with truly free scholarly thought.

**Kherin:** Barbarians though they may be, these raiders always manage to keep pace with weaponry designs and tactical innovations.

**Uriwane:** They'll never know what they missed by rejecting polite society.

### Territory

**Capital:** Kazuya, a well-run city of 75,000 busy workers. Its two most prominent features are the Seunjong University and its attached library.

**Trading Goods:** Silver, rice and horses.

**Terrain:** Wide plains with scattered forests.

## Notable People

### Li Jin-soo, Courageous Admiral

Most members of the Shirai are tolerant of the gaijin missions to Kaigaku, but Jin-soo is far more cautious than most. He's seen the ships that these foreigners use to travel, and he's well aware that their design is beyond the naval capabilities of the samurai Empire. When Jin-soo ascended to his position as the supreme commander of the Shirai naval forces he ordered the construction of turtle ships with metal plating to be more resistant to cannon fire. To his military mind, it's not a matter of if, but when relations sour to the point of war. Jin-soo personally commands the Dragon Turtle, an ironclad vessel outfitted with an ingenious weapon. While Kaigaku's metalsmiths can't replicate cannons, the Shirai old secret weapon, the hwacha rocket launcher, sits within the mouth of the dragon-like figurehead of his flagship, ready to rain fire on the Shirai's enemies. The canny admiral has yet to convince his clansmen of his suspicions, and he's willing to handsomely reward anyone who can prove the gaijin unworthy of trust, or can at least provide him with the secret of creating hull-smashing cannons.

### Shirai Gwang-hyun, Official Censor

Gwang-hyun has one of the most important jobs within his clan. He heads the Office of Censors, who publically renounce dishonorable or cruel actions taken by the daimyo. Gwang-hyun is trying to drum up support within the Chisaten family to create an Office of Censors at the Imperial level, with full powers to speak out against the Emperor. This aged scholar believes that bringing accountability to the ruler of the land is the only way to improve conditions for the lower classes. He is also attempting to change the foundation of the Shirai's military officer corps, rewriting the qualification texts to focus on actual tactics instead of literature and philosophy. These are radical thoughts, but if the Shirai are to persevere they need to change.

## Toguchi: Hidden Blade

The Toguchi are known for their fabled duelists and venom-spewing demagogues. Lesser-known, however, is the fact that they sponsor one of the most powerful ninja ryu in the Empire, the Soaring Crow. They border the Watanabe, with whom they have a long-standing blood feud.

### Toguchi Leadership

#### Toguchi Saiko, Broken Viper

Saiko was chosen to lead her clan over her older twin brother, Ryoji, because their pragmatic mother, Heiko, decided that Ryoji's martial talents were better suited for leading men on the field of battle, while Saiko's intellectual gifts made her the superior choice for daimyo. The decision was a sound one, and the two siblings have worked together since then to catapult their clan to new heights of power.

Saiko spends much of her time at court sitting silently. She walks delicately due to a traumatic childhood injury that left her nearly lame in one leg. In the early days, she was often overlooked by her rivals, who soon learned that disrespect against the scion of the Toguchi usually led to an early grave or an embarrassing scandal. Saiko, by means of spies or her own acute observations, sees and hears everything.

**Adventure Hooks:** Saiko wants someone to take her rival out for a night on the town in the hopes that he'll scandalize himself. The Toguchi need new spies who are above suspicion, Saiko wants the PCs to prevent a treaty between two rival clans.



## Silver Tanuki

The Silver Tanuki ryu enables students to become someone else. From an early age, these ninja learn to study facial expressions, voice, and body language in order to better fill their assigned roles. Silver Tanuki ninja use cosmetics and acting skills to pass as gardeners, geisha, servants, or other inconspicuous members of society and spy on their targets. They also frequently work as courtiers.

**Type:** Ninja

**Weapon of Choice:** Knives, plus appropriate to roles

### Tier 1: Learn the Role

Select a profession at each Tier of this ryu. You may take on the appearance of a member of that profession by making a Charisma test.

### Tier 2: Practice Makes Perfect

While assuming a role, you have Advantage on rolls to act as that profession (botany and artistry for a gardener, for instance).

### Tier 3: Become the Role

You may Intensify a number of times equal to your Tier rank when assuming a role. If successful, other people take a penalty to pierce your disguise, equal to the number of times you Intensified.

### Tier 4: Expand the Repertoire

You can now convincingly portray a member of the opposite gender, someone significantly older or younger than you, or a gaijin.

### Tier 5: All Roles are One

You now gain Advantage for rolls appropriate to your available roles at all times, unless negated through Disadvantage.

## Crimson Eagle

The Crimson Eagle produces some of the most talented duelists in Kaigaku. Their duty is to prevent anyone from calling out the Toguchi's courtiers for any of their insidious plots. Tales of the courtiers intentionally acting dishonorably to goad enemies into challenging them and dying on the blade of a Crimson Eagle are totally unfounded.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Katana

### Tier 1: Confidence of Champions

You may roll Charisma when you Center, as you use the force of your personality to assure yourself of victory and to intimidate your opponents.

### Tier 2: Vigilant Sentry

You can, once per turn, roll Dexterity to defend someone within Close distance from an incoming attack.

### Tier 3: Cow the Weak

When you Center using Charisma, for every Intensification you make to the roll your opponent, if they're an NPC, is considered to be -1 HD for the purposes of imparting a penalty on actions against them. If your opponent is a PC, for every Intensification you make, they must make one on their Center roll, to no effect.

### Tier 4: Control the Battlefield

You can now use your Tier 2 ability twice per turn, and before each time you use it, you may move to an ally who is Nearby.

### Tier 5: Move Past the Blade

When you roll Charisma to Center, you gain 3 AP, usable only against your opponent's Strike. If it reduces the damage done to 0, their Strike is considered a miss.

## Keen Wolf

The Keen Wolf protect the interests of the Toguchi with the same ruthless zeal as the Crimson Eagle and the Silver Tanuki. They use their talents to find and exploit any weaknesses in their enemies.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** None

### Tier 1: Find the Weakness

Size up an antagonistic NPC or PC and make an Intelligence roll. Choose to learn about one physical disadvantage or social quirk that they suffer. You gain Advantage when using this disadvantage or quirk against them.

### Tier 2: Create the Truth

For every Intensification you make on Charisma rolls to tell convincing lies, you can make a second statement using that same roll without having to roll again.

### Tier 3: Seduce the Unwary

You can use any Contact you have to gain privileged information about their clan. You have to make a Charisma roll followed by an Intelligence roll. The Contact doesn't consciously betray their lord; you use your powers of deduction to determine some secret based on what you already know and what they say.

### Tier 4: Dominate with Lies

You can now make two extra statements per Intensification when using your Tier 2 ability.

### Tier 5: All Secrets are Mine

Make an Intelligence roll against an antagonistic PC or NPC. You learn, based on their body language, physical appearance, and other indicators either a minor secret about that character or you learn where you can begin the trail to find a major, ruinous secret that the character wants to keep hidden.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** It is easy to condemn when you make the rules.

**Chisaten:** They see us as treacherous, yet their safety often depends on our actions.

**Kakujima:** They're very good at hiding their faces, and at getting others to realize the deception.

**Kondo:** The roaming ascetics give these recluses a reputation for benevolence that they don't deserve.

**Morimoto:** You haven't lived until you've seen the Morimoto attempt to host a dignified court.

**Shirai:** Their commitment to sharing knowledge makes them almost as useful to us as our own spies.

**Watanabe:** A truly effective fighting force would have wiped out the Kherin ages ago. Unless the Watanabe have reason to keep them around...

### Gaijin

**Albar:** We'd call them masters of deception, if their lies weren't so obvious.

**Cordova:** It's impressive how easily their priests seem to be able to control the thoughts of their subjects.

**Kherin:** They've tried and failed at direct assault for generations. A true waste of strength.

**Uriwane:** Samurai speak freely in the presence of an Uriwane, never thinking them capable of understanding. This is a fallacy that's benefited us and the tribesmen.

### Territory

**Capital:** Inuyama, a small, fortified town at the base of a stark mountain. It's rumored that there are deeper complexes within the mountain itself, but nothing's ever been confirmed.

**Trading Goods:** Clay, stone and jade.

**Terrain:** Forests at the base of a mountain range.

## Notable People

### Toguchi Kaede, Wild Woman

At the young age of 16, Kaede is already making a name for herself. As a reaction to wave of traditionalism, Kaede is one of a growing number of youths known as "kabukimono", or people on the outside of society. She dresses in wild colors and makes up her face in a garish display of white and red. Her parents are senior retainers in the Toguchi leadership, which means that she gets invited to all sorts of parties where her behavior tends to end up with someone challenging a member of her family to a duel. She also happens to be the most terrifying mounted lancer of her generation. Kaede has been in three battles since her fifteenth birthday, and in each one she and her horse, Akaikaze, have single-handedly broken through lines of infantry to wreak havoc on the enemy camp.

### Mayonakage, Shadow of the Toguchi

Nobody has ever seen Mayonakage in person, but letters are showing up at sites of assassinations, thefts and other brazen acts, all signed by Mayonakage. Everybody suspects the Toguchi for these specific acts, but are wary to voice their opinions because the Toguchi are purportedly too skilled and disciplined to ever leave behind a trace of their involvement in anything shady. The only thing is that Mayonakage's letters always leave a clue as to their next target, and they've never failed to achieve their objective, despite extra precautions taken by vigilant victims.



## Watanabe: Vigilant Sentries

Watanabe samurai guard Kaigaku's only passable land border with the rest of the world, which is constantly harassed by the Kherin tribes. Any bushi from this clan expects to spend the majority of her career assigned to one of the guard houses built along the massive Western Wall. Their warriors are renowned for their ability to continue on in the face of wounds that would fell a lesser samurai.

### Watanabe Leadership

#### Watanabe Tadakatsu, Barbarian Daimyo

Tadakatsu's very existence causes his clan to come into conflict with the rest of Kaigaku. His father, Tadasayo, allowed a band of gajjin steppe tribesmen to have a place within his clan's lands on the condition that they spend the rest of their lives fighting the Kherin. The tribe, formerly called the Nuurgen, sealed this deal by offering their chieftan's daughter in marriage. A year after the wedding, Tadakatsu was born.

Very few people in Kaigaku trust Tadakatsu. Many claim in roundabout words that Tadakatsu is more of a steppe-dweller than a samurai of Kaigaku. They fear that he holds the same lust for conquest that drives the Kherin. For his part, the leader of the Watanabe has never publicly swayed in his duty, but this is not enough to satisfy the bigotry of the other clans.

**Adventure Hooks:** Tadakatsu offers a generous estate to any group of samurai who can infiltrate a nearby Kherin camp and defeat their khan, a massive force threatens to invade, Tadakatsu wants to recruit duelists and courtiers to destroy those who slander him in court.

## Stone Tortoise

This ryu teaches warriors how to remain on their feet and in the middle of the action, even while wounded. Stone Tortoise warriors seem to never tire in the face of the enemy. They may have a reputation for slowness, but they're widely feared among the rest of the clans.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Two-handed clubs or hammers

### Tier 1: Armored Shell

You can absorb hits using AP without reducing AP a number of times per day equal to your Stone Tortoise Tier rank.

### Tier 2: Hardy Body, Sound Mind

You gain +1 HP per character level that you gain from here on out, and +1 HP for each level you currently have.

### Tier 3: Crippling Blow

Intensify twice to cause your blow to stun an opponent. That opponent can't use any abilities or ryu on their next action. PCs can attempt a Constitution save to act normally.

### Tier 4: Second Skin

You suffer no Disadvantages due to wearing armor in combat or athletic situations.

### Tier 5: Supreme Shell

You can use your Tier 1 ability twice per Tier rank per day.



## Growling Bear

The Growling Bear are the mouthpiece of their clan. They use belligerence and intimidation to get their way. More than a few of them train as bushi in their spare time to cut a more fearsome figure and to be able to defend the Watanabe outside of court.

**Type:** Courtier

**Weapon of Choice:** Unarmed and Wakizashi

### Tier 1: Browbeat the Weak

It's not dishonorable for you to openly try to intimidate others in court, so long as you don't slander anyone. Gain Advantage for social rolls against intimidated NPCs and PCs.

### Tier 2: Words and Fists

You gain a +2 bonus to your Strength when attacking someone who is intimidated by you.

### Tier 3: Force of Personality

You can roll Strength when attempting to intimidate someone by means of your physical presence.

### Tier 4: Hold Your Own

You can now make two attacks per turn.

### Tier 5: Overbearing Presence

You can use your Strength, rather than Charisma, to make boastful statements. Each Intensification made on this roll gives you a single +1 bonus to Charisma to use for social rolls made during this scene.



## Savage Tiger

While most ninja operate in the shadow of the night, or stealthily infiltrate other clans, the Savage Tiger follow the example of the other Watanabe ryu and teach open warfare. These ninja are a blur on the field of battle, cutting down men and horses and sabotaging formations.

**Type:** Ninja

**Weapon of Choice:** Kusarigama

### Tier 1: Wheel of Destruction

You do additional damage equal to your Savage Tiger Tier rank when you make an attack in the same round that you moved at least to Nearby distance.

### Tier 2: Speed of the Deadly

You gain an extra attack per round that you can only use against targets that you run past. This attack automatically does damage equal to your Tier rank.

### Tier 3: No Obstacles

Common obstructions, such as a group of men, a horse, or a cart, don't hinder your movement. You roll under or leap over any such obstacles, or use your kusarigama to pull yourself along.

### Tier 4: Mow Them Down

You gain another extra attack per round (in addition to the one from Tier 2), that you can only use against targets that you run past. This attack automatically does damage equal to your Tier rank.

### Tier 5: Redirect Attacks

Intensify twice on an attack made with a kusarigama to briefly ensnare and cause any battle-ready opponent, such as someone wielding a sword or a drawn bow, to attack another target in their range. You make your opponent's attack roll using your own Strength with a +2 penalty to the roll. You can use this ability twice per turn if you succeeded on Initiative, or once per turn if you failed.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** Their warriors are skilled, it's too bad that they fear to commit to warfare.

**Chisaten:** We will hold them to the standard that they proclaim themselves to uphold.

**Kakujima:** They supply needed weapons even though the Kherin pose almost no threat to them.

**Kondo:** If you can get them to act, they're outstanding allies.

**Morimoto:** They're the only others in the Empire whose military we fear.

**Shirai:** For all they prattle on about wisdom and charity, they do little to aid our struggle.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** More plain-spoken than Cordova, which we appreciate.

**Cordova:** They might be colluding with Kherin.

**Kherin:** We fight because we must, but what a force they would make with a Watanabe commander.

**Uriwane:** They're no threat, and they're no help, so we have nothing to do with them.

### Territory

**Capital:** Officially the daimyo's residence is in a mobile tent city so that he may relocate to wherever the Kherin are massing. Much of the day-to-day administrations are overseen at Toitoshi, a great walled city that's home to a massive war college.

**Trading Goods:** Rice, Kherin horses.

**Terrain:** Grassy steppe.

## Notable People

### Watanabe Kuro, Invincible Yojimbo

Kuro is a large man who carries a large spear. His signature weapon is called Chougiri, the Butterfly Cutter, and it's specially weighted to swing like a kanabo. It's said to be so sharp, and Kuro's skill so great, that he once cut a butterfly's wing down the edge, splitting it in two. Kuro once single-handedly held the bridge at Aogawa while Kherin forces tried to storm over it. The army grew so fearful of his killing power that they eventually tried to cross the frozen river itself, rather than face Kuro. More barbarian horsemen died falling through the cracking ice than Kuro slew with his spear. He's never forgiven the river for showing him up that day. Kuro spends most of his battles at his daimyo's side, holding back any invaders who would dare strike the leader of his clan.

### Abaqader, Restless Horseman

Abaqader is Takeshi's uncle from the Nuurgan side. He was a young man when his father brought the tribe into Kaigaku, and he considered it an affront to his people's honor that they went crawling to the samurai in order to escape their enemies. He longs for nothing more than to gather what remains of the Nuurgan forces, now officially the Watanabe Heavy Cavalry Vanguard Unit, ride into the steppes and strike at the heart of Bayar Khan. He knows that this would be a suicide mission, and while he would have been content with that as a younger man, he now hungers for victory in order to redeem his people's legacy. Much to his surprise, Abaqader is finding more and more support among younger members of the Watanabe. What began as the restless anxieties of a frustrated warrior is slowly becoming the foundation for a rebellion.

## Other Factions

The clans above are not the sole powers affecting Kaigaku. Various lesser clans control portions of the Empire, as do the Two Emperors, and gaijin nations eye Kaigaku's prosperity with envy.

## The Two Emperors

Due to a long-past schism, the true Imperial Family, the Daiten, is split in two. As a stop-gap measure, the clans sponsored an arrangement where succession of the throne alternates between the competing lines. The current monarchs are Wazen, Emperor of the Right, in his Eastern capital of Nagagawa, and Johime, Princess of the Left, in the Western city of Yamashiro. While only the current monarch has legitimate political power, the Princess or Prince on the other side often has a retinue of loyal followers, or at least sycophantic toadies.

## The Lesser Clans

Clans whose prestige is less than the major houses fall into this category. It could be that the clan was established very recently, has less-significant holdings and military might, or any number of reasons why a given clan is considered lesser. It's the dream of most of these houses to ascend to higher rank.

## The Gaijin

Foreigners are called gaijin, or strange people. Various nations have differing levels of contact and friendliness with Kaigaku.

## Kherin, the Horse Masters

People of the steppes beyond the Empire, the Kherin eschew civilized society for a life lived free of constraints. They know little of farming and prefer to take what they need, either through hunting or subjugating nearby people by means of the might of their leader, Bayar Khan. The Watanabe are the Empire's first defense against the Kherin.

## Albar, The Expanding Empire

Most citizens of Kaigaku know very little of Albar, but folks throughout the world are all aware of their reputation as traders. Commerce with Albar is profitable, but because of their bitter enmity with the more well-known Cordovans, most clans don't have much to do with them.

## Cordova, The Pious Kingdom

Neighbors of Albar, Cordova was the first nation from its area to contact Kaigaku. Wherever they go, they bring missionaries of their faith and establish facilities for teaching. Many lords allow this within their territory because the missions often provide food for the poor. Other daimyo don't trust these foreigners.

## Threats to the Empire

Nothing is guaranteed in life, least of all survival. Though prosperous, Kaigaku faces a number of potential crises.

## From the Gaijin

The most immediate foreign threat comes from the steppe tribe of Kherin. Word has it that their leader, Bayar Khan, is attempting to form a coalition of tribes with an army large enough to threaten any nation in the world. While steep mountain ranges block off land approach by all routes except through Watanabe territory, this places that clan in a precarious position. On one side are foreign enemies and on the other are their countrymen who are either plotting to take their lands and their position as Defenders of the Empire or who aggravate the Kherin into periodic attacks to keep the Watanabe from growing too friendly with their neighbors.

Beyond Kherin lie several magnificent empires. From the jungles of Maru to the deserts of Achaem and beyond there are other nations whose glory could rival that of Kaigaku. Trade is sporadic at best, but there are no hostilities between Kaigaku and her far neighbors.

No one in Kaigaku knows the extent of the power of the Far Gaijin, those from Albar, Cordova, and other states that make sporadic visits. Their main interests seem to be in promoting a new religion among all levels of the populace, as leaving with as much jade, spices, gold, and silver as they can get their hands on. Astute observers note that Cordovan monks spend much time reading and learning about Kaigaku's culture, and much less time teaching others about their own lands. Such information and instruction tends to be reserved only for converts to their religion.

## From Within

The two Imperial lineages continue to feud. Rumor has it that the courts of each monarch are filled with ninja, both assassins and bodyguards, all waiting for the order to



attack. At any given moment, Wazen and Johime are courting favor from all the daimyo and generals. Private loyalties shift constantly, though in public, most clans proclaim neutrality. The latest bid for power involves the two monarchs trying to outdo one another by bestowing grand titles upon their supporters. Johime currently wants to create a position of taikun, the shogun, to be the nominal military commander of the combined armed forces of Kaigaku. If only she can spark a war dramatic enough to merit such a position being created...

Kaigaku wasn't empty when the first settlers came from across the plains. The various indigenous tribes, some of whom intermarried to form modern society, all resisted the encroachment. Isolated pockets of the fiercest fighters carved out their own lands and are usually left alone. Occasional revolts cause grief mainly for the peasant conscripts that defend Kaigaku's villages. If the disaffected tribesmen ever get their hands on firearms or team up with bands of ronin, the Empire might find itself in a perilous position.

No culture is free from crime. The various "civil protection societies" that cropped up in the last few centuries began as organizations that helped peasants to care for their needs during disasters and to fend off bandits. Clan leaders elevated some of the leaders of these communities to a sort of "deputy samurai" status, and their ranks eventually padded out with ronin and ashigaru returned from military campaigns. Over time, the heads of these organizations became corrupt with power and began shaking down local businesses and residences for protection fees.

These societies, now called ninkyo, banded together to form a loose national structure that protects its members from investigation and resists governmental attempts to shut them down. Although they shake down local peasants, the lower castes tend to respect them since it is far more rare for a hanzaisha to kill a peasant than for a samurai to do so. That said, the occasional gang war eruption does leave lots of collateral damage among civilians. Most tea houses, sake bars, kabuki theaters, and geisha houses have some ties to the ninkyo, and it's not uncommon for a careless samurai to find himself under the thumb of the gang lords after committing some indiscretion.

Kaigaku did not spring forth from nothing. Its society began as a confederation of tribes that eventually banded together. The descendants of the victorious tribes eventually became the first Imperial Family and samurai clans. The losers ended up being exterminated or sent to the mountains and hills, where they merged with the holdouts of the indigenous tribes. Many of them took to a remote island chain above the Kaigaku mainland.

These exiled tribes call themselves the Uriwane, and while they tend to keep to themselves they occasionally come down to raid villages. This is usually in retaliation to harassment from the samurai, or when an upstart young warrior whips his peers into a frenzy, convincing them that they can carve out an empire for themselves.

Uriwane have a lower technology level than the Kaigaku, and very little contact with the gaijin, though some missionaries have made contact.

## Sugida: Warrior Fishers

The Sugida are a lesser clan founded three generations ago by Sugida Junichiro, the son of a poor fisherman and the daughter of a wealthy merchant in Atsumichi territory. Junichiro eventually managed to build a fleet of fishing boats modeled after the war canoes used by the Uriwane barbarians. He and his men stood up to a notorious pirate, taking on three warships in just their small boats and completely routing the cutthroats. Junichiro was given samurai status by the Empress in recognition of his valor. Since that day the newly-minted bushi train tirelessly to work as a cohesive unit. The Imperial Families regularly use the Sugida to secretly pass items and information down the coast, as Sugida boats are free from customary inspections, per Imperial Decrees.

### Sugida Leadership

#### Sugida Ken-zo, Rabble Rouser

Ken-zo is a man who lives for the sea, a bounteous haul, a beautiful sunset and a splendid melee. He's one of the largest men in the Empire, so far topped only by Kondo Kimura's gaijin giant, Kozue. Ken-zo makes sure to spend just as much time on the boats as he does training or on sentry duty, assigning himself to the same job roster that he holds his most inexperienced soldiers to performing.

Ken-zo makes sure that his men eat well every day, feeding them, their families and the peasant laborers before selling off their excess. While the clan might lack access to the luxuries enjoyed by older factions, each one is healthy and ready for battle. Unless it's a matter of ceremony, Ken-zo orders that all Sugida samurai, direct descendants of the crew of Junichiro's raid on the pirates, treat all of their peasant crew with common dignity. After all, it's just a matter of happenstance that the peasant's ancestors weren't signed onto the crew that day many years ago. He's infamous for the wild parties that he throws, to which all samurai and peasants in the city are invited, after his men bring in a spectacular catch.

**Adventure Hooks:** Chisaten Daiichi, governor of Harayama, is trying to cause problems, so Ken-zo needs someone to intervene at court. A school of sharks mutated by the kiseki during the last seirakka starfall are killing Sugida crews, there's a generous bounty for killing the monsters. Ken-zo wants someone to help him establish a smuggling network independent of the work that he does for the Imperial Families.

## Merciless Eels

The Merciless Eels are the only bushi school of the Sugida. They fight with their signature weapon, the tetsugai, which is a heavy paddle lashed to a chain at the end to keep it tethered to the bushi during a storm. The chain can swing for grappling and the oar itself is equivalent to a kanabo for gameplay purposes. Members of this school fight without words, attacking en masse when one of their own is in danger.

**Type:** Bushi

**Weapon of Choice:** Tetsugai

### Tier 1: Read the Enemy

You can always tell when someone means to attack you. You may grunt or shout a warning to your allies in earshot to give them and you Advantage for dodging attacks during the first round of combat.

### Tier 2: Sweeping Bash

You do extra damage with your tetsugai equal to your Howling Dog rank.

### Tier 3: Snare the Unwary

Roll Dexterity to catch an NPC in the chain end of your tetsugai. They're trapped for the next round, plus a number of extra rounds per Intensification made to the Dexterity roll. This ability does no damage

### Tier 4: Sweeping Bash

You can attack two enemies at once with your tetsugai, making one roll for attack and damage applied to both.

### Tier 5: Master Bruiser

You do extra damage with your tetsugai equal to twice your Howling Dog tier rank (replacing your Tier 2 ability). You can apply this damage to anyone snared in your chain once per turn.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** We got our start in their lands. If only they respected us like we respect them.

**Chisaten:** For all their talk of honor, these Imperials sure do like to use our smuggling services.

**Kakujima:** They're just jealous that we don't need big vessels to win battles.

**Kondo:** We don't spend much time in their lands, but we have no ill will with them.

**Morimoto:** Why do other samurai scoff at them? They take care of their brothers and that's what makes anyone noble.

**Shirai:** Too much book study, but they've never mistreated us.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** We'd love to see a real throwdown between our tetsugai masters and their kanabo wielders. Not out of spite, just curiosity.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** We hear tell that they treat their skilled commoners very well. We respect that.

**Cordova:** Very foppish, but they bring good wine.

**Kherin:** Never seen 'em in person. Can't imagine that they're anything to fear.

**Uriwane:** They know how to build a good canoe.

### Territory

**Capital:** The Sugida have no cities, only very small fishing houses in a few different coastal villages. Their largest district is in Harayama.

**Trading Goods:** Fish.

**Terrain:** Water and piers.

## Notable People

### Sugida Rinkon, Master Fisher

Rinkon is a young bushi, who longs for nothing more than to catch the world's biggest whale. Once, two years ago, he observed the kiseki falling from the sky and landing in the ocean. Weeks later he and his boatmates were capsized by an enormous beast. All Sugida are strong swimmers, and the crew of the three boats involved in the incident were able to swim to shore. Rinkon was the only one to catch a glimpse of the creature, and since that day he's been obsessed with finding it again. He doesn't want to kill such a magnificent creature, but he won't be able to sleep a full night until he sees it.

### Sugida Ryoko, Master Marine

The wife of Ken-zo, Ryoko came into the clan after spending her entire life as a ronin. She trained as a ninja, and her husband uses her talents well. Ryoko leads marines who attack their enemies by hiding in small compartments dragged below the waterline, fixed with siphons for air. Once the boats are in range the sailors on the canoes cut the lines and Ryoko and her team swim underwater until they hit the boats and use their shuko hand claws to climb the sides, leap aboard and defeat the enemy crew.



*The Sugida Lesser Clan was created at the suggestion of Kickstarter backer Will Ross.*

## Toyama, Kiseki Scholars

The Toyama clan was founded a few centuries ago by a group of explorers setting who set out to discover more about the mysterious kiseki, the stones of power. Their journey brought them to Mt. Toyama, where their leader, a scholar named Jian, established a camp. There they discovered something extraordinary, a deposit of kiseki not from a crater left by a falling star. The stones weren't found beneath the earth, but along and within the riverbanks of Mt. Toyama's canyons, suggesting that there is a large store somewhere up beyond where people can safely travel.

The group secretly brought their discovery to the Emperor, who gave them clan status on the condition that the Toyama gift a portion of all of their finds to the Chisaten artisans. The Toyama now work hard to ensure that their secret is safe, sending out many ascetics who claim to find more stones than they really do within seirakka sites. If the rest of the Empire know of their secret, the clans would surely find some pretext to take it from the Toyama.

### Toyama Leadership

#### Toyama Maya, Shrewd Scholar

Maya only recently inherited the mantle of Toyama daimyo. Unlike the mostly-reclusive prior daimyo of her clan, who tended to spend their time searching the river, Maya grew up in the courts. She's adept at keeping secrets and making deals, and so far she's used this to her advantage. Maya is making discreet overtures to the Shirai to establish a permanent military alliance so she can expand her clan's influence. If she's successful the Toyama may ascend to become a greater clan within her lifetime.

**Adventure Hooks:** A silver-like metal is washing down the river from Mt. Toyama and Maya needs people to find out from where it's coming. A problematic courtier is close to discovering the Toyama's secret and needs stopped. Maya is hosting a martial competition open to ascetics.

## Illuminated Night

The Toyama's scholars focus kiseki necklaces through their weapons, and eventually the rest of their bodies. Though they appear placid these ascetics can quickly create dramatic displays of power that intimidate even the fiercest bushi of the greater clans. They spend most of their time learning to manipulate the kiseki by means of their creations.

**Type:** Ascetic

**Weapon of Choice:** Bo staff

### Tier 1: Empower Staff

You may choose to add one mundane or kiseki-based effect from the Crafting Items section each day to your bo staff. With the GM's permission you can use homebrewed abilities. You also gain a free Intensification to your crafting rolls.

### Tier 2: Within the Body

Make a Wisdom roll during combat to add a mundane or Kiseki-based effect to your body, as if from armor. This lasts for an entire combat or scene.

### Tier 3: Unleash the Power

Once per combat you can attack by using Wisdom to roll. This attack can target enemies up to Far Away, and it emanates from your staff. You also gain Advantage on rolls to find kiseki.

### Tier 4: All Things Empowered

Once per day if you spend an hour working with an item and you have some kiseki on your person you can charge that item with one mundane or item effect from the Crafting Items section. This effect lasts for an hour, or you can make three Intensifications to make it permanent.

### Tier 5: Kiseki Unbound

You may use your Tier 3 ability three times per combat. Instead of doing damage you can now choose to also fly at 60' a round for a number of rounds equal to the Intensifications, catch your target on fire, freeze it in place or chain lightning, doing 1d6 damage from your target to extra targets within Nearby range from that target equal to the Intensifications.

## Relations with Others

### Kaigaku

**Atsumichi:** Like most of the rest they underestimate us, but we can see the envy in their eyes.

**Chisaten:** They continue to keep our secret, and for that we're grateful.

**Kakujima:** Besides our handful of courtiers, we have no contact with the Kakujima.

**Kondo:** They speak of wisdom, but they're too detached from the world to be useful.

**Morimoto:** Nothing but bluster and aggression. They hide their weakness with boasts.

**Shirai:** Our closest patrons. They make good use of their stores of kiseki.

**Toguchi:** We don't trust them, but we respect them.

**Watanabe:** We sympathize with their duty.

### Gaijin

**Albar:** We hear tell of their marvelous inventions. There's little we wouldn't give for one of their technical books.

**Cordova:** If the rumors are true, their knowledge of kiseki rivals our own.

**Kherin:** Several of our members volunteer to defend the Watanabe against these pests every year.

**Uriwane:** If only we could somehow get these river dwellers to help us find the source of our deposits.

### Territory

**Capital:** The Toyama take their family name from their stronghold at the base of a craggy mountain. Its canyons are the only place in the empire where people regularly find kiseki, as opposed to searching starfall craters.

**Trading Goods:** Pottery and other fine goods.

**Terrain:** Mountainous.

## Notable People

### Toyama Tsuko, Explorer Warrior

Tsuko is an ambitious woman who wants to find the true source of the kiseki flowing through Togawa, the river cutting canyons into the mountain. She's currently attempting to woo the Uriwane to help navigate the treacherous crags. This scholar has spent enough time with these people that she's become fluent in their language and traditions. She's met mostly with frustration, as each of the tribes will only help if she agrees to help them eliminate their enemies. She's held off on getting involved in petty wars, but her patience is running low.

### Toyama Shotaro, Swordsmith

While most of the Toyama spend their days harnessing the elements within their bodies and staffs, Shotaro takes the most pleasure in crafting exotic weapons. They're imbued with various powerful properties, though the vast majority of these powers are not destructive, but oriented towards defense, speed or utility. His most famous work is called Utaken, a breathtakingly beautiful sword that sings when its wielder dances or performs kata.



*The Toyama Lesser Clan was created at the suggestion of editor Jeffery Meyer.*

The background of the page is a traditional Japanese ink wash painting (suiboku-ga) depicting a landscape. In the center, a multi-tiered pagoda stands on a rocky outcrop. To the left, a large, flowering cherry tree (sakaki) is in full bloom, its branches extending across the scene. The background shows misty mountains and a bamboo grove. The overall style is soft and atmospheric, with a muted color palette of greys, browns, and soft pinks. The painting is framed by a dark, textured border that resembles a stone wall or a bamboo fence. In the corners, there are small, realistic-looking illustrations of green bamboo leaves and pink cherry blossoms.

# Chapter 5

## The Secrets of Kaigaku

## Player Warning: Spoilers Ahead!

If you're planning on playing in a game of Kaigaku, do yourself and your group a favor and give this section a pass. Everything else in the book up to this point is knowledge that most any samurai could find out with a little digging, if they didn't already know.

## Clan Secrets

I'll keep this short and sweet, since the goal is for you to Make Kaigaku Yours. You can use the secrets here for your game, or not if you prefer.

### Atsumichi

This clan is secretly sowing discontent among the clans of the Kherin. They send secret envoys to arm members of the various families and tell lies to raise the ire of the riders so that they continue to attack the Empire. More specifically, they do this to keep the barbarians at odds with the Watanabe clan.

The Atsumichi fear the day when the Watanabe realizes what a powerful ally the steppe dwellers would make. After that point it would be a simple matter for a Kherin-Watanabe to storm through Kaigaku. While that alliance might be stopped, it would cause more devastation than the Atsumichi are willing to bear.

### Chisaten

The Conspiracy of Seven is a council of senior members of the family. They're currently plotting to have all gaijin expelled from the empire, as they feel that the foreigners' presence is too imbalancing to the culture of the Empire. Their plan is to assassinate Johime, the Princess of the Left, to stir up xenophobic sentiment, and to rid themselves of the young monarch-in-waiting, who favors curtailing their stipends.

### Kakujima

Civil war is brewing. Hitomi's daughters are at odds with one another, and even if they don't initiate the conflict themselves, the clan's advisors are all jockeying for position and riling up the common folk in support of one sister or the other. This is a dangerous game because if the lower classes start throwing their weight around then the rest of the clans are going to have to respond, lest their own commoners grow restless.

### Kondo

Kimura is gathering resources for a coup. He's planning to kill Wazen, Emperor of the Right and prop up his successor, Johime, as a puppet while he acts as the de facto ruler. The ambitious daimyo has spies operating in every court and has a series of plans fleshed out. Any clan that resists is going to be attacked. His blackmail on select members of each clan means that when he chooses to act he can force at least two other clans to join his initial assault on the first clan to cross him.

### Morimoto

Yasanobu found a letter shortly after he returned home from escaping the ninja who kidnapped him and his family. It was from his father, who confessed that he was secretly the patron of a ninja order. He had found that he was dying of a wasting illness, and he needed to be sure that his son was up to the task of saving the clan. His father closed the letter with the exhortation to never back down from a challenge, and with the series of coded documents needed to assume control of the Fire Snail ninja order.

### Shirai

As part of its treaties with various clans the Shirai often donate scrolls to create libraries for the daimyo. In each of these libraries the custodian is a supposedly illiterate commoner who cares for the clan's deepest secrets. While they are commoners, the Shirai have generously seen to it that the commoner is taught to read and write, and they secretly supplement their incomes with a life-changing amount of zeni to keep tabs on the documents being filed.

### Toguchi

Among this clans many secrets is that each and every one of the double agent librarians reporting to the Shirai clan is actually a member of the Silver Tanuki ninja ryu, and they only report to the Shirai what the Toguchi want them to know.

### Watanabe

While Tadakatsu's uncle, Abaqader, plots to run headlong into the steppes in a foolish attempt to eliminate his ancestral enemies, Tadakatsu himself is living up to the rumors. He has no love for Bayar Khan, but he sees the value of the Kherin as military allies. It's ironic that without the taunting from the members of the other clans Tadakatsu would have found a place in Kaigaku's society and never thought to use the steppe people for his own ends.

## NPC Secrets

### Atsumichi Goemon

Goemon is secretly working for the Toguchi Clan. He thinks that both Kondo Kimura and his elder brother, Atsumichi Hikaze are both fools who are hung up on their own vices. Hikaze adheres too closely to tradition while Kimura does nothing to disguise his foolish ambition. Goemon was promised by his anonymous contacts among the Toguchi that after the two daimyo fall he'll be left as the leader of both clans.

### Hikaru

This gruff man is on the hunt. He roams from clan to clan looking to find the man who engineered the downfall of his father's house, the disgraced Sugiyama Clan, by planting evidence "proving" them of treason. He doesn't know the man's name, only that he was tall and is missing an eye. This is not an uncommon appearance, so for now this ronin has to wander, keeping his true identity secret. With the right information he hopes to restore his house and his father's honor.

### Chisaten Hanzo

Hanzo has no personal secrets, but he knows virtually all of the misdeeds committed by Johime, Wazen and their immediate predecessors. The guilt of taking out enemies of the royal family who had done nothing wrong save be inconvenient to his masters' plans. Hanzo maintains a journal, title *The Sins of an Empire*, chronicling the misdeeds he's had to perpetrate, as well as those he's been able to uncover in the course of his research.

### Shang Ze

Shang Ze began his life as a ronin, so far as anyone knows. He found his way to the Chisaten's good graces. It's an open secret that his true purpose as a tactical instructor is to gauge the strength of the clans' armies and make sure that their actual power harmonizes with the reports sent to the Emperor. What nobody knows, for now, is that he was raised by a revolutionary ninja sect and plans to use his military acumen and authority to eventually sow the seeds of war and overthrow the samurai class.

### Kakujima Himiko

Himiko wants to free her clan from the yoke of Kaigaku. Kakujima was a prosperous nation long before their annexation, and they would continue to thrive without being attached to the empire of the mainland. She's

recruiting capable warriors for her growing fleet with the aim of crippling Kaigaku's navy. She has no dreams of conquest, yet, but simply wants the Emperor to recognize her sovereignty. Himiko remembers her friends and promises wonderful bounties to those who stay loyal to her.

### Kakujima Takako

The biggest reason that Takako doesn't want to marry is that she's already found a young man. His name is Arjun and he's a simple sailor from the Maru Empire. Takako knows that her mother would never approve of her marrying a gaijin, and a commoner, no less. What Takako doesn't realize is that Arjun is no simple sailor. He's truly a kindred soul who longs for a life free of his ancestral obligations, as he is actually the crown prince of the Maru empire. The two young mariners meet frequently at an unknown island, were they eloped several months ago.

### Morimoto Shizuka

Shizuka is under explicit orders from her lord that she is not to return to Kaigaku without support from the gaijin. Like so many of his fellow daimyo, Yasanobu has designs on the Empire. He wants her to come back with an army of gaijin soldiers, but he's willing to settle for enough cannons to blow his rivals into pieces. Shizuka maintains an outward facade of only pretending to believe the gaijin's strange culture, but in her heart she's slowly converted. A zealot's fire consumes her heart, and she has no respect for her heathen lords. When she returns Yasanobu will feel the wrath of divine retribution.

### Tsubame

Tsubame lives a relatively straightforward life. He does have one large secret, though. During his tinkering Tsubame had an epiphany. If he kept packets of premeasured powder available, he could reload his flintlock far more quickly than other gunfighters. From there he devised an oiled paper tube with a bullet at the open end and filled with powder at the rear. These casings mean that he can fire off four shots in the time that it takes a regular teppouka to shoot once. An entire army outfitted with these special guns would be an unstoppable force.



### **Li Jin-soo**

Jin-soo doesn't keep secrets from his lord. His hidden knowledge is the same that his clan possesses. The hwacha in his flagship is not a unique, kiseki-based weapon. It was designed a few centuries ago by scholars who decorated it in gemstones in an attempt to hide the fact that it is a mundane gunpowder weapon. The Shirai claim to only have a few of these weapons, since kiseki are in high demand. The truth is that any clan could easily construct them and use them against enemies. While not as accurate as a gun, nor capable of being reloaded during the heat of battle, if these were deployed in every conflict the casualties would be much higher. For now Jin-soo restricts his use of the clan's weapon to times of dire need, but he's losing patience and may soon decide to unleash the Shirai's true power on the gaijin and their supporters.

### **Shirai Gwang-hyun**

Gwang-hyun reads every book that he comes across. While he's no lover of the gaijin, he came across one of their philosophical texts and translated it to the Shirai tongue. The ideas that it contains, that all men have fundamental rights equal to their neighbors, are anathema to Kaigaku (and to most gaijin cultures, too), but they struck a nerve. Gwang-hyun is now working in secret to make sure that the common people throughout the empire are able to stand up to samurai abuse. If caught, he'll be summarily executed, but his death could very well make him a martyr.

### **Toguchi Kaede**

The darling student of the Rising Badger ryu's only secret is that she's not so obnoxious as she appears to be. She's simply a student devoted to mastering her craft. The school taught her to be unflinching in the face of danger, so she throws herself headlong into every challenge. Kaede would much rather be a gardener, but her devotion to her duty means that she instead spends her days picking fights to prove superiority.

### **Mayonakage**

Mayonakage's true identity is Toguchi Saiko, the clan daimyo. She faked her injury all those years ago to make her enemies underestimate her. People see only the injury and forget that her body, broken as it appears, is home to a very calculating mind. Saiko grows ever more restless and takes to the city at night to release her frustrations. Not even her sensei know of this identity.

### **Watanabe Kuro**

Kuro has no secrets, as he views hiding information as a sign of fear and weakness.

### **Abaqader**

The Nuurgan cavalryman doesn't hide his view of his nephew's lack of resoluteness, but Tadakatsu tolerates the behavior for now because he would rather have his uncle's supporters champing at the bit to fight Bayar Khan than to fight him. Abaqader's true secret is that he is affected by kiseki madness. In an attempt to enhance his combat prowess he impaled his body with various power stones. His utter lack of mental discipline meant that he was quickly overwhelmed. Abaqader is almost always lucid, though he has no idea why. It seems that his madness extends no further than enhancing his aggression, so he's taken to recruiting likeminded Watanabe samurai into a cabal of kiseki-empowered madmen.

# INDEX

- Advantage and Disadvantage p. 2
- Armor Points p. 4
- Armor Proficiency p. 4
- Ascetic p. 17
- Attack p. 4
- Bushi p. 17
- Castes p. 22
- Clans
  - Atsumichi p. 26-28
  - Chisaten (Imperial Family) p. 29-31
  - Kakujima p. 32-34
  - Kondo p. 35-37
  - Morimoto p. 38-40
  - Shirai p. 41-44
  - Sugida p. 53, 54
  - Toguchi p. 45-47
  - Toyama p. 55, 56
  - Watanabe p. 48-50
- Clan treasures p. 11, 12
- Contacts p. 9
- Crafting p. 10, 11
- Critical Attacks p. 5
- Combat p. 4-6
- Customs and Etiquette p. 13
- Damage p. 4
- Defense p. 4
- Distance p. 4
- Dual-wielding p. 5
- Dueling p. 5
- Emperor/Empress p. 51
- Encounters p. 7, 8
- Enemy HD p. 5
- Experience p. 5
- Firearms p. 23
- Gaijin
  - Albar p. 51
  - Achaem p. 51
  - Cordova p. 51
  - Kherin p. 51
  - Maru p. 51
  - Uriwane p. 52
- Gear p. 19
- Healing and Resting p. 5
- Honor and Dishonor p. 3
- Intensification p. 3
- Kiseki p. 3, 24
- Languages p. 12
- Lesser Clans p. 51
- Mass Combat p. 5
- Movement p. 4
- Ninja p. 17
- Ryu p. 16
- Skills p. 16
- Social Combat p. 13
- Stats p. 16
- Two-handed Weapons p. 5
- Usage Die p. 9

Watanabe

Kondo

Toguchi

Atsumichi

Shirai

Morimoto

Watanabe



# KAIGAKU



## Character Details

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Class \_\_\_\_\_ Level \_\_\_\_\_  
Special Features \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Stats

STR	DEX	CON
INT	WIS	CHA

HP _____ / _____	Damage Die _____
AP _____ / _____	Hit Die _____

### Skills

Station \_\_\_\_\_  
Passion \_\_\_\_\_  
Duty \_\_\_\_\_

### Ryu

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### Contacts

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### Gear

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# KAIGAKU

## Coming Soon!

The Kaigaku Chronicle, a periodical publication with fiction, background information, adventures, new lesser clans and much, much more. Look for it on [DrivethruRPG.com](http://DrivethruRPG.com) or join the Kaigaku RPG Google+ community to get the latest updates.