

Once Upon a Time in Old Japan...

Houses of the Blooded

Blood & Honor

A GAME OF SAMURAI TRAGEDY

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Buyer Beware

I'm a big fan of samurai. I love the ideas of honor and loyalty and the conflict of human emotions in extreme conditions. Grace under pressure.

A long time ago, I designed a game about samurai. You may have heard of it. This game is a little different. That was a game about *fantastic samurai*. This is a game about *samurai tragedy*, both historical and fantastical.

Now, before we go any further, I've got to say something right up front. **This is not a history book.** It is also not a reference book. There are plenty of books available to you if you want to know more about Japan. Even some great gaming books. Look at *Gurps: Japan*, for example. Also, *Sengoku*. And, of course, if you're looking for something really fantastic, go check out that *Legend of the Five Rings* book everybody's been talking about.

The purpose of this book is to provide rules for playing samurai in Old Japan, not give you a detailed essay on samurai culture, etiquette and history. I am not a historian nor am I an anthropologist. I'm a game designer. I'll give you a ton of references at the end of this book to learn more about samurai and their world. Those sources are a lot more reliable than an amateur like myself.

Also, I've taken a few liberties with "historic" Japan and I ask all you purists for forgiveness. I've done so to make the game a bit more accessible to a Western audience—and frankly—to downplay a few of the more ugly aspects of Feudal Japan. I'm not picking on the culture specifically: I can demonstrate a whole lot of ugliness in Feudal Europe as well. (And, when given the chance, I did the same thing to Restoration Europe by editing out the uglier aspects of my own ancestors' history.) Despite my changes, I hope readers find my version of Old Japan retains its authenticity even if it sacrifices a bit of its historical accuracy.

This is a game about warring Clans. In samurai literature, the heroes are fragile. Always four feet from death. They die to serve the Clan. Every decision a samurai makes is about his Clan. To reflect that attitude, you'll find characters in this game are just like their literary counterparts: they are fragile. Don't get into a fight unless you know you can win. Also, the mechanics reflect the sentiment that the characters are all bit parts in a much larger machine. Identity is almost

smothered by duty. Not entirely—and certainly less than if this was a historical game—but players will find that their characters are truly tiny parts of a larger machine. Your character's personal identity is far less important than his role in the Clan. Character creation takes a few moments of consideration. Clan creation, on the other hand, is something the entire group should consider carefully.

Finally, a friendly warning.

Samurai literature is filled with stories of men and women forced to choose between love and duty, duty and honor, honor and honesty. These are the kinds of choices you will find in this game. If you'd rather play a game where your character always makes the right choice, always increases his skills, always comes out smelling like a rose...

PUT THIS BOOK DOWN RIGHT NOW AND BUY SOMETHING ELSE.

Don't say I didn't warn you. After all, it's my name on the spine. You should know what you are getting into.

Hai sensu!

JW

Chapter 1

Clan & Character

Like I said in the *Introduction*, this is a game about warring Clans. Unlike most roleplaying games, in *Blood & Honor*, your character is less important than his family. In fact, your samurai should always attempt to bury his personal interests and desires under the flag of *duty*.

Samurai come and go, but Clans remain.

And so, in *Blood & Honor*, making a Clan is the primary task of the players. Making individual characters is a secondary step. You still get to play a character—many of them, in fact—but primary consideration should be making a Clan.

There are two ways to make a Clan:

1. Your group can combine to make a single Clan from which all the characters hail.
2. Your group can divide into separate Clans, making characters from each.

Either way you go, the rules are the same.

If multiple players join the same Clan, they will have more resources to make that Clan more powerful. If players decide to make their own Clans, each individual Clan will be weaker.

Making a Clan

Before you make your character, you must first make his Clan. When making a Clan, you provide the basic philosophy and mechanical bonuses available to all members of that Clan.

- First, who is your Clan Daimyo?
- Second, what Virtue does your Clan revere?



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- Third, what Holdings does your Clan have at its disposal?
- Fourth, what Aspects does your Clan have?
- Fifth, what Meibutsu does your Province boast?
- Sixth, what is your Clan's Name and Heraldry?
- Seventh, what true about your Clan?

Let's go through all of those, one at a time.

Step 1: Choose a Daimyo

First, you must choose a Daimyo: the Lord of the Clan.

Your Daimyo begins as a lesser Daimyo. As he grows in power and strength, his abilities will also grow. Right now, as you start the game, your Daimyo is rank 1. Your Daimyo's Rank is equal to the number of Provinces he commands. See *War* for more information on gaining Provinces.

Pick one of the Daimyos below. Each of the Daimyos has both an Advantage and a Disadvantage.

Also, the character of your Daimyo greatly influences the character of your Clan. An Ambitious Daimyo is known for his ruthless expansion. A Clever Daimyo is known for being an outsider. Each Daimyo has his own eccentricities and benefits.

AMBITIOUS

While each samurai has at least half his heart devoted to ambition, your *Ambitious* Daimyo has his entire heart set on it. He is willing to sacrifice everything and anything to gain more land, more title, more prestige.

The Advantage of having an Ambitious Daimyo means your Daimyo gains one additional Season Action per Season.

The Disadvantage of having an Ambitious Daimyo is that his samurai receive the "Ambitious" Aspect, making them less trustworthy. See *Aspects* for more information.

CLEVER

The *Clever* Daimyo makes use of new innovations and does not cling to tradition.

The Advantage of a Clever Daimyo is all equipment provided to his samurai is considered *good quality equipment* (see *Seasons*).

The Disadvantage of a Clever Daimyo is that he is seen as a non-traditionalist: a high nail that must be hammered down. All of his samurai have the Aspect "Non-Traditionalist"

which may be tagged by other samurai in social situations. See *Aspects* for more information.

CRUEL

The *Cruel* Daimyo does not suffer fools. He is quick to anger and judge but he is feared throughout the lands... as are his samurai.

The Advantage of having a Cruel Daimyo is that all of his samurai gain 2 bonus dice for any intimidation risks.

The Disadvantage is that they have the “Cruel” Tag in social situations. See *Aspects* for more information.

CUNNING

The *Cunning* Daimyo has many spies and uses espionage to gain information on his rivals and friends.

The Advantage of having a Cunning Daimyo is you gain a free espionage action every Season (see *Seasons*).

The Disadvantage is that all his samurai have the “Untrustworthy” Tag which may be tagged by other characters. See *Aspects* for more information.

DANGEROUS

The *Dangerous* Daimyo takes risks and rewards samurai who do the same. He is unpredictable, lethal and deadly.

The Advantage of having a Dangerous Daimyo is you gain two bonus dice whenever taking a risk that may end your life.

The Disadvantage is the Narrator removes *four Honor* (rather than three) from the Honor Pool whenever you decline such a risk.

KIND

The *Kind* Daimyo treats his peasants fairly. He is known to have a generous heart and takes time when he must make important decisions.

The Advantage of having a kind Daimyo is you gain two bonus dice in any social situation involving trust.

The Disadvantage is that all his samurai gain the “Trusting” Tag. See *Aspects* for more information.

The Mad Daimyo

Roll a six-sided die to discover what the Mad Daimyo is this Season.

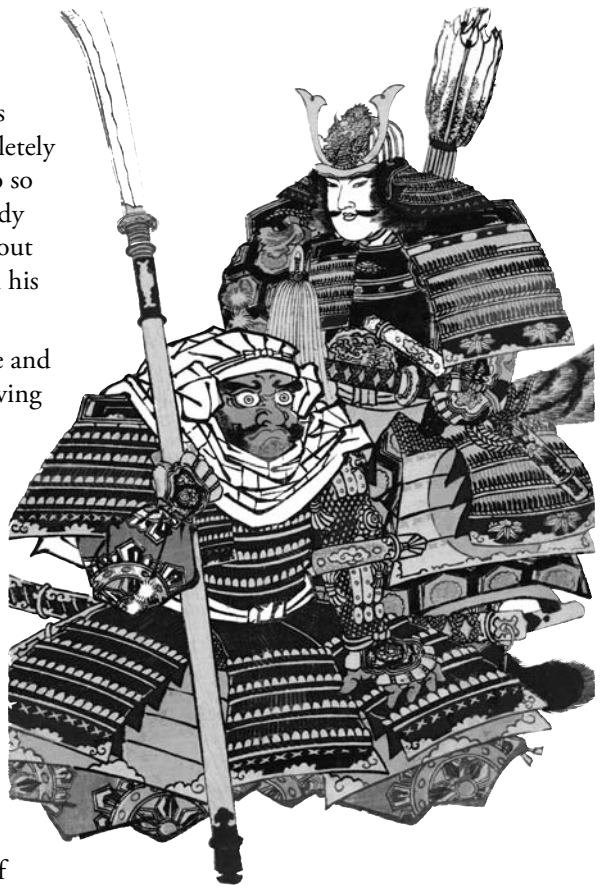
- 1 Ambitious
- 2 Clever
- 3 Cruel
- 4 Cunning
- 5 Dangerous
- 6 Kind

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MAD

The *Mad* Daimyo is just that: he's completely insane. But he's also so powerful that nobody can do anything about removing him from his throne.

Both the Advantage and Disadvantage of having a Mad Daimyo are random: the Narrator rolls a die and determines what kind of Daimyo he will be at the beginning of each Season.



Step 2: Virtues

Every Clan reveres one of six Virtues.

Your Clan reveres one of these Virtues above all others. Which is it? Again, your choice here will define much of your Clan's character. Choose one Virtue as your Clan's favored Virtue.

BEAUTY

Beauty is the ability to communicate to others. It may be through poetry or rhetoric or drama or even gardening. Beauty is the most important Virtue because without it, you cannot communicate your ideas to others.

COURAGE

Courage is the ability to say "No." The ability to say no to temptation, to fear, to pain, to anything. Courage is the most important Virtue because without it, your character will not be able to refuse any temptation.

CUNNING

Cunning is the ability to see the plan within the plan within the plan. Cunning is the most important Virtue because without it, you will not be able to anticipate your enemy's plans.

PROWESS

Prowess is the ability to wield weapons. Prowess is the most important Virtue because without it, you cannot defend yourself against martial attacks.

STRENGTH

Strength is all physical actions: lifting, pushing, pulling and even manual dexterity, speed and nimbleness. Strength is the most important Virtue because without it, you cannot swim, climb or jump in dangerous situations.

WISDOM

Wisdom is knowing what is true and false in the world. Wisdom is the most important Virtue because without it, you cannot determine facts from falsehoods.

Step 3: Holdings

Each Daimyo owns a Province. Within that Province are Holdings that represent his wealth and Vassals who represent his loyal followers.

Each player who is a part of your Clan may pick one Holding to add to your Daimyo's lands. You'll find out how to use these Holdings later in the *Seasons* chapter. But for your convenience, here is a list of Holdings you may choose from.

Like everything else, Holdings have ranks. All starting Holdings begin at rank 1 and may not be increased except through Season Actions.

BLACKSMITH

Men pull iron and other metals from the ground and blacksmiths forge them into deadly weapons. The quality of your Clan's weapons relies on the Blacksmith.

But I Want to Play a Ronin!

So... you want to play a wave man, eh? Okay. Here are the rules.

Make a character. You get no Clan Points. All of your equipment is *poor quality*. You have no horse, you have no food, you have nothing.

Oh, and samurai treat you like crap because you're a coward. You didn't have the courage to kill yourself when your Daimyo died.

Playing a ronin is the modern equivalent of playing a homeless person in modern America. Yes, you can get picked up by a Clan as a sword arm, but they'll put you in the crappiest part of the army and expect you to die quickly. You'll have to do manual labor for food—remember the samurai cutting wood in *Seven Samurai*?—and you'll be scorned wherever you go.

Those are the rules. Have fun with them.

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

A place for samurai to gain insight and reflect on the deeper nature of their souls.

DOJO

Where your samurai hone their skills in warfare.

GAMBLING DEN

Where your samurai lose their money.

GARRISON

A Garrison allows you to hold ashigaru (foot soldiers) in your Province. Each rank of Garrison provides one rank of ashigaru.

GEISHA HOUSE

A place of art and beauty.

RICE FARM

Where the peasants toil to generate the real keystone of the economy.

SAKE WORKS

Liquid courage. Literally.

SHINTO SHRINE

A place to honor your ancestors.

STABLES

Where grooms breed and care for horses.

STONE CUTTER

To build new Holdings, you will need Stone. This is where you get it.

SUMO SCHOOL

If you want your samurai to be stronger, get yourself a Sumo School.

WOODCUTTER

To build new Holdings, you will need Lumber. This is where you get it.

Bigger Holdings

Some players may want to begin the game with a high-ranking Holding. If they are all willing to use their Holding slots to increase the rank of a single Holding, I'm not entirely against that. It means their lands will be short of vital resources, but on the other hand, knowingly accepting a limitation is what makes games interesting.

Step 4: Choose Aspects

Each Clan gains four Aspects that define its character. An Aspect is like a skill, but a bit more broad. It's more of a cliché—with game mechanics.

For example, your Clan has the Aspect, *None of Us is as Great as All of Us*, shown below.

NONE OF US IS AS GREAT AS ALL OF US

Invoke: Your Clan is well known for working together. Gain three dice when helping another Clan member accomplish a goal both of you want.

Compel: You genuinely feel men must work together to accomplish their goals and will do so regardless of the risk to yourself.

This Aspect, as it says, gives your character three bonus dice whenever he takes a risk appropriate to the Aspect. On the other hand, it also has a *compel* that forces him to act in a way his Clan deems honorable. If, when presented with the opportunity to help another Clanmate, the Narrator adds an Honor Point to the pool. If you ignore the opportunity, you do not gain the Honor Point. More on that in the *Aspects* chapter.

Every Clan has *four Aspects* that define it. Each Clan has one Aspect in common: the sample Aspect above. In other words, every Clan has the *None of Us...* Aspect. You may choose three more from the list below that further define the character of your Clan.

Go ahead and pick *three more Aspects* that define your Clan. When you make a samurai from this Clan, you choose *two* of those Aspects for your samurai.

A MERRY COMPANION IS AS GOOD AS A HORSE

Invoke: Your Clan is known for the wit of its samurai. Gain three bonus dice when using humor in a delicate situation.

Compel: Sometimes, the fool forgets that he is only a fool. You forget your place from time to time and cause situations that would not have occurred if you kept your mouth shut.

ALL MARRIED WOMEN ARE NOT WIVES

Invoke: The women of your Clan are beautiful, cunning and deadly. The men are dashing, dangerous and sly. Gain three dice for any seduction risk (whether your character is male or female).

Compel: A charmer is always lured by charms. You often succumb to likewise advances.

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THE BEST SWORD STAYS IN THE SCABBARD

Invoke: There is the life-giving sword and the death-giving sword. A swordsman reaches a point when the threat of violence is enough to maintain peace. Gain three dice when intimidating others with the threat of violence.

Compel: You truly believe in peace and harmony. You will only draw your weapon if another samurai draws his first.

THE DEER HUNTER PAYS NO MIND TO THE HARES

Invoke: This Aspect gives three bonus dice for risks involving hunting and surviving in the wilderness.

Compel: The samurai of your Clan are known for being very clever hunters but not well educated in the delicacies of the court.

DIG TWO GRAVES

Invoke: When preparing for revenge, always dig two graves. Your Clan's samurai are well-known for being ruthless when it comes to matters of revenge. Gain three bonus dice whenever you are *directly confronting* an issue of revenge.

Compel: Unfortunately, your samurai are also rather hot-blooded and rush to judgment, seldom listening to reason when offended.

EVEN A THIEF MUST LEARN HIS TRADE

Invoke: Your Clan's samurai are knowledgeable in crafts such as blacksmithing, weaving, etc. Gain three dice for risks involving craftsmanship.

Compel: Your Clan is also known for its fair treatment of



the peasantry and merchant class. You show them compassion and good will.

FIRST THE MAN TAKES A DRINK

Invoke: ... then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes the man. Your Clan is well-known for its excessive samurai. Gain three dice on any risk when drunk.

Compel: A drunken man will say anything, do anything. Be careful. Drunkenness is not always forgiven...

FOG CANNOT BE DISPELLED BY A FAN

Invoke: Your Clan is exceptionally good at deceiving others. Gain three dice whenever trying to lie.

Compel: Lying is just like any other source of power: incredibly addictive. You must lie when given the opportunity.

IF MY DOG KNEW MY PLANS

Invoke: ... he'd be dead, too. Your Clan is incredibly good at discovering and keeping secrets. Gain three dice for any risk obtaining or keeping secrets.

Compel: You love secrets and you tend to go out of your way to discover them.

IF ONE MAN PRAISES YOU

Invoke: ... a thousand will repeat his praise. Your Clan's samurai know exactly how to get attention. Gain three dice for any act in front of a crowd that will bring honor and glory to your Clan.

Compel: You are a glory hound. You can't shut up about yourself and you must always be in the spotlight.

LAUGHTER IS THE FOOL'S HICCUP

Invoke: Your samurai are deadly serious. All. The. Time. Gain three bonus dice to resist any attempt to change your mind once you've made it up.

Compel: You have no sense of beauty. You cannot appreciate poetry or painting or theater or any of the arts.

Compel: You are rude, brutish and don't care about etiquette.

ONE WORD CAN WARM THE WINTER

Invoke: Your Clan is known for its eloquence. Gain three dice when making speeches or performing.

Compel: You tend to speak when not spoken to.

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TEN MEN, TEN COLORS

Invoke: Your Clan understands the need for compassion. When you try to convince another you sympathize with their cause, gain 3 dice.

Compel: You truly believe in compassion and will sympathize with those in true need.

THE MOUNTAIN NEVER FALLS

Invoke: Gain three bonus dice when resisting physical pain or arduous circumstances.

Compel: You are rude, brutish and don't care about etiquette.

NAIL AND HAMMER

Invoke: "The nail that sticks up tallest is the first to be hammered down." Your Clan knows the proper procedure and etiquette for everything. Gain three bonus dice for any risks involving manners.

Compel: You must do things the right way. Doing otherwise is disgraceful and dishonorable.

WAITING FOR LUCK IS WAITING FOR DEATH

Invoke: Your Clan's samurai do not hesitate. Gain three bonus dice for any risk that is impetuous, impertinent and spontaneous.

Compel: You must act without thinking, jump into the situation without knowledge and otherwise throw yourself into danger.

Step 5: Meibutsu (A Little Thing)

Each province in Old Japan boasts the best... something. The best sake, the best kimonos, the best katana, the best *something*. People travel from province to province to pick up *meibutsu*: the pride of the Province.

Your province is known for a particular item. Nowhere else in Old Japan can anyone find better. What is that one item your province makes better than any other?

Traditional Meibutsu

Nagoya: Kishimen, Tebasaki, Miso foods

Aomori Prefecture: Apples

Chiba Prefecture: Peanuts

Ehime Prefecture: Mikan, Iyokan

Matsuyama: Tart, Botchan dango

Fukui Prefecture: Crab

FUKUOKA PREFECTURE

Hakata: Motsunabe, Mentaiko, Torimon

Gifu Prefecture: Cormorant Fishing

Hiroshima: Okonomiyaki

Hokkaidō: Crab, Ikura (Roe), Sea urchin

HYŌGO PREFECTURE

Kobe: Kobe Fugetsudo (Gaufre)

Kagawa: Sanuki udon

KYOTO PREFECTURE

Kyoto: Yatsunashi, Kiyomizuyaki ceramics.

Nishijin: textiles

Uji: Green tea

KYŪSHŪ

Arita, Imari: pottery, ceramics

Nagano Prefecture: Shinshu Soba

Nagasaki Prefecture: Champon, Kakuni

Niigata: Rice

Okayama: Kibi dango, muscat grape, white peach

Okinawa: Awamori, Chanpurū

Osaka: Takoyaki, Okonomiyaki

SAGA PREFECTURE

Arita: Arita (porcelain)

Shizuoka: Green tea

Tottori: Pears, Crab

Yamagata: Cherries

Shimonoseki: fugu

Yamanashi: Grapes

Step 6: Name and Heraldry

Finally, choose a name for your Clan and your Clan's heraldry. It's important to pick a Name that *means something*. If your Clan Name's meaning is appropriate to a risk, you gain bonus dice for that risk.

Step 7: Truths

Finally, each player gets to say one thing true about the Clan. You can say whatever you like as long as it doesn't contradict an already established truth. You could say that the Daimyo's wife is unfaithful or that the people of the province are well-known for their integrity. You could say that the sensei at the dojo is blind, that the geisha in the nearest city are generous with their favors or that a wandering ronin avenges wrongdoings perpetrated on the peasants. You could

say that ghostly spiders haunt a local forest or that a wise old man lives on a nearby mountain and gives out advice to the worthy. Say whatever you like about the province. It's true.

Finished!

And that's it. That's everything you need to know to make a Clan. The next step, of course is making samurai. That's a whole lot easier.



Sample Clan

I have five players making a Clan. They talk about each step and come up with the following choices.

Step 1: Daimyo

Our players decide they want a Clever Daimyo. They like being on the cutting edge of things and also like the drawback of being seen as outsiders.

Step 2: Virtues

Our players decide that Cunning compliments their Daimyo's nature. All samurai made from this Clan gain a +1 to Cunning.

Step 3: Holdings

Looking at the list of Holdings, our five players pick five Holdings they feel add to their Clan's character. This is what they picked:

Nick wants a *Geisha House*. He plans on being the Daimyo's Spy Master (see below), so he wants a place where he can pick up rumors.

Ro wants a *Gambling Den*. She feels this will add to the Clan's wealth because she always rolls lucky.

Ken wants a *Dojo*. He plans on being the Daimyo's Assassin and wants a place to hone his sword skills.

Kelly picks a *Rice Farm*. She knows the Clan needs a steady source of income just in case Ro doesn't roll well.

Jessica chooses a *Sake Works*. Courage is an important component of being a samurai and she wants to make sure her samurai always has courage... even if it comes in a bottle.

Step 4: Aspects

Every Clan begins with the Aspect *None of Us are as Great as All of Us*. Our players pick three more Aspects for their samurai to choose from.

One Word Can Warm the Winter

If My Dog Knew My Plans

Fog Cannot be Dispelled by a Fan

Step 5: Meibutsu

After a long discussion, the players decide they like the idea of having green tea as their *meibutsu*.

Step 6: Clan Name and Heraldry

Our players choose the Clan Name "Hashiba." Roughly, it means "gentlemen." (I'm often very tolerant of... let's call them "creative" use of Japanese names. If you want to be more correct about these things, feel free.)

Step 7: Truths

We have five players so each gets to say one thing that's true about the Province.

Nick says, "Many of our spies are geisha."

Ro says, “We have many rivers that we use to trade with other provinces.”

Ken says, “Our samurai are known to be bad asses.”

Kelly says, “Our Daimyo’s wife is unfaithful.”

Jessica says, “We have issues with seasonal bandits.”

Making a Character

Once you’ve made a Clan, it’s time to make a character. Take it step by step.

- Step 1: Choose a Name
- Step 2: Choose a Duty
- Step 3: Choose Virtues
- Step 4: Choose Aspects
- Step 5: Honor & Glory
- Step 6: Choose an Advantage

Step 1: Choose a Name

Your character’s name is important: it adds one die to all appropriate risks. Pick a name and then, pick the name’s meaning. If the meaning is appropriate to a risk, add one die to that risk.

Step 2: Choose *Giri* (Duty)

Now determine your position in the Daimyo’s court. This is called *giri*, or “duty” or “obligation.” This is the role you fulfill for the Daimyo. There can be more than one court officer per court. In other words, a Daimyo may have two *yojimbo* or *hatamoto* if he chooses. Your *Giri* provides three advantages.

- Your duty gives you three bonus dice for any risks involving your duty to the Daimyo. In other words, if you are the Daimyo’s *yojimbo* (bodyguard) and you are protecting him from assassination, you gain three bonus dice for that risk.
- You also gain an Ability you can use during the game. Read your *Giri*’s specific Ability for details.
- Finally, you gain a specific Benefit during in the game. This will usually manifest as an “in-game” benefit for your character and not a mechanic.

HATAMOTO (GENERAL)

You are the master of the Daimyo’s armies. Without you, the Daimyo’s forces have no leader and cannot adequately protect his

lands. You gain three bonus dice when leading other samurai or inspiring them to work together.

Ability: You may take an action to survey the circumstances of a scene. Make a Cunning + Giri risk. If you gain privilege, every samurai on your side gains one die due to the advantages you found. Any wager increases the number of dice by one per wager.

Benefit: You may keep a number of Ashigaru (foot soldiers) equal to your Giri Rank. Your Ashigaru require no koku payments and are always loyal to you, regardless of any other mechanics. These are *your men* and they will do as you command. No one can spend wagers or use risks to make them betray you. See *Violence* and *War* for more information.

KARO (SENECHAL)

You maintain the Daimyo's lands, finances and castle. Without you, nothing happens.

Ability: Because you are the Daimyo's right-hand man, you have his authority. The Courtier may be the *voice* of the Daimyo, but when he isn't around, you are the one in charge. Your Social Rank is considered "Daimyo" when the Daimyo is not present. You may add a number of bonus dice to any social situation equal to your Giri Rank or the Daimyo's Rank, whichever is greater.

Benefit: You have an entourage of Staff equal to your Giri that accompanies you wherever you go. Your Staff includes various servants who run errands for you, carry messages and perform other less dignified duties.

KAISHAKU (EXECUTIONER)

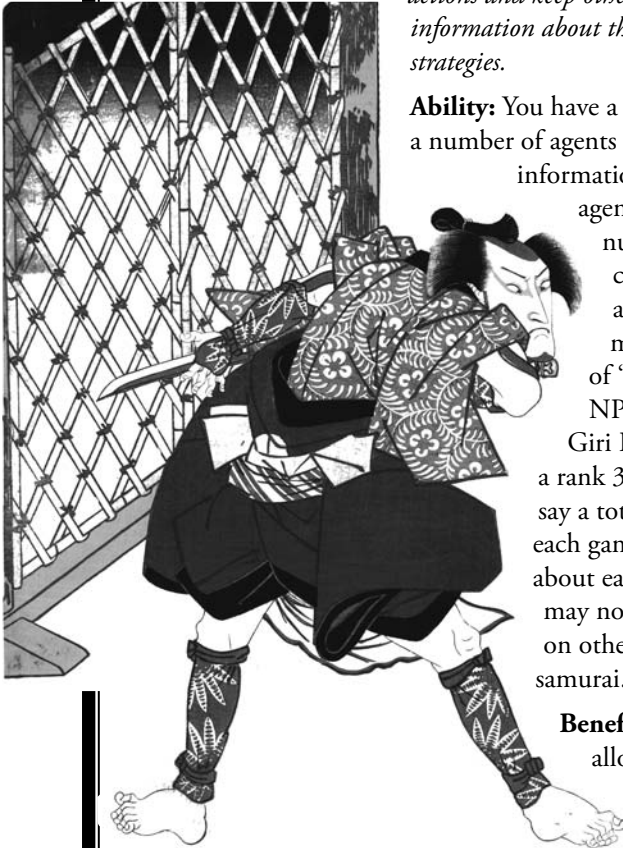
You are the Daimyo's personal sword. When he wants someone killed, he turns to you.

Ability: You carry the Clan's Sword. Because of that, the Sword has a number of abilities equal to your Giri Rank. See Swords for more information.

Benefit: Your reputation as the Executioner precedes you. If you are ever in an antagonistic position toward another character, that character must set aside a number of dice from any risk against you equal to your Giri Rank.

ONIWABAN (SPY MASTER)

You are the Daimyo's master spy. You direct his espionage actions and keep others from gathering information about the Daimyo's strategies.



Ability: You have a Spy Network: a number of agents who gather information for you. Your agents give you a number of facts on characters you meet, and each game, you may state a number of “truths” about NPCs equal to your Giri Rank. (If you have a rank 3 Giri, you get to say a total of three things each game; not three things about each NPC.) You may not use this ability on other player character samurai.

Benefit: Your agents allow you overhear or see any discussion or event during the game that you are

not present for. You may do this a number of times equal to your Giri Rank.

ONMYŌJI (SPIRITUAL ADVISOR)

You are the Daimyo's spiritual advisor. You do not have the martial skills of a yojimbo or the tactical and strategic mind of the general, but you do have a unique understanding of the cosmic powers that guide the world along its path.

Ability: At the beginning of each game session, you may make a prediction about a risk that may happen during the game session (based on the astrological charts and other omens and signs). You may be as vague or specific as you like. If your prediction occurs, any samurai who participate in that risk gain a number of dice equal to your Giri Rank.

Benefit: You may give your Daimyo's Officers a number of Blessings each Season equal to your Giri Rank. See *Magic & Religion* for more information.

TAKUMI (COURTIER)

You are the Daimyo's private artisan and personal cultural advisor. You ensure that the Daimyo's court is elegant and refined, and you create poems, plays, and works of art to commemorate grand events and the history of your Daimyo and his family.

Ability: As your Daimyo's courtier, you may redact, alter, edit, reinterpret or change anything said by any samurai to make it sound more appropriate to the current situation. You may do this a number of times per game session equal to your Duty Rank.

Benefit: Every game session, your contacts within the court gain you a number of *favours* equal to your Giri Rank. A favor represents a boon some other character owes you that must be returned by the end of the game.

YOJIMBO (BODYGUARD)

You are the Daimyo's personal protector. You never leave his side. If any harm comes to him and you are still alive, you will be expected to answer for your shame with your own life.

Ability: You may take an Injury for any other samurai from your Clan, saving them from that Injury. Reduce the rank of that Injury by a number of ranks equal to your Giri Rank.

Benefit: You have a number of Guardsmen with you at all times. You have a number of ranks of Guardsmen equal to your Giri Rank. These men cannot be bribed or bought away from you; these are *your men* and will serve you to the death. See *Violence* and *War* for more information.

Step 3: Choose Virtues

You must now assign ranks to the Virtues. There are six Virtues, but unfortunately, you only get five of them. The sixth is your *weakness*. You will have no ranks in that Virtue. Not now, not ever. Well, that's not completely true. But not now, for sure. And not in the near future.

Assign these ranks to your Virtues:

- One Virtue at rank 4.
- Two Virtues at rank 3.

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- Two Virtues at rank 2.
- One Virtue as a *weakness* (write “W”).

Having a weakness means you have no dice for that particular Virtue. You must find dice elsewhere (in Aspects, Duty, etc.). Having a weakness does not mean you *never* roll dice for a particular kind of risk, it means that Virtue gives you no dice.

For example, riding a horse is a Strength risk. My samurai has Strength as a weakness, so if he must make a Strength risk for riding a horse, he gains no dice from his Strength Virtue. However, he has the “Born in the Saddle” Aspect, giving him three dice for riding a horse. He still doesn’t get any dice for Strength, but his Aspect gives him three dice.

Step 4: Choose Aspects

You now choose two of the four Aspects your Clan has chosen to define its samurai. Every samurai receives the *None of Us...* Aspect for free, so you may choose two Aspects in addition to *None of Us is as Great as All of Us*.

As a side note, I should mention that the reason *None of Us...* became a default Aspect was because *every playtest group* chose that Aspect as one of its Clan’s Aspects. Also, 75% of the samurai created with this system choose *None of Us...* as one of their Aspects. So, I just made it the default Aspect.

If you like, you can ditch the rule about *None of Us...* being the default Aspect and make it a choice rather than a mandate. You paid for the game, after all. You can do with it what you want.

Step 5: Honor & Glory

Your character begins with two ranks of Honor. This gives you two Honor Points for the Honor Pool. See more about Honor Points in the *Risks* section.

Your character begins with one rank of Glory. He is a lesser-known samurai without a reputation. Because you have one Glory Rank, you may write a single word or phrase on the line next to your Glory rank. This word or phrase represents your reputation. It could be “great sword fighter” or “wise judgment” or “rash and impulsive.” Whatever you like.

Step 6: Advantages

You may have one Advantage. Pick from the list below.

ANCIENT SWORD

You are in possession of an ancient weapon handed down from family member to family member... or perhaps you stole it. Regardless, it is yours. See *Violence* for more information on ancient weapons.

ARCHER'S EYE

When using a bow, you do the same damage as a katana. Unfortunately, when you use a katana, treat it as a normal weapon. See *Violence* for more information.

BLESSED VIRTUE

If you have a Virtue at rank 5, you may increase it to rank 6 if you lower another Virtue by a single rank.

BLOOD OATH

Your character has made a blood oath. He has vowed to accomplish some important task. Your character will not die until he reaches his goal. Literally. I mean, your character cannot die until he gains the opportunity to accomplish that task. But your character *will die* if he accomplishes the goal or if he fails. The goal cannot be trivial; it must be something... *epic*. There is no guarantee your character will succeed, but he won't die until he gets the opportunity.

BONUS ASPECT

Your character has a *bonus Aspect*, something that distinguishes him from the other samurai. You may choose an Aspect from the Clan Aspect list or create your own (with the Narrator's approval).

BORN TO THE BLADE

Your character always gains a free wager on all Prowess risks.

DAIMYO'S FAVOR

For reasons known only to you and the Daimyo, you have the Clan Lord's favor. At the end of each Season, you always get a Season



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Action. This is in addition to any other Season Actions the Daimyo may have.

FAST HEALER

You heal faster than other samurai. At the end of the day, you always heal one Injury rank, regardless of your current condition.

INSIGHT

You were born to perform your duty for the Daimyo. All your life has led to the moment when you could serve. You begin the game with a Giri Rank of 2 rather than 1.

IRREPROACHABLE

You are renown for your sense of honor and fidelity. Any action you take *must* be for the greater glory of the Daimyo. One per game session, you may negate one Honor loss.

LARGE

Your character always gains a free wager on any Strength risks.

LUCKY

Three times per game, while taking a risk, you may re-roll a single die that rolls a 1.

OUTSIDER

You gain a +1 to a Virtue *other than* your Clan's revered Virtue.

PERCEPTIVE

Your character always gains a free wager on all Cunning risks.

PERSONAL ANCESTOR

You have an Ancestor who looks after you. Your Ancestor has one Blessing that you may call upon once per Season.

QUICK

You move with the speed of flowing water. Gain two bonus dice for any risk involving speed.

STYLISH

Your character always gains a free wager on all Beauty risks.

TRUE BEAUTY

While most characters are either dramatically handsome or dramatically ugly, your character's beauty outshines almost all others. Gain two dice whenever speaking to a character who is sexually attracted to you.

UNSHAKABLE

Your character always gains a free wager on all Courage risks.

VISIONS

You don't know why, but for some reason, you receive vague and cryptic visions. At random moments (once per game session), your character falls to the ground, helplessly and violently shaking. When he recovers, he may say one thing is true about a future event (like spending a wager—see *Risk* for more information).

WAY OF THE LAND

You always know the correct direction to get to your destination. You know how to get anywhere. You never need to take any kind of risk for navigation.

WELL-SCHOOLED

Your character always gains a free wager on any Wisdom risks.

Sample Character

I built this character to fit with the Clan the other players designed above. Follow along!

Step 1: Choose a Name

My samurai's name will be *Hayate*. It means "smooth." I'm taking a more fanciful definition for Hayate's name. Whenever he's trying to talk his way out of trouble, he gets a bonus die.



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Step 2: Choose a Duty

For a Giri, I chose Hayate to be the Takumi (Courtier). His job is to speak for the Daimyo and avoid political difficulties.

Step 3: Choose Virtues

Hayate's Clan gives him +1 to Cunning. I have a 4, 3, 3, 2, and 2 to place in my Virtues. This is how it works out:

Beauty: 4

Courage: 2

Cunning: 3 (+1)

Prowess: W

Strength: 2

Wisdom: 3

Step 4: Choose Aspects

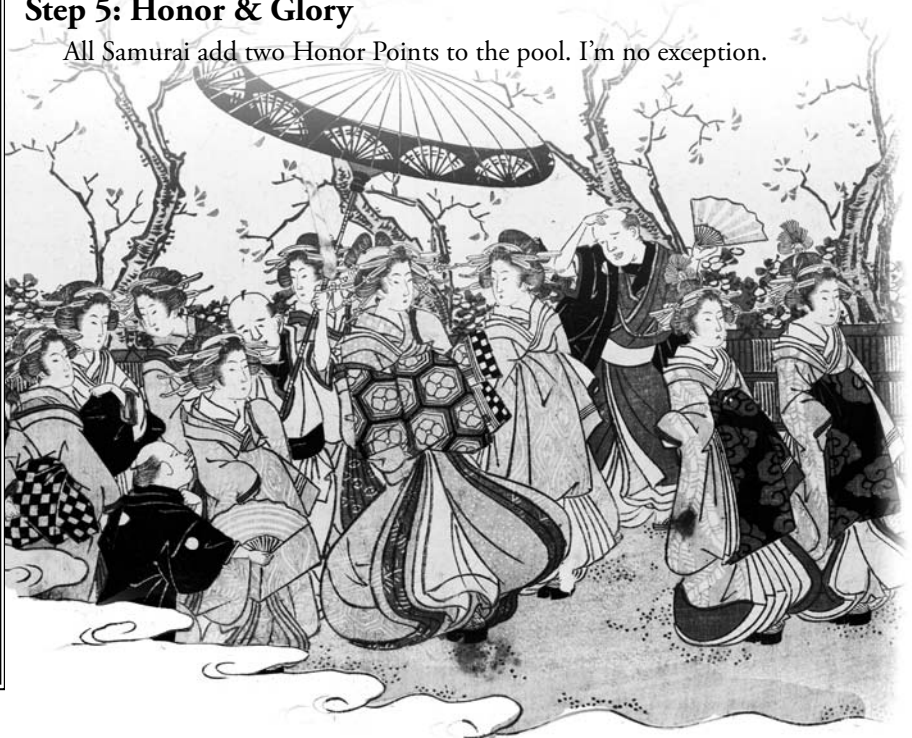
From the three Aspects (plus the free Aspect, *None of Us is as Great as All of Us*), I get to choose two. Here are the ones I choose:

One Word Can Warm the Winter, and

Fog Cannot be Dispelled by a Fan

Step 5: Honor & Glory

All Samurai add two Honor Points to the pool. I'm no exception.



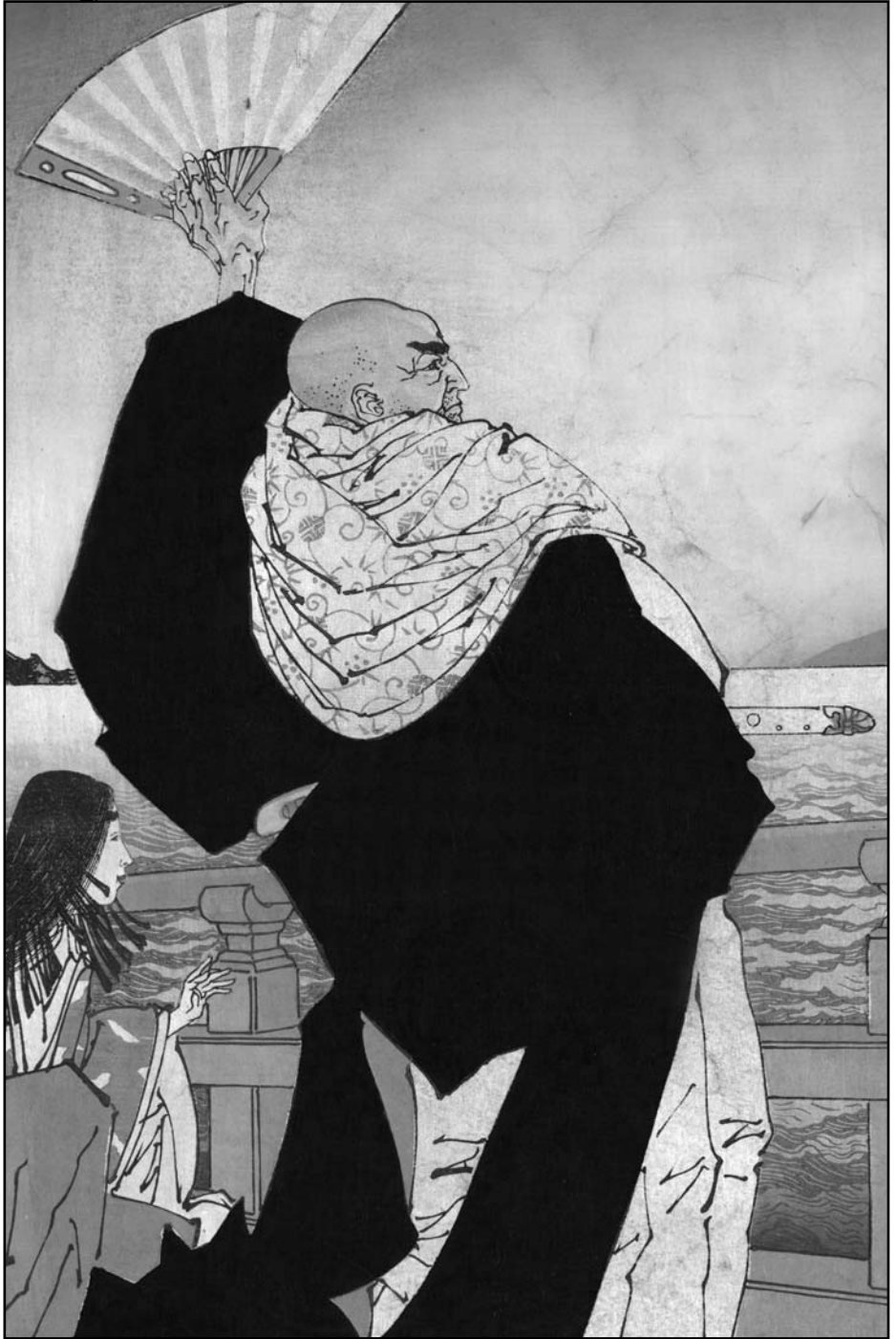
As for Glory, I choose one Reputation for Hayate. I choose “Clever Negotiator.” Whenever I am in a negotiation, I get a bonus die. As my reputation increases (through Glory Points), I will be able to increase my Reputation’s rank and thus get more dice for any risks involving negotiations.

Step 6: Choose an Advantage

I get to choose one Advantage. I’ll choose *Irreproachable*. That way, if I ever take an action that loses the Clan Honor, I can negate that Honor loss. I can only do that once per game session.



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Risk

In this chapter, we discuss all the rules for resolving risks in the game.

A *risk* is a meaningful action taken by a character whose outcome may influence the plot and/or other characters.

If it isn't meaningful, it probably isn't a risk. If it doesn't affect any characters, it probably isn't a risk. If it doesn't affect the plot, it probably isn't a risk.

If a player wants to undertake an action and it doesn't qualify as a risk, the player gets to narrate the outcome of the action.

If a player wants to undertake a risk, then the narration rights of that action are at stake. In other words, if the player rolls well enough, he can narrate the outcome of his action. If he does not, then the Narrator does.

Privilege

Rolling dice in *Blood & Honor* is not about success and failure. Instead, it is about who gets to say what happens.

When you want your character to take a risk, you roll a bunch of six-sided dice. If the sum of the dice is equal to or greater than ten, you gain privilege. This means you get to say what happens.

If the sum of the dice is nine or less, the Narrator gets privilege. This means the Narrator gets to say what happens.

I'll say that again.

If you beat the target number, you get to determine how your character succeeds or fails. If you don't, the Narrator gets to say how your character succeeds or fails.

Target Number

The target number for almost all risks is ten.

That number never goes up or down. Ten.

Getting Dice

You get dice from the following sources:

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運を待っている
と、死は待っています。
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VIRTUE

If a Virtue is appropriate to the risk, you get a number of dice equal to the Virtue's rank. You may only invoke one Virtue per risk; you cannot gain dice from more than one Virtue for a risk.

NAME

If your samurai's **family name** is appropriate to the risk, you gain two dice.

If your samurai's **personal name** is appropriate to the risk, you gain one die.

ASPECT

If you have an Aspect that is appropriate to the risk, you gain three dice. You may only invoke one Aspect per risk; you cannot gain dice from more than one Aspect for a risk.

OTHERS

As you read through the book, you will find other sources of dice.

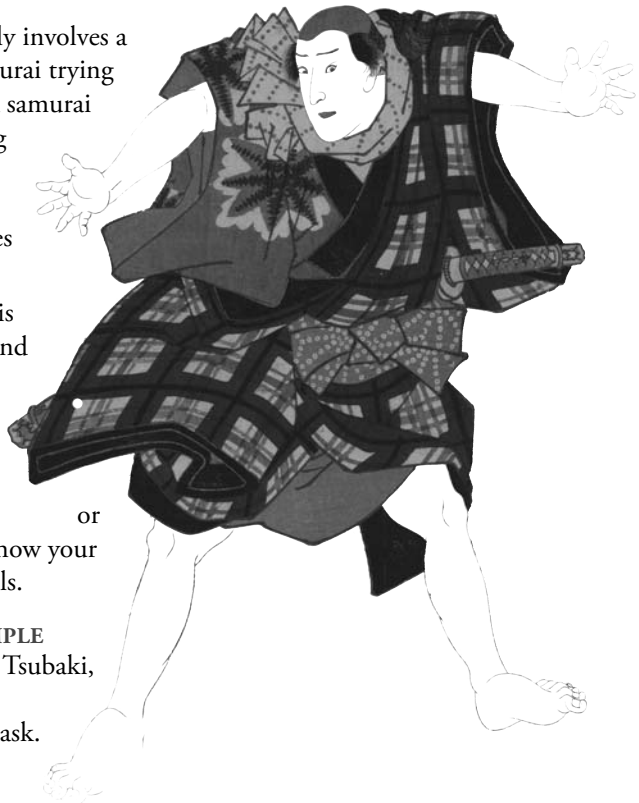
Simple Risk

A simple risk usually involves a single character. A samurai trying to remember details. A samurai trying to lift something heavy. A samurai climbing a wall. All of these are good examples of simple risks.

All you have to do is roll a number of dice and beat a ten. If you can do that, you get to say how your samurai succeeds or fails. If you roll nine or less, the Narrator says how your samurai succeeds or fails.

SIMPLE RISK EXAMPLE

My character, Obu Tsubaki, has been called by his Daimyo to perform a task.



One of the Daimyo's favorite concubines has been murdered and Tsubaki's reputation for having an eye for details is well-known in the court. My Daimyo has asked me to look at the murder scene to determine if I can find anything important.

Tsubaki enters the room and wants to find clues. That's my intent. The Narrator tells me, "That's a Cunning risk."

I look at my character sheet.

Tsubaki has a 4 Cunning. That gives me four dice.

Tsubaki also has the Aspect, "Investigator's Wits." The Narrator agrees that's an appropriate Aspect. Because appropriate Aspects give a player three dice for a risk, I get three more dice. I now have a total of seven dice.

I make the roll: 6, 4, 4, 3, 2, 1, 1. Well over ten. I gain privilege.

I tell the Narrator, "I find a clue. A dab of poison on the girl's lips."

Wagers

As you are about to undertake a risk, you may notice that you have more dice than you need for rolling a ten. If that's the case, you'll want to make some wagers.

Wagers are the real backbone of the system. They make the game fun.

Usually, when your character succeeds, he has one rank of Effect, or 1 Effect. But there is a way of increasing the Effect of your success. We do this through wagers.

Consider. About to roll for a risk, you look at your pool. You can easily beat the risk. You've got seven dice. Using four is a safe bet. Five is an almost guarantee. So, what do you do with those extra dice? You wager them. Set those extras aside and roll the rest.

Setting dice aside before your roll is called "wagering dice." A wagered die does not get rolled with your other dice. If you beat the risk, each wagered die adds to the Effect of your success. Each die adds one Effect.

If you make a wager, you get bonus effect. Bonus effect usually leads to more Honor Points, but it can also be used to take narrative control of a scene and provide additional details.

Yes, this means the players tell the Narrator what's happening in the scene. Wagers give everyone the opportunity to be the Narrator, to be in charge, to add to the collective narrative.

WAGERS EXAMPLE

Let's expand on the example above: my character, Obu Tsubaki, is investigating the murder of his Daimyo's favorite concubine.

I still have a 4 Cunning and the "Investigator's Wits" Aspect giving me seven dice to roll. Because I really only need four dice to make ten, I set aside three of my seven dice to make three wagers.

I make my roll: 6, 4, 4, 1. I easily beat a ten. That gives me privilege.

Because I have privilege, I say, "I find a dab of poison on her lips."

My three wagers allow me to say three more things Tsubaki finds. I tell them to the Narrator.

First wager: "I also find a similar dab of poison in some rice spilled on the floor."

Second wager: "The lock to the window is in perfect condition."

Third wager: "But the window is open."

ANOTHER WAGERS EXAMPLE

I want to know more about the Daimyo's concubine. I ask the Narrator what I know about her. He says, "You tell me. Make a Wisdom risk."

I have a 3 Wisdom. That gives me three dice.

I also have the Aspect, "Courtier," which means I know about the ins and outs of the court. The Narrator agrees this is an appropriate Aspect, but I can only use it to learn things I would know from being a courtier.

I have six dice. I make two wagers.

My roll: 4, 3, 3, 2. I make ten and get my intent.

The first thing I know (because I get my intent) is that she was stolen booty from another province that my Daimyo conquered.

My first wager: "And she was the rival Daimyo's second daughter."

Second wager: "And she was never happy here."

The Wager Golden Rules

You cannot use a wager to contradict a previously established element of the scene. You cannot use a wager to say, "No." You can only use wagers to say "Yes, and..." or "Yes, but..." You cannot simply negate another person's wager. Wagers are used to add elements to a scene or to define undefined elements of a scene. You'll see how they work in the samples below.

You cannot use a wager to get a free risk. Any action that would require a risk cannot be accomplished with a wager. That requires an additional risk.

Free Wagers

Every once in a while, you will receive a free wager. This is a wager the Narrator gives you because of circumstance, a mechanical bonus or some other reason.

Free wagers are just that: they are free. They don't come from your die pool. You can't add them back into your die pool, either. Also, if you roll 9 or less, you lose all wagers, even the free ones.

Contested Risks

A contested risk occurs when two characters want the same thing—even if they are working together. Both players roll simultaneously and the player who rolls higher is the victor. The player who rolls lower is the defeated.

Step 1: Declaring Dice

Both players announce how many dice they can roll for the risk.

Step 2: Hidden Wagers

Each player then secretly makes wagers and reveals their wagers at the same time.

Step 3: Determine Privilege

The players roll. The player who rolls highest is the victor and has privilege. Any and all other players involved in the risk are the defeated and do not have privilege.

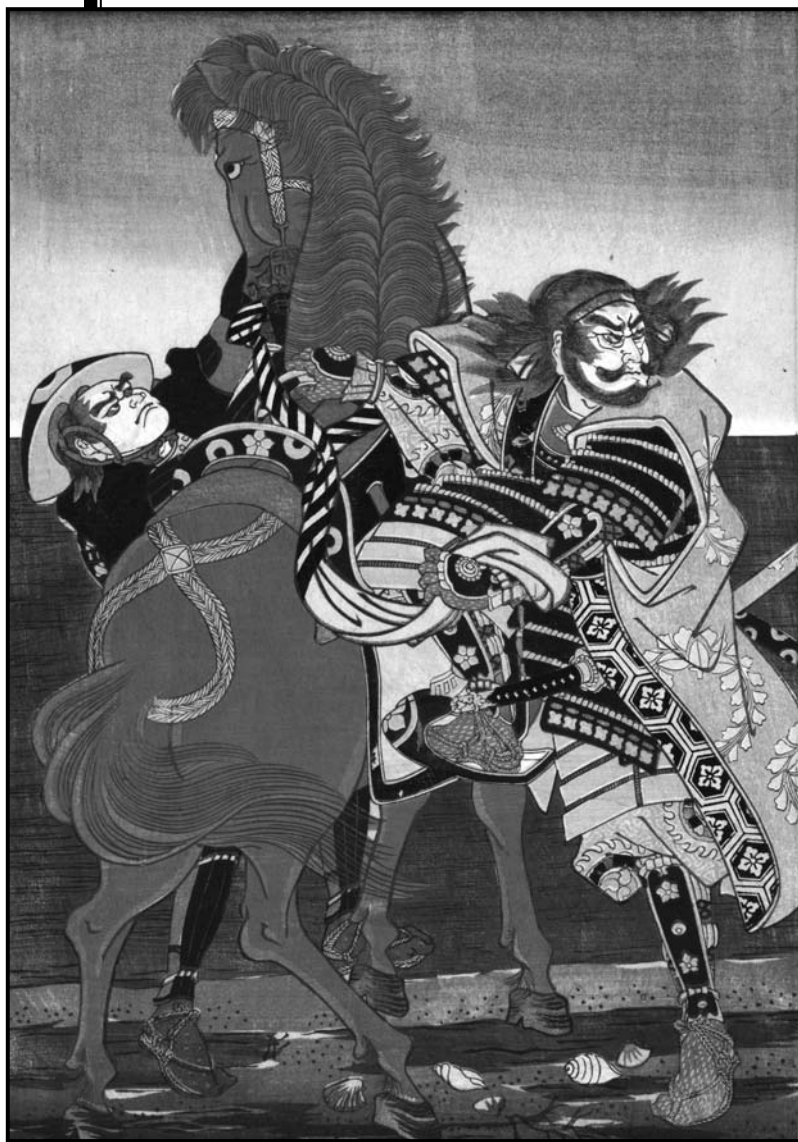
The Victor & Defeated

The victor has privilege and may describe the outcome of the risk.

The victor also gets to keep all his wagers.

The victor also gets to say who spends his wager first (himself or another player).

The defeated does not have privilege.



The defeated also only keeps half his wagers, rounded up (minimum of one).

Spending Wagers

The victor decides who spends their first wager (he can include himself). Then, spending wagers goes around the table clockwise until everyone has spent a wager.

If you like, you can choose to pass when it comes your turn to use a wager. This allows you to hear more of what's going on but also

loses you the opportunity to spend your wager first and set precedent. Remember: wagers cannot say “No.” A wager can only say “Yes, and...” or “Yes, but...” or some other positive modifier.

Less Than 10

If any player in a contested risk rolls less than ten, he gets nothing. He gets no wagers, no privilege, no nothing. Don't throw all your dice away on wagers expecting to keep half of them even if you lose. If you don't roll at least a ten, you get nothing.

Example Contested Risk

My character, Obu Tsubaki, is questioning another character about his whereabouts during the murder of the concubine. After intense questioning (roleplaying), I want to know if the character, Tonuba Asukai, is telling the truth. Asukai wants me to believe him. This calls for a contested risk.

For Tsubaki, I have to roll Cunning (determining truth from lies) plus my Investigator Aspect. That gives me seven dice.

Asukai has to make a Beauty risk (communicating, be it truth or lies). Asukai's Beauty is three. He also has the Aspect, “Honest Eyes,” giving him three more dice. That gives him a total of six dice.

I tell Asukai's player I have seven dice and Asukai's player tells me he has six dice.

We both make our wagers in secret. We put our hands under the table and put our wagers in our right hand and our dice in our left hand (whichever you prefer). At the same time, we reveal our wagers and put them on the table. I made three wagers and Asukai's player made only one.

Now, it's time to roll. Whoever rolls higher gets privilege.

My roll: $4+3+2+1=10$. A typical John roll.

His roll: $5+4+4+3+2=18$. Asukai's player is the victor and I am the defeated.

Asukai's player gets to determine the outcome of our risk. He also keeps all of his wagers. In this case, he made only one wager.

Because I am defeated, I only keep half my wagers, rounded up. Since I made three wagers, I get to keep two of them. (3 divided by $2 = 1.5$. Rounded up, that's 2 .)

Asukai's player says, “You believe me.” Then, he declares that he can spend his first wager. He does: “And, you also suspect someone else.”

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Now, it is my turn to use a wager. I say, “Yes, but there is a hole in your story I have not noticed yet.”

Asukai’s player has no more wagers, so I get to spend my last one. I consider carefully how to do so...

Cooperative Risks

If two or more samurai are working toward the same goal, they can make a cooperative risk. This kind of risk allows everyone to assist (and add details) in some way.

Step 1: Gather Dice

All players announce how they are gathering dice and then announce how many dice they have.



Step 2: Announce Wagers

All players then announce how many wagers they are going to make.

Step 3: Privilege

Everyone rolls. Every player who rolls ten or higher gains privilege. That is, every player who rolls ten or higher gets to say one thing true about the outcome of the risk.

The player who rolled highest keeps all his wagers. Players who do not roll highest only keep half their wagers, rounded up.

The player who rolled highest gets the first opportunity to say what happened at the end of the risk. He then chooses which player goes next.

Each player who rolled ten or higher can add a detail to the outcome, adding additional details with each wager.

Cooperative Risk Example

Two samurai—Soteki and Kenshin—are trying to lift a heavy gate separating them from their Daimyo.

Both gather dice. Soteki has a 3 Strength and Kenshin has a 4 Strength.

Because they have the None of Us... Aspect, they each gain three more dice. Soteki has six and Kenshin has seven.

Kenshin decides to spend an Honor Point from the pool giving him four more dice. Now, Kenshin has eleven dice and Soteki still has six.

Both players announce their wagers. They could hide their wagers, but they feel it is appropriate to show them. Kenshin's player will make five wagers and Soteki's player makes two. That means Kenshin's player rolls six dice and Soteki's rolls four.

Kenshin's player rolls 5, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2. Soteki's player rolls 6, 6, 4, 4. Kenshin rolled a nineteen and Soteki rolled a twenty. That means that even though Soteki rolled less dice, he still gains privilege: he can say whether or not the two samurai lift the gate successfully or if they fail. He also determines who spends their first wager. Because he does not gain privilege, Kenshin's player only keeps half his wagers, rounded up.

Soteki says, "We successfully lift the gate..." and he spends the first wager: "but my Strength gave out at the last minute, leaving Kenshin to lift the gate alone."

As a Narrator, I add an Honor Point to the pool. Humility (and making another player's character look cool) is a good source of Honor Points.

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Aspects

Aspects are defining traits. People have Aspects, places have Aspects, and even things can have Aspects. For those familiar with roleplaying game tropes, an Aspect is like a “skill” or an “ability,” but it’s a bit more three dimensional.

Aspects represent the qualities of a person, place or thing. For example, if you have the Aspect One of Us is not as Great as All of Us, it reflects a particular quality about your character. He recognizes the strength of unity of purpose. Many hands can accomplish more than two. Other Aspects reflect different qualities. If a samurai has the If One Man Praises You Aspect, he knows how to draw attention to himself in almost any situation.

Aspects reflect not only knowledge, but skill as well. They are broad-based abilities that are open to a little interpretation. Now, you can’t go around with an Aspect like, I’m Awesome! That’s just silly. Aspects should be open for players to use, but an Aspect shouldn’t be useful in any situation.

Invoke & Compel

Every Aspect has two elements: an invoke and a compel. The owner of the Aspect uses the invoke but others can use the compel. (A player may compel his own Aspect as well. We’ll talk more about that later.)

You invoke Aspects when your character is about to take a risk. When you invoke an Aspect, your character gains three bonus dice for an appropriate risk. For example, if you want your samurai to know the right course of action during complicated issues of etiquette, he should have the Nail and Hammer Aspect. That Aspect gives you three bonus dice for any risks involving procedure and decorum.

Remember: invoking an Aspect gives you three bonus dice for appropriate risks. You may only invoke one Aspect per risk. You cannot invoke more than one. Also, you are the only person who can invoke your own Aspect. You can’t invoke it for someone else and someone else can’t invoke it for their own benefit, either.

Invokes are powerful tools that allow you to get narration rights at the end of a risk. But each Aspect has a compel as well.

泥棒さえ商売を覚えなければなりません。

Tags

You can give a temporary Aspect to another character, a place or even a thing. We call these “Tags.”

When you give another character a Tag, it works like an Aspect. For example, if someone drops a lantern in a room full of flammable material, you can give the room the “On Fire!” Tag. Or, if a Samurai belongs to a Clan with an Ambitious Daimyo, he has the “Ambitious” Tag.

If you have a Tag, it is an Aspect that you cannot invoke but others can. Tagging doesn’t cost anything; the character only needs to know the Tag exists. Invoking a Tag (or just “Tagging”) gets you two bonus dice. Not three, but two.

For example, my Samurai comes from a Clan with a Clever Daimyo. That gives me the “Non-Traditionalist” Tag. Another Samurai—if he knows my Clan—can use that Tag to gain two bonus dice against me in any situation when my being “non-traditionalist” would be an advantage to him.

Likewise, if the room has the “On Fire!” Tag, characters who find ways to take advantage of the fire can Tag that Aspect for two bonus dice.

Tags do not count toward the total number of Aspects that can be invoked during a risk. Usually, only one Aspect can be invoked during a risk. Because your character is using a Tag (or “Tagging” an Aspect), he isn’t actually invoking it. He’s tagging it. And that doesn’t count towards the total Aspects invoked in the risk.

Injuries as Tags

The most common Aspects a character may Tag are Injuries.

If you are facing another character in a physical risk (Prowess or Strength), you may tag any and all Injuries that character has for bonus dice. The number of bonus dice you gain is equal to the ranks of the Injuries.

For example, if a character has a rank 1 Injury, a rank 2 Injury and a rank 3 Injury, you may tag all three Injuries for a total of six bonus dice.

Whenever your character’s Injuries are tagged, your character gains one Honor to add to the Honor Pool.

Chapter 5

Honor and Glory

For a samurai, honor (yo) is everything. For you, as a player, honor will be the key to the game. Honor unlocks all the mechanics. It is the true engine of the game. Without honor, your samurai will be less than nothing.

But honor is a difficult concept. Samurai wrote long essays on honor; all exquisite arguments for what it actually means to be a samurai. What is the best life? What is the appropriate action? What exactly does honor mean?

Instead of trying to define honor in a categorical way, I rather enjoy the disagreement and discussion. That's why, in this game, honor is not an answer. Instead, it is a question. Your Clan believes it has the answer. And your samurai, for better or worse, will struggle with that answer in his own way.

What Does it Mean?

What does it mean to be honorable? Depending on the Virtue your Clan chose, it means different things. Listed below are six points of view regarding honor based on your Clan's chosen Virtue. You may agree or disagree with this answer, but if you do not conform to your Clan's definition of honor, you will lose. Every time. Remember: samurai tragedy is about conforming. Don't ever forget the lesson of the tall nail.

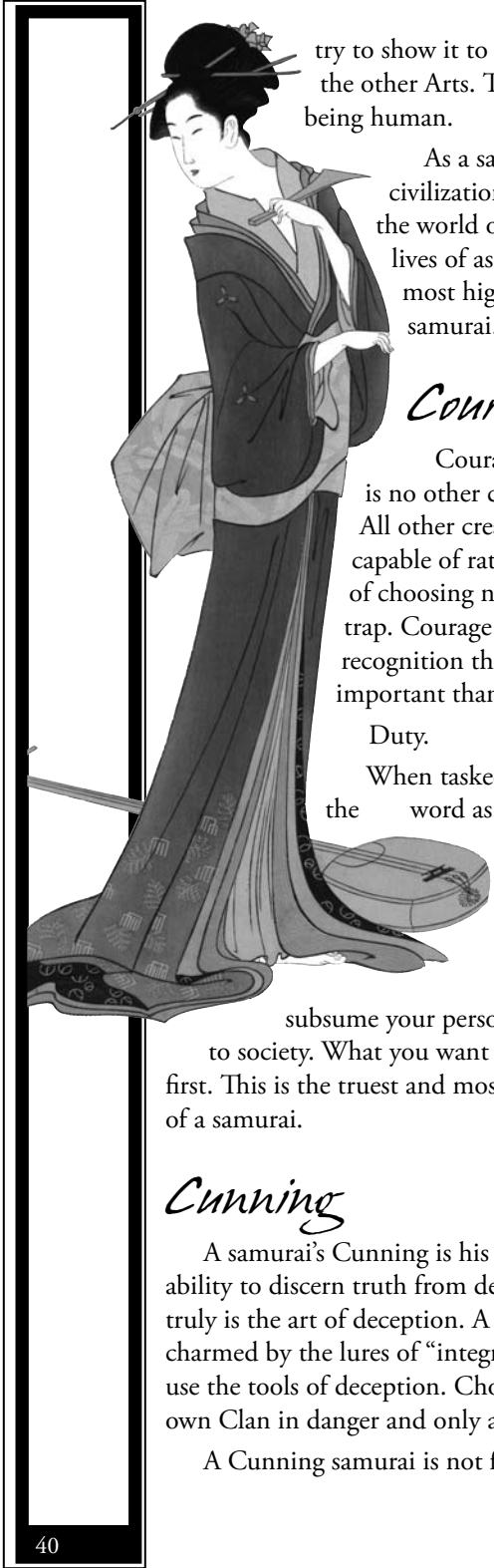
Beauty

A samurai's duty is maintaining civilization. Only through culture and art can mankind maintain his dignity. The rules of society provide us with two important benefits. The first is the law and the second is the exquisite.

Culture provides laws to help maintain balance and order. Every creature in the world has its place in the world and man is no different. We fulfill an obligation to the universe. We hold a place within it. We must fulfill that obligation. We must follow the structure and order of law. Justice is what mankind introduces into the world. Without men, there is no justice. It is our duty to maintain order in the world.

Culture also provides the exquisite. The sublime. Art communicates powerful truths that cannot be stated by words alone. The recreation of experience. I cannot tell you true beauty, I can only

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try to show it to you through poetry and painting and the other Arts. This is a vital and necessary part of being human.

As a samurai, it is your duty to maintain civilization and help it grow. Make it better. Rid the world of injustice and bring beauty into the lives of as many as possible. This is the truest and most high virtue of bushido. The true duty of a samurai.

Courage

Courage is the ability to say “No.” There is no other creature in the world that can do so. All other creatures act on instinct. Man alone is capable of rational thought. Man alone is capable of choosing not to rip off his leg to escape the trap. Courage is more than just willpower. It is the recognition that some things in this world are more important than yourself.

Duty.

When tasked with a charge, many samurai say the word as if it were like any other. That word is not like any other. It is the only word a samurai needs. It is the recognition that your life means nothing if it is not serving a higher purpose.

As a samurai, it is your duty to subsume your personal desires and accept your obligations to society. What you want is irrelevant. The Clan always comes first. This is the truest and most high virtue of bushido. The true duty of a samurai.

Cunning

A samurai’s Cunning is his most crucial weapon. Without the ability to discern truth from deception, a samurai is useless. Warfare truly is the art of deception. A true samurai knows this. He is not charmed by the lures of “integrity” or “honesty.” The Clan’s enemies use the tools of deception. Choosing not to use them only puts our own Clan in danger and only a fool would do that.

A Cunning samurai is not fool. He buries fools.

We will use distraction and deception. We will make our opponent think we are weak when we are truly strong. We will make our opponent think we are helpless when we are ready to attack. When we are caught off-guard, we will use tricks to keep him from taking advantage of our weakness. Only through these methods will we serve our Daimyo and our Clan.

As a samurai, it is your duty to use deception to protect the Daimyo from plots and machinations. Our enemies use the same tools. We will use them with even deadlier force. This is the truest and most high virtue of bushido. The true duty of a samurai.

Prowess

A samurai is a warrior. His duty is to defend his Daimyo against the dangers of the world even if that means his own life. If a samurai does not understand the arts of warfare and the sword then all other skills are meaningless.

A wise man needs only a moment in this world to understand that this is a world of violence and struggle. If we do not know the ways to master it, the world will eat us alive. We must study advantage. We must study strife. We must study violence. This is the true language of the world. To live in the world without mastering it is to live in the world like a blind man without full understanding of what is around us.

The sword is the way of truth. The sword is the way of peace. The sword is the way of war. Those who do not master the sword think words can protect them. Those who do not master the sword think books can protect them. Those who do not master the sword think illusion can protect them.

What is more real than the sword? Nothing.

As a samurai, it is your duty to use the sword to protect the Daimyo from the reality of the world. Our enemies use tools—tools of weak men—to take from us what we have rightfully earned. Earned with blood. This is the truest and most high virtue of bushido. The true duty of a samurai.

Strength

A man who cannot lift his own weight... what can I do with that?

A man who cannot swim. A man who cannot jump. A man who cannot climb. A man who cannot master his own body. A man who cannot master his own flesh. A man with no discipline.

A man with no strength. This man is useless to me.

Your body is your most precious weapon. Without it, you are a weapon that can only be used by my enemy.

Train your body. Give it strength. A courageous man who is weak wastes his courage. A cunning man who is weak wastes his cunning. All other virtues are wasted if a man cannot master his own body. This is the truest and most high virtue of bushido. The true duty of a samurai.

Wisdom

If a man is ignorant, what good is he?

Let me ask that again. If a man is ignorant, what use are his other virtues?

If a man cannot think for himself, if he knows nothing of the world around him, if he acts without true understanding of his actions... he is nothing more than a wild animal who bites and claws without thought, without intention, without meaning.

It is only the meaning of a man's actions that matter. The truth of his actions. The intent of his actions. Otherwise, he is like a storm: a raging and violent whirlwind. Destructive but without purpose.



It is knowing the meaning of our actions that gives them purpose. Without that, we are nothing. Therefore, a man must study. He must study history to know what came before and he must study philosophy to know what the profundity of his deeds.

As a samurai, it is your duty to use your knowledge to bring glory to the Daimyo's name. Our enemies will use the past against us. They will use knowledge against us. Without this most potent weapon, we will be naked and helpless against them. This is the truest and most high virtue of bushido. The true duty of a samurai.

The Honor Pool

In the center of your gaming table, place a bowl. This is the Honor Pool. You can use whatever tokens you like to represent Honor Points. At the beginning of the game, fill the Honor Pool with a number of Honor Points equal to the total Honor Rank of all the samurai present.

Before you make a risk, you may draw an Honor Point from the pool. A player may only draw one Honor Point at a time; a single player cannot draw two or more Honor Points for a single roll, for example. Give the Honor Point to the Narrator. You have spent an Honor Point from the Pool.

You can spend Honor Points in two ways: for bonus dice and adding details to the story.

Bonus Dice

When you spend an Honor Point before a risk, add four dice to your pool. Once you have spent an Honor Point, it is gone for the remainder of the adventure.

Because almost all samurai start the game with 2 Honor, each samurai will add two Honor Points to the Pool.

Adding Details

During the game, a player may spend an Honor Point (withdrawing it from the Pool) to add details to the story as it



progresses. Think of these like free floating wagers. Just as a wager allows you to add details to a risk, Honor Points allow you to modify the story in the same way. You can add details to an NPC, a castle, the relationship with your family or anything else you like in the game.

Like wagers, plot points cannot be used to say “No.” If I use a wager to say the Daimyo is a drunken fool, you can’t use a plot point to say, “No, he’s not.” You can use a plot point to say, “He’s a drunken fool, but that’s only because his wife drives him to drink.” That intimates that if we get him away from his wife, he’ll drink less. That isn’t a “No,” it’s a “Yes, but...”

Adding Honor to the Pool

You can add Honor Points to the Pool by taking specific kinds of risks. See the list below for risk that allow for an Honor Point to be added to the Pool. Each of these qualifications are cumulative. That is, if you take a risk that fulfils one of the qualifications, that’s worth an Honor Point. But if you take a risk that fulfils more than just one qualification, it’s worth multiple Honor Points.

Again, my wording here is specific. It must be a risk. Simple actions are expected of samurai and are not worth Honor Points. Only risks are worth Honor Points.

There may be circumstances where an action qualifies for an Honor Point, but these should be momentous. They should be few and far between.

- Take a risk that directly furthers the Clan’s interests (and not yours).
- Take a risk that upholds the Clan’s dignity and honor.
- Take a risk that puts your samurai in danger while fulfilling another obligation. (Samurai are men of action and expected to live dangerous lives. Just being reckless is not Honorable.)
- Fulfill your Clan’s definition of bushido.

Losing Honor from the Pool

When a samurai takes an action that is disgraceful, insults the dignity of the Clan or otherwise shames himself, the Narrator takes three Honor Points from the pool.

As a Narrator, I should note for anyone playing in one of my games that I also take Honor from the Pool for player behavior. Quoting Monty Python, answering your cell phone, talking about last night’s episode of (insert current cool geek TV show here), or otherwise distracting from the game.

Bad form. Lose Honor.

Note that individuals do not lose Honor. I toyed with that idea for a little while—that each samurai had his own Honor Points and Ranks, etc.—but I quickly ditched it when I realized that Honor, like everything else in this game, is something shared by the players. You aren't important; the Clan is important. Therefore, by making Honor a community resource and then adding to it for honorable behavior and subtracting from it for dishonorable behavior added a different kind of flavor to the whole mechanic.

At the End of the Game

At the end of each game session, the Narrator should count up the total Honor Points in the pool. At the start of the next game session, the players begin with the same amount of Honor.

Glory

Glory indicates how well known and respected your samurai is. The higher your Glory, the more well-known you are. Like Honor, Glory comes in both Ranks and Points, but samurai do not spend Glory Points. Instead, they try to acquire Glory through noteworthy and auspicious deeds.

All samurai begin the game with a Glory rank of 1. Each Glory Rank has a word or phrase associated with that Glory Rank, indicating the general reputation you earned getting that rank of Glory.

Glory enters the game in many ways.

First, if you are about to undertake a risk and one or more of your Glory ranks is appropriate, you may add one die per Glory rank that is appropriate to the risk. In other words, if you have a Glory Rank: Great Swordsman and you are about to enter into a duel, you may add one die to your total. If you have more than one Glory Rank that's appropriate to a risk (three ranks of Glory: Great Swordsman, for example), you may gain one die for each rank that's appropriate.

Second, whenever you perform a risk, you may convert two wagers for one point of Glory. The greatness of your deed feeds the story of your life.

Third, you may earn Glory whenever you take an action that is noteworthy.

Finally, when you reach ten points of Glory, your Glory Rank increases by one, gaining you another Glory Rank and Reputation.

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Damaging Your Reputation

You may take actions that damage a Reputation you have earned. If you do, the Narrator may declare that your current Reputation is tainted and must be cleansed before it may be used again. You cannot call upon that Reputation for bonus dice until you have taken actions to repair it.

To repair a damaged Reputation, you must earn ten points of Glory in actions that are appropriate to your Reputation. For example, if you are challenged to a duel and decline, the Narrator may declare that your “Great Swordsman” Reputation has been damaged. To repair that Reputation, you must earn ten Glory from risks appropriate to “Great Swordsman.”



Violence

A samurai lives four feet from death. Four feet, of course, being the length of a katana. I've said this many times before, but it bears repeating.

When a sword maker tests a katana, a well-made katana, he tests it on a pile of bodies stacked stomach to back. The number of bodies the katana cuts through is the number put on the blade. "Four man blade." "Five man blade."

Now, imagine getting hit with one of these things. Then imagine asking, "How many hit points do I lose?"

This chapter talks about violence. I won't be using the kind of terms you hear in other roleplaying games. That's because most RPGs say that they're all about story, story, story. But then, someone draws a sword, and the game suddenly shifts from "story" to "authentic strategic simulation." The game breaks everything down into arbitrary dice rolls, pointless minutia and endless bookkeeping.

"Authentic strategic simulation" is not something you're going to find here. Instead, I present you with an alternative.

Usually, this kind of chapter is the longest in a roleplaying game. In this case, it is going to be the shortest.

There are three circumstances where thehat violence mechanics are necessary: a strike, a duel and mass murder. We'll discuss each in turn.

Strike

A strike is an immediate action. One samurai draws his sword and the other responds. This is not a formal, ritualistic action like a duel; this is a samurai immediately drawing his sword and his target responding as quickly as possible.

That's how violence begins. It starts fast. Almost no time to react.

That's how our fights begin here, too.

A fight scene begins when someone calls out, "Strike!" and points at another player. No initiative rolls. You call it out and it happens.

When an attacker announces a Strike, he gains two bonus dice. There is a slight advantage to surprise. Not much, but enough for two bonus dice.

If both samurai call out "Strike!" at the same time, neither gains bonus dice. There is no surprise, therefore, no advantage.

最も良い刀はさやに滞在しています。

EXAMPLE

As Ben and I find our characters in a heated debate, Ben's character says something to mine that my character doesn't quite like. So, he decides to cut Ben's character down.

I declare a "Strike!" The violence begins.

The first actions in a fight are between the attacker and the defender. No one else can assist. The action is too quick.

The two samurai draw swords and (most likely) one of them dies. After the first strike is over, other samurai can announce intentions to attack, but the first attack and defense are between the attacker and the defender and no one else.

Result

After a strike has been called, both opponents gather dice for a contested Prowess risk. You know the procedure. Each player announces their dice, then hides their wagers, then rolls.

The victor (the player who rolls highest) gains privilege and may determine the outcome of the strike. Does the attacker or the defender successfully strike? Do they both miss? The victor determines the outcome, whatever it may be.

If you've been struck by a katana, you die. In this case, the victor may be the defender and the defeated may be the attacker. Yes, that means you can draw your sword on a better opponent and get yourself killed. It happens all the time in samurai tragedy and I don't see why it shouldn't happen here.

EXAMPLE

Ben and I both gather dice.

Ben has eight dice while I have six. We both make wagers secretly, then reveal our wagers and roll. Ben made three wagers while I made two.

Ben's roll: 5, 5, 2, 2, 1 = 15

My roll: 6, 4, 3, 1 = 14



Ben gets privilege so he can narrate the outcome of the duel. He could say that I win the duel. He could say that he wins the duel. He could say that we both strike each other at the same time. It's up to him to determine how the duel goes.

Other Weapons

If you get struck with any weapon other than a katana, you take a rank 1 Injury. Your opponent may use wagers to increase the rank of the Injury, but only a number of wagers equal to his Prowess.

Using Wagers

If you have a dead opponent and wagers left over, you may convert your wagers into Glory. Two wagers make one Glory Point that you can add to your Reputation. You may do this even if your samurai is dead.

Using Honor

If your samurai is killed, you may pull one Honor from the Honor Pool to reduce your death to a rank 5 Injury.

Duel

A duel is a formalized, ritualistic contest involving two samurai.

The two samurai stand apart, hands on swords. They stare for a long moment. Then, in a brief flash of violence, swords slice flesh. It is a dramatic, immediate event that happens all the time in samurai literature. Here's how you handle it in the game.

Step 1: Challenge

Both duelists gather and announce dice.

Let us call them the First Player and the Second Player. The First Player has more dice than the Second Player.

Historical Accuracy

If you didn't read the introduction, go back and do that now. If you skipped it, here it is again.

If you want to know the rules for armor and why a *no-dachi* doesn't do more damage than a katana or why a *wakizashi* doesn't do less, I have an answer for you.

This isn't a game about historical accuracy or creating authentic combat simulations. There are plenty of other games doing that just fine. Go play those. This is a game about recreating samurai tragedy. Too many roleplaying games claim they are about storytelling, but then, as soon as the swords come out, the game stops and it suddenly becomes an exercise in futility as players are forced to keep track of every detail that happens every second.

I'm not doing that here.

Step 2: Focus

The First Player acts first in this stage.

The First Player sets aside any number of wagers.

The Second Player must then set aside an equal number of wagers.

Step 3: Strike

Then, both players roll. Whoever rolls highest gains privilege. If a duelist cannot beat 10, he gains nothing and loses all of his wagers.

The duelist with privilege may narrate the outcome of the duel (including “My opponent dies,” or “I die.”)

Step 4: Glory

In a duel, you gain Glory based on your opponent’s wagers. Each wager set aside by your opponent is worth one Glory. Both duelists gain a new Reputation based on the duel. Pick a colorful name for the duel. “The Duel at the Rocks” or “The Duel on the Crossroads” or something clever like that. The duel gives each duelist a new Reputation.

There is no Glory in defeating an opponent when the match is so obviously one-sided. Thus, if you can cancel all your opponent’s dice with just spending wagers, you gain no Glory for that duel.

EXAMPLE

I have ten dice and my opponent has four. I could easily bid four dice as my wagers. My opponent would have to bid an equal number of dice as wagers, thus removing any dice from his pool. If I fight this man in a duel, I gain no Glory.

On the other hand, if I only bid enough wagers so he can make privilege (with wagers), the duel can gain both of us Glory. In this case, I bid only one wager. Remember, I have ten dice and my opponent has only four. I’m still rolling nine dice and my opponent now has an opportunity to make privilege with one wager, making the total Glory for our duel a possible 2 Glory.

That’s not much, but you shouldn’t expect much. I’m a far better swordsman and accepting a duel with a samurai of such lesser skill is a sign of respect from me.

Honoring Your Opponent

If you have ten dice and I have six, you can use six of your dice for wagers forcing me completely out of the duel. I have no chance to win. None at all.

But all of my wagers count for nothing toward your Glory. Because I can't roll dice (you've wagered all of my dice away), I can't beat ten and that means all my wagers are thrown away. You get no Glory for defeating me.

If you want a duel with more Glory, you'll have to allow your opponent an opportunity to keep some of his wagers. Otherwise, I'm the only one who gains Glory from the duel. You get nothing because you gave nothing.

This raises an important point. In many duels, the samurai strike and both agree, "It was a tie." There is an implicit understanding that one man was the better, but both agree the duel was a tie.

If you fight another samurai (with non-lethal weapons) and you gain privilege, what is the best way to ensure that both of you gain Glory?

You both won. It was a tie.

Two samurai (you and I) face off in a duel. One of us rolls better than the other. We both know who won. But the winner smiles and says, "A tie." And we both walk away with Glory.

That's how most duels should work. Of course, when it comes down to murdering your opponent, that's a different story.

The Yowamushi Rule

Yowamushi are any non-samurai characters or any unnamed samurai. Any samurai can kill any *yowamushi* with just announcing his death.

"I kill him."

That's all it takes.



If there's more than one *yowamushi*, a samurai can kill a number of them equal to his Prowess.

Keen observers will note that if you took Prowess as a weakness, you cannot employ this rule.

Firearms

Only a samurai may carry weapons. Remember this.

Firearms change Old Japan. Introducing them into your campaign will change it forever. Here is why.

If a bullet from a firearm strikes any character, he dies. No dodge, no parry, nothing. Just death. No negotiating the Injury down with Honor. No protection from armor. If a bullet from a firearm strikes any character, he dies.

Only a samurai may carry weapons. A peasant can carry a firearm. Remember this.

Mass Murder

So, what happens when three or more samurai want to get involved in a fight? You've got a Mass Murder on your hands.

(These rules come from Houses of the Blooded, but they've been slightly modified to better fit the samurai genre.)

After a Strike occurs, if other samurai want to be involved in the violence, the Narrator invokes the Mass Murder rules.

Step 1: Gather Dice

All players who want to be involved gather dice as if they were preparing for a Strike: Prowess + Aspect + Giri (if appropriate) + other bonuses. All players announce how many dice they have.

If Mass Murder directly follows a strike, the winner of the Strike gains two bonus dice for the Mass Murder.

If a samurai has the Quick Advantage, he may use it during this Step.

Step 2: Declare Strikes

On the count of 3, each player points at who they want to Strike. If a player wants to Strike an NPC, he points at the Narrator.

Step 3: Strike

Everyone sets aside wagers (secretly) and rolls. The player who rolls highest has initiative and privilege. He may declare his Strikes first. **No player loses any wagers for not gaining privilege in Mass Murder. All players keep all wagers made.**

In the event of a tie, Strikes occur simultaneously.

The Striking samurai rolls a contested Prowess risk against his target. The winner gets privilege.

During Mass Murder, a samurai may strike one opponent. Then, the player who rolled the next highest number may declare a Strike. This continues until all samurai involved have made a strike.

Then, go back to the first player. He may make an additional strike. Each wager he made allows him to strike an additional opponent. This continues with each samurai making an additional strike, in turn, until all additional strikes are exhausted.

After all Strikes are exhausted, if samurai wish to continue Mass Murder, repeat the process.

A Note About Mass Murder

Those familiar with Houses of the Blooded will know that Mass Murder is deadly. I designed it that way. Game mechanics should influence player behavior. I wanted players to avoid large combat scenes, so I designed Mass Murder to do just that.

Still, every once in a while, it happens. My second consideration was making it fast. I didn't want the game bogging down in minutia. Fights in samurai films are lightning quick and lots of folks die (usually under a single samurai's blade). So, this system reflects that.

You've been warned. Do what Musashi and Sun Tzu suggest. Don't get involved in a duel you don't know you can win.

Ashigaru and Guardsmen

The General and the Yojimbo both have vassals at their command who can be used during Violence Scenes. The Ashigaru and Guardsmen provide similar duties but each also has a unique ability only they can perform.

The Ashigaru and Guardsmen's effectiveness is directly related to their master's Giri Rank. The higher the Giri Rank, the more effective they are. Each Giri Rank adds a rank on to the vassals. In other words, if the General is rank 2, he commands two ranks of Ashigaru.

Likewise, if the Yojimbo is rank 3, he has three ranks of Guardsmen with him.

Both the Ashigaru and Guardsmen can take Injuries for their commanders. If the General or Yojimbo ever suffer an Injury, the Ashigaru or Guardsmen can take the hit instead saving their commander. The Ashigaru and Guardsmen may do this a number of times equal to their rank. Doing so diminishes their rank, however, leaving the General and Yojimbo with fewer men to command. A group of rank 3 Ashigaru who take an Injury for their master become rank 2 Ashigaru. When they lose all their ranks, their masters have no more men to command. Both Ashigaru and Guardsmen become refreshed at the end of the Season.

Also, both the Ashigaru and Guardsmen count as a samurai during Mass Murder. They roll a number of dice equal to their commander's Prowess plus their rank.

The Ashigaru's special ability gives them bonuses during *War*. You can read about their bonuses in that chapter.

The Guardsmen, however, may extend their ability to any other samurai under their Daimyo's command. In other words, they are not limited to only protecting the Yojimbo. The Yojimbo can command which samurai they protect during Mass Murder.

The Ashigaru and Guardsmen cannot use their abilities during a duel.

The Guardsmen cannot provide bonuses dice during War. They can protect their charge (the Yojimbo and his fellows) by taking Injuries, but they provide no bonus dice.

Magic & Religion

Magic in *Blood & Honor* is not quite like the magic in most roleplaying games. Despite the overwhelming temptation to try fitting Buddhism and Shintoism into a codified set of rules, I chose a different path. Japanese magic—like the magic of most cultures—is a mess of exceptions rather than rules. In folk tales and legends, what magic can and cannot do fits the story’s needs.

Also, this is a game about samurai. Samurai feared magic and those who used it. It was not something they could control. The power of the stars and the planets, the earth beneath them, the power of the spirits around them, the power of the gods and heavens... all of these things were beyond the reach of samurai. Beyond the reach of most mortals, in fact. A mystic in samurai literature was a plot device to (again) fulfill the needs of the story, not an active agent. The samurai consulted seers and oracles, but these seers and oracles were not the protagonists.

In most roleplaying games, magic becomes a kind of Swiss Army knife, capable of doing anything at any time. Or, it is an artillery device used to take out boss units on the other side of the board. Such magic does not fit in an authentic game about samurai.

The immortal and inscrutable power of the universe is what we’re talking about here and mortal men do not tinker with the immortal and inscrutable power of the universe.

For those reasons (among others), I have resisted the urge to make “magic rules” and a “magic-user class.”

Instead, this chapter talks about the various forms of Japanese mysticism, magic and sorcery and how to use those in your own campaign.



Syncretism

Syncretism is the attempt to reconcile disparate or contrary beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. In other words, in Old Japan, the two prevailing religions—Shinto and Buddhism—are practiced with equal respect and reverence. Even though the two of them are completely different—even with different creation myths—the Japanese don’t seem to have a problem with reconciling the two of them.

Shinto

Shinto is the practice of revering animistic spirits. It is a highly ritualized religion, but at this period of time, it is also highly disorganized. The arrival and popularity of other religions (such as Buddhism) forced Shinto priests to get their acts together. Shinto has no popes or bishops or any other formal hierarchal structure. A local priest serving a small fishing village has just as much authority as a priest who advises the Emperor.

Where are the Shugenja?

When designing the *Legend of the Five Rings* collectible card game, it became obvious that the complexities of Japanese magic were too... well, complex for a CCG. We thought about the problem and arrived at a simple compromise. We'd create a social caste within Rokugan that covered every kind of mysticism. Yes, that meant we'd have to simplify things a lot, but I felt we could get away with it without sacrificing authenticity. We'd combine the Shinto priest and Buddhist monk and onmyōji into a single role. The problem became finding a name for this class of person. After much searching, I eventually adopted the same term as the Bushido RPG: "shugenja." It wasn't historically accurate, but it was a word already familiar to most gamers, so we went with it.

In *Blood & Honor*, a shugenja would probably find himself most closely associated with an onmyōji. His duties as "mystical advisor" fit almost perfectly with the role shugenja play in Rokugan (and is more culturally correct).

Kami

Shinto priests communicate with the spirits of Japan called kami. Now, exactly what a kami actually is presents a difficulty. Kami are natural spirits, ancestor spirits, guardian angels and just about any other kind of invisible force you can imagine. Every river, every tree, every storm, the sun, the sky, the earth... all of these things have an accompanying spirit. A kami. A Shinto priest's position in Japan is to communicate to the kami, keep them happy and make them happy again when they grow angry or dissatisfied. All trouble in Japan comes from dissatisfied kami. If the invisible world isn't happy, the visible world feels it.

Every kami has its own character. Like the gods of ancient peoples (the Greeks, the Norse, the Babylonians), the kami are seen as flawed characters with incredible power (and hair trigger tempers). If things are going wrong for a village, the village calls upon the priest (kannushi) to deal with the problem. He consults with the local kami, finds out what the problem is and goes about setting the problem right.

The standard fix for such problems is dancing and sacrifice, although in a heroic setting such as this, more dramatic actions may need to be taken to rectify the wrong.

Purity

Purity is an important aspect of Shinto. Actions can make a samurai “unclean” (kegare) requiring a ritual to cleanse his spirit. Two good examples of such actions are killing animals for food and actions which further one’s personal power (politically or otherwise). Both are seen as impure actions which require a cleansing ritual.

The samurai avoided eating meat and put the chore of slaughtering animals to the eta. In fact, the entire eta caste consisted of professions who, by the nature of their activities, would be considered unclean. Butchers, leather workers, undertakers and anyone required to touch dead flesh.

Also, any action that falls outside the prescribed etiquette or procedure could be considered kegare. Not only that, but impurity could be seen as a kind of contagion: if your neighbor is unclean, you are likewise tainted by his impurity. In this sense, the Great Social Hammer of feudal Japan comes calling to put down that infamous tall nail.

Shrines

Once stained, a samurai must go to a shrine to perform harai, the purity ritual. When entering, the samurai must approach the temple with reverence and respect. Often, a particular ritual must be performed. While the rituals vary from shrine to shrine, a typical version looks something like this:

The samurai bows respectfully before entering. He then performs temizu: washing his hands and mouth. Washing his left hand first, and then his right. He then rinses his mouth and feet. Then, he washes the ladle provided and replaces it. He then rings a bell and leaves a donation. Finally, he says his prayers and then bows again and claps (usually two bows and two claps).



Talismans

Shinto has many different kinds of talismans providing luck and good fortune and even protection. There are so many; too many to list here. But, I've provided a few as examples below.

Ema are small wooden amulets or trinkets with sacred and auspicious words or phrases written on them. Ema bring good luck to those who wear them. An ema must include the word gani ("wish") to perform properly.

Ofuda are talismans of wood or paper that provide protection to a household.

Omamori are personal protection amulets, usually made of cloth, worn to bring good luck. Omamori provide a specific kind of luck: good health, good fortune with fishing, protection for travelers, etc.

Omikuji are small random fortunes written on paper. The visitor to a shrine leaves a donation and may draw one from a box receiving the good fortune inscribed there.

Onmyōdō

Onmyōdō could be called "Japanese alchemy," although that isn't entirely correct. Like Western alchemy was the predecessor to science, Onmyōdō was the forerunner of many Japanese sciences. Under the ritsuryō system (a Confucius-inspired "duty system"), the Onmyōryō (Bureau of Divination) was required to know koyomi (calendrical studies), onmyō (Yin-Yang divination), and rōkoku (time keeping), and tenmon (astrology); all of which assisted the Daimyo and maintained his position.

One needs a permit from the Emperor to practice onmyōdō and doing so without one is a serious offence. Licensed practitioners were called onmyōji. Their duties include serving as a kind of occult adviser, maintaining the calendar, divination and protection from evil spirits.

Buddhism

"That which can be said about the Way is not the true Way."

So, here I go, trying to give an introduction to Buddhism. In a roleplaying game. Specifically, the very odd kind of Buddhism that developed in Old Japan: Zen Buddhism.

I once heard it said that teaching someone about Buddhism is a lot like teaching someone how to bake a cake. I can give you the ingredients list, go shopping with you, pick out everything we need, mix everything together, prepare the frosting together and even show

you how to pre-heat the oven. But once it comes out of the oven, there's no way I can prepare you for how the cake will taste.

That is Zen.

Zen emphasizes direct knowledge rather than philosophical or theoretical knowledge. One must do to know. After that, everything is up for grabs. Every teacher of zen will tell you that each student must go out into the world and experience the world to gain its deeper meanings. Do not be distracted by physical temptations and distractions. You must see beyond what the world is to learn what the world means and to learn your part in it.

And even by saying that much, I've distracted you from the true path.

Using Magic

Now, with all that in mind, how does one go about using "Japanese magic" in a roleplaying game?

Well, the whole Western concept of "spells" is right out the window. Instead, I have some suggestions for how to use all of this in a campaign without (pardon the pun) invoking a magic-using class of characters.

Wisdom Risks

Despite these suggestions, one thing remains true: magic is never truly in the players' hands. An onmyōji can use his Wisdom to say things are true about magic, but he is not a "magic user."

If the adventure includes a haunted forest, the samurai turn to the onmyōji. The player makes a Wisdom risk and says what is true about the forest. If a castle has fallen under a terrible curse, the player makes a Wisdom risk to say how the curse may be lifted.

Charms & Talismans

Most of what constitutes Japanese magic are good luck charms and tokens you see everywhere in the literature (and even on the streets of modern day Tokyo).

Sidebar: Controversy

One of these days I'm going to write a roleplaying game where I write the statement, "Christian/Jewish/Islamic characters can pray to their god if they like; whether or not he actually exists is another matter." It's perfectly all right to question the faiths of people who live on the other side of an ocean, but as soon as I put the God of the Book under scrutiny, suddenly, I'm all controversial and stuff.

Samurai can carry good luck charms if they like; whether or not they actually work is another matter.

Charms provide benefits to characters... some of the time. Every charm has a particular theme: good luck in love, good luck in battle, good luck in farming, etc. A charm may or may not provide a benefit.

Each Charm provides a free wager on a single category of risk. The Onmyōji may provide a number of charms to his fellow samurai equal to his rank. For example, a rank 3 Onmyōji may provide three charms to his fellow officers. Charms are only good for one adventure, and then, they must be replenished. A samurai may only carry a single Charm.

Predictions

At the beginning of each adventure, the Onmyōji may make a number of predictions equal to his rank. The predictions should have something to do with a risk the players may make during the game.

If the prediction comes true, the players involved get a number of bonus dice for a particular risk equal to the onmyōji's rank.

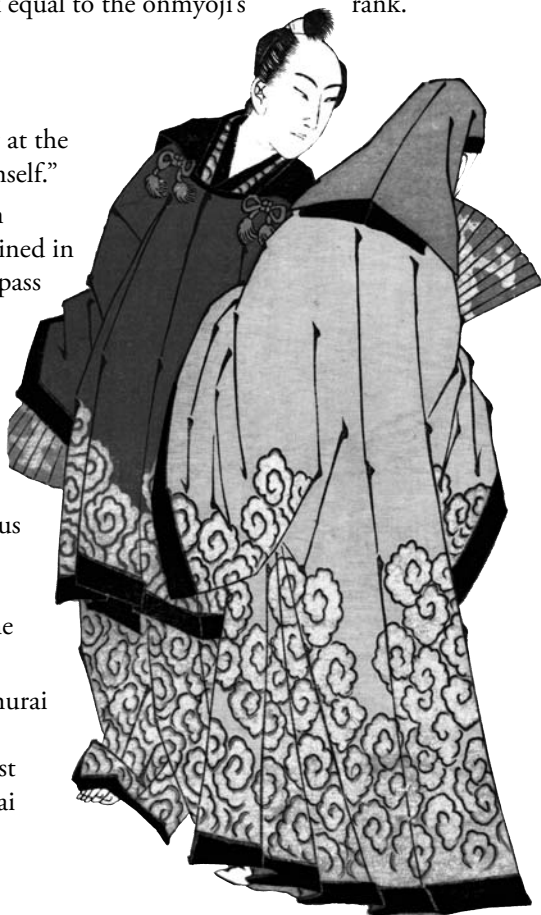
Zen Meditation

“The archer does not shoot at the target; the archer shoots at himself.”

The “magic” of Zen rests in Meditation. Those who are trained in the ways of Mediation may bypass the distractions of the world to reach the inner truth of its beauty.

When a samurai practices Mediation, he hopes to escape the trappings of the world to transcend to Luminous Truth. With that Truth in his heart, he can only do Justice. With that Truth in his heart, he can only make Balance.

A Zen monk can teach samurai the art of Mediation. With a Season Action—and a Buddhist Monestary Holding—a samurai may gain a Meditation Point.



Samurai may spend a Meditation Point before any roll. Doing so turns that roll into a ten. The samurai must roll at least one die, but the Meditation Point turns that single die into a ten. He must spend the Meditation Point before rolling and before declaring wagers.

Ancestors

Shinto Shrines provide an opportunity for samurai to commune with the spirits of their ancestors. Ancestors may give cryptic advice, provide ominous omens or bless the samurai in some other mysterious way.

You may revere your Ancestors at a Shinto Shrine (one of the many Holdings your province may have). If your Daimyo has a Shinto Shrine, your samurai may gain the benefit of Blessings from your Ancestors.

Your samurai gain a number of Blessings each Season equal to the rank of the Shinto Shrine in your Province. That is, if you have a rank 3 Shrine, your samurai must share three separate Blessings; each samurai does not receive three Blessings each.

A Province may have more than one Shrine, thus giving your samurai multiple Blessings.

Listed below are the many Blessings an Ancestor can give his devoted followers. When you pray to an Ancestor, he or she (in other words, the Narrator) will give you the Blessing they feel you need and/or deserve.

You may only use a Blessing once per Season.

I HAVE NO PARENTS...

“... I make the Heavens and the Earth my parents.”

Invoke this Blessing to ignore one Honor loss.

I HAVE NO HOME...

“... I make the Tan T’ien my Home.”

When another samurai compels one of your Aspects, you may invoke this Blessing and ignore that compel.

I HAVE NO DIVINE POWER...

“... I make Honesty my Divine Power.”

Miko

A miko is a “shrine woman” who can commune with the spirits of the dead. (A great—and chilling—example of one such woman can be found in the Kurasawa film, *Rashomon*.)

A miko may fall into a trance and allow the spirits of the dead to possess her body allowing others to communicate with ancestors. Whether or not the miko can actually perform this miracle—or they are just charlatans taking advantage of a superstitious populace—is up to the Narrator and players.

Invoke this Blessing when making a confession or revealing statement. All in attendance believe your sincerity.

I HAVE NO MEANS...

“... I make Docility my Means.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Wisdom risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

I HAVE NO MAGIC POWER...

“... I make Personality my Magic Power.”

Invoke this Blessing after being the target of any magical effect. Cancel that magical effect.

I HAVE NEITHER LIFE NOR DEATH...

“... I make *A Um* my Life and Death.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Courage risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

I HAVE NO BODY...

“... I make Stoicism my Body.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Strength risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

I HAVE NO EYES...

“... I make The Flash of Lightning my Eyes.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Cunning risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

I HAVE NO EARS...

“... I make Sensibility my Ears.”

Invoke this Blessing after another character has spoken to you. You know whether or not that character is lying or telling the truth.

I HAVE NO LIMBS...

“... I make Promptitude my Limbs.”

Invoke this Blessing after another samurai has declared surprise upon you. You may cancel the effects of surprise.

I HAVE NO LAWS...

“... I make Self-Protection my Laws.”

Invoke this Blessing if you lose a risk. You may either spend your wager first or make your opponent spend his.

I HAVE NO STRATEGY...

“... I make the Right to Kill and the Right to Restore Life my Strategy.”

Invoke this Blessing while meditating on a target (samurai or an object). On your next risk against that target, you know exactly where its weakness lies. Even the weakness of an argument. You gain free wagers equal to your Wisdom on your next risk against that target. You can reveal this weakness to another, but the person you are communicating to does not gain complete understanding. Another samurai can only gain half the your Wisdom in wagers.

I HAVE NO DESIGNS...

“... I make Seizing the Opportunity by the Forelock my Designs.”

When it comes time to make wagers in any contested risk, invoke this Blessing. You may look at your opponent's wagers before you make your own. Your opponent may not change his wagers after you've looked at them. You do not have to show your own wagers. You also cannot reveal your opponent's wagers to other samurai.

I HAVE NO MIRACLES...

“... I make Righteous Laws my Miracle.”

Invoke this Blessing after dice have been rolled in a risk but before privilege has been declared. You may spend your wager before anyone else.

I HAVE NO PRINCIPLES...

“... I make Adaptability to All Circumstances my Principle.”

Invoke this Blessing before making a risk. You may replace your highest Virtue with your lowest Virtue. You may not replace your Weakness.

I HAVE NO TACTICS...

“... I make Emptiness and Fullness my Tactics.”

Invoke this Blessing after privilege is determined but before any wagers are spent. You may spend two wagers in a row (rather than just one at a time). You may only do this once during this risk.

I HAVE NO TALENT...

“... I make Ready Wit my Talent.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Wisdom risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

I HAVE NO FRIENDS...

“... I make my Mind my Friend.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Wisdom risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

I HAVE NO ENEMY...

“... I make Incautiousness my Enemy.”

Invoke this Blessing and target a samurai. You must be able to name the samurai's Aspect. That samurai cannot use the invoke for that Aspect until next Season. The Aspect can still be compelled, but not invoked.

I HAVE NO ARMOR...

“... I make Benevolence my Armor.”

After taking an Injury, invoke this Blessing. You may reduce that Injury's rank by three.

I HAVE NO CASTLE...

“... I make Immovable Mind my Castle.”

Invoke this Blessing and pick one opponent during the Gather Dice phase of a contested Prowess risk before any wagers are made. Before you roll for your attack, you may deduct dice from your own pool to force your opponent to deduct dice from his pool, one for one.

I HAVE NO SWORD...

“... I make No Mind my Sword.”

Invoke this Blessing after you have rolled dice in a contested Prowess risk. Cancel your opponent's wagers in this risk. Success and failure of the risk is unaffected, but only you can keep your wagers.

Seasons

Time is an important element in *Blood & Honor*. It moves forward at a terrible pace. Never hesitating, never resting. The passage of time gives characters the chance to grow, to practice, to become more than what they are. Time also allows a Clan the opportunity to grow, to accumulate more land, to gain more honor and more glory.

This chapter focuses on the Seasons mechanic you will use to measure the passage of time in the campaign. As the seasons pass, both your characters and your Clan will grow and change. You can make long-term plans into motion and watch as they come to pass. You will spy on other Clans, build castles, hire vassals to protect your Daimyo, mine metals for weapons, grow crops and prepare exquisite items of fine art.

All of these things require time. More time than is allowed in a single adventure. Days, weeks and months of toil, labor blood and sweat go into a Season Action. Great effort for great deeds. To represent the long-term strategies and subtle maneuvers of a Season, we have this chapter.

The Passage of Time

When you first sit down to play *Blood & Honor*, with everybody around the table—character sheets, dice and refreshments ready—the Season has begun. In other words, the first adventure begins the first Season. We'll assume you'll be starting with Spring. Remember: you have ninety days before the end of the season. That leaves you with plenty of time to get a lot done.

Each Season, the Narrator prepares a number of stories (otherwise known as “adventures”). A story, of course, is a fictional tale with a beginning, middle, and an end that the characters take part in—for better or worse. The Narrator chapter has more information on building stories.

Characters cannot participate in more than 3 stories per Season. Upkeep of lands and other downtime actions demand attention. If the players take up too much time with stories, the Narrator may determine they cannot spend time handling other important activities.

Season Actions

At the end of each Season, the Daimyo prepares his Season Actions.

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A Daimyo has a number of Season Actions equal to the number of Provinces he controls. In other words, as a starting Daimyo, your Clan Lord controls one Province. This means your Daimyo has one Season Action. As he conquers additional Provinces, he gains additional Season Actions.

The Daimyo and his officers all have Season Actions they may perform. These represent long-term goals for the Clan.

Provinces

Every Daimyo owns his own Province. A Province is an ambiguous amount of land controlled by the Daimyo. Some Provinces are large while others are small. For this system, the actual size of the land is unimportant. The fact that your Daimyo owns land establishes his authority and power.

(I like abstract. Gives players room to be creative with their stuff. If you want to be more precise, there are a ton of other games with similar systems that deal with specifics. Use those.)

Every Province should also have a name. I'm not going to force you to name your Province, but if you don't, you'll look awfully silly when someone at a party asks you for your Province's name and you say, "Oh, uh, we haven't named it yet."

Holdings

Your Province has a number of Holdings that represent your Daimyo's accumulated wealth. Each Season, your Holdings provide either Resources or Actions (or, sometimes, both). Keep your Province's Holdings in mind as we go through the Season.

A Province may only have up to ten Holdings. Once you reach that total, you have to start looking for new lands.

The Season

Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. When you first sit down to play the game, you should start in the Spring Season. You'll play one or two adventures, then move on to the Summer Season. Then Autumn, then Winter, then back to Spring. Circles, circles, circles. Four Seasons constitute a Year and at the end of the Year, your character ages.

That's how the Seasons work. The slow and inevitable crawl of time.

Actions

Every Season, your Daimyo can take a number of "Season Actions." He can use his Season Actions for the following tasks.

1. **Provincial Improvement:** Make your Province a better place by building important structures
2. **Craft Items:** The Daimyo can direct the resources of the Province to create items of beauty
3. **Personal Training:** Make yourself a better samurai by adding further details to your character sheet
4. **Espionage:** Your Daimyo can spy on other Provinces in preparation for their inevitable defeat

Provincial Improvement

Your Daimyo may construct a Holding in his lands, providing his samurai the benefit of that Holding when it is complete.

Building a Holding requires a Season Action.

A Province may only have a total of ten Holdings.

A brand new Holding begins at rank 1: a modest structure. However, with further Season Actions, you can improve your Holdings, increasing their ranks.

A Holding may not have a rank greater than three.

Improving a Holding requires a Season Action.

BLACKSMITH

Men pull iron and other metals from the ground and blacksmiths forge them into deadly weapons. The quality of your Clan's weapons relies on the Blacksmith.

With a Blacksmith, your samurai are all equipped with normal quality katana and other weaponry (see *Equipment*, below). Each Season, your Blacksmith can take a Season Action to provide one of your samurai with a normal quality weapon. The rank of your Blacksmith equals the number of normal quality weapons and other equipment your samurai can make each Season.

For example, if you have a rank 1 Blacksmith, as a Season Action, he can provide one of your samurai with one katana.

A Blacksmith of higher rank can produce better quality equipment. Each rank allows him to increase the rank of your equipment by one level of quality.

For example, a rank 2 Blacksmith can make two normal quality katana or a single fine quality katana. A rank 3 Blacksmith can make three normal quality katana or one exquisite quality katana.

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

If your Daimyo supports a Buddhist Temple, your samurai gain a number of bonus Wisdom wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Buddhist Temple. The Temple only provides one, two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

Also, a Temple provides your samurai with Meditation Points (see *Magic & Religion*). It provides a number of Meditation Points equal to its rank.

Dojo

If your Daimyo supports a Dojo, your samurai gain a number of bonus Prowess wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Dojo. The College only provides one, two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

The Dojo provides another benefit: it provides a number of free Season Actions for the sole purpose of the Self Improvement Season Action. These Actions do not count toward the maximum number of Actions that may be spent for Self Improvement (see Self Improvement as a Season Action, below).

GAMBLING DEN

If your Daimyo supports a Gambling Den, your samurai gain a number of bonus Cunning wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Gambling Den. The Den only provides one, two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

Also, the Gambling Den provides additional koku per Season... and may produce more if you take a gamble. The Den provides one koku per rank of the Den. If the players want to gamble, they can earn two additional koku if they can roll a 5 or a 6 on a number of dice equal to the rank of the Den. If they do not roll a 5 or 6, they lose the koku they gambled.

GARRISON

A Garrison allows you to hold troops in your Province.

A Garrison allows a rank of Ashigaru for each rank of the Garrison. (See *War* for more information.)

GEISHA HOUSE

If your Daimyo supports a Geisha House, your samurai gain a number of bonus Beauty wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Geisha House. The Geisha House only provides one, two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

Also, the Geisha House provides your samurai with a number of rumors equal to its rank. A rumor is a Wisdom-based wager that allows the samurai to say things are true this Season. Like normal wagers, rumors cannot be used to contradict facts already established in the game. If a samurai wants to use a wager from the Geisha House to say the Daimyo of a rival Clan is secretly a drunk, or a coward or even dead (and being portrayed by his kagemusha), he may do so.

RICE FARM

Where the peasants toil to generate the real keystone of the economy. Rice Farms produce rice, which is essential to a samurai economy.

A Rice Farm produces two Koku per rank per Season.

SAKE WORKS

If your Daimyo supports a Sake Works, your samurai gain a number of bonus Courage wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Sake Works. The Sake Works only provides one,

two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

Also, the Sake Works provides an additional benefit. Providing Ashigaru with sake (see *Violence* for more information) increases their morale, making them more effective warriors. Using a Season of sake increases the rank of any Ashigaru Troop by one.

SHINTO SHRINE

If your Daimyo supports a Shinto Shrine, you gain a number of Blessings (see Religion & Magic) equal to the Shrine's rank. In other words, if you have a rank 2 Shrine, your samurai share two Blessings among themselves. A Province may have more than one Shrine, thus providing more Blessings for your samurai to share.

SILK FARM

Silk is the fabric of the nobility. In Old Japan, there are so many Silk Farm, samurai blow their noses with silk handkerchiefs and throw them away. Every Season, a Silk Farm produces enough Silk to clothe your Daimyo's Officers... and a little more.

If your Daimyo supports a Silk Farm, your samurai gain a number of bonus Beauty wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Silk Farm. The Farm only provides one, two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

Also, the Silk Farm provides a number of Gifts each Season equal to its rank. A Gift, when presented, adds a number of free wagers to any social risk equal to its own rank. A Silk Farm produces a number of Gift Ranks equal to its own rank, so a rank 3 Farm can make three rank 1 Gifts or one rank 3 Gift, as the Daimyo wishes.

STABLES

Where grooms breed and care for horses. Your Clan's horses have a rank equal to the rank of your Stables. Any horse-based risks gain a number of free wagers equal to the rank of your Stables.

SUMO SCHOOL

If your Daimyo supports a Sumo School, your samurai gain a number of bonus Strength wagers, per Season, equal to the rank of the Sumo School. The Sumo School only provides one, two or three wagers for all the samurai to use, so use them carefully.

The Sumo School provides for an additional benefit: the samurai may ignore any weapon Injury not caused by a katana. Your samurai may do this a number of times per Season equal to the rank of the Sumo School.

(Don't go jumping in front of cannons or perform other acts of stupidity, trying to abuse a rule's literal text, thus violating the spirit of the rule. Only a wanker would do that. Lose three Honor.)

Craft Items

Certain Holdings can produce Equipment. This represents your Province spending time, effort and resources to create weapons and art that further the goals of your Clan.

A Holding may make a number of Items equal to its rank. Thus, a rank 1 Holding may only make a single Equipment. All such Equipment are Good Quality; they provide a bonus to any samurai who uses them.

If a Holding has a rank greater than rank 1, it may produce



Equipment of greater Quality than Normal. For example, a rank 2 Holding can produce a rank 2 Equipment (Fine Quality) or it can produce two Items of Good Quality.

Remember: if your Province does not have certain Holdings (the Blacksmith, for example), all Equipment your Province provides are

only Normal. You must have specific Holdings to gain Equipment of Good, Fine or Exquisite Quality.

BENEFITS OF QUALITY

Each level of Quality above normal gives the person using the Equipment a bonus die for any appropriate risks. A fine kimono, for example, provides two bonus dice for Beauty risks. An Exquisite Sword provides three bonus dice for any Prowess risks.

Normal	No Bonus
Good	1 die
Fine	2 dice
Exquisite	3 dice

Personal Improvement

Personal Training allows you to add elements to your character sheet.

Your Daimyo may use a Season Action to give your character an additional Giri Rank.

He can also spend a Season Action to add an Aspect to your sheet. You are limited to the total number of Aspects you may have on your sheet. You may only have two Aspects plus a number of bonus Aspects equal to your Wisdom. No Wisdom? No bonus Aspects.

The Dojo Holding can spend Season Actions for Personal Training. See the *Dojo*, in *Holdings*, above.

Swords

“If on your journey, you encounter God... God will be cut.”

— *Hattori Hanzo, Kill Bill, Volume 1*

It was said a samurai could see his soul in the reflection of his blade. It has also been said that the daisho (long sword and short sword) were the only two friends a samurai could rely upon.

To a samurai, nothing is more sacred than his swords. As such, I think its important to include a section on swords and a few mechanics that make them more than just bonus dice.

Katana and Wakizashi

A samurai carries two Swords: a katana (long sword) and a wakizashi (short sword). Both Swords may be considered Quality Swords.

Creating a Sword

Only a Blacksmith may make a Sword.

The Quality of a Sword is measured by the rank of the Blacksmith.

- A rank 1 Blacksmith may make a *Normal Quality* Sword. Normal Quality Swords have no bonus Qualities.
- A rank 2 Blacksmith may make a *Good Quality* Sword. A Fine Quality Sword may have one Quality.
- A rank 3 Blacksmith may make a *Fine Quality* Sword. A Fine Quality Sword may have two Qualities.
- A rank 4 Blacksmith may make an *Exquisite Quality* Sword. An Exquisite Quality Sword may have three Qualities.

Quality

Each point of Quality is a slot that can hold a different kind of benefit. Here are the benefits a sword can carry.

BLADE

The quality of the handle determines the control a samurai has over the blade. If the Sword has a quality Blade as a Benefit, it provides a number of Free Raises equal to the Quality of the Blade.

CURSED

Some swords of legend carry a Curse. If your samurai carries a Cursed sword, at the beginning of each game session, the Narrator adds a number of Honor Points to the pool equal to the Quality of the sword.

Sample Curses include: you may never sleep in the same bed twice, you may never find true love, you will betray the one you love the most, etc. Every Curse must also have a method for removing it.

A samurai cannot carry any other sword if he carries a Cursed sword. Not until the Curse has been lifted or fulfilled or the sword is destroyed.

HANDLE

The quality of the handle determines the control a samurai has over the blade. If you invest in the sword's Handle, it allows a number of Free Strikes equal to the Quality of its Handle.

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LEGEND

Swords can also carry Legends. A Legend is a benefit from the Advantage list in Chapter 1. A sword may only carry one Legend, regardless of its Quality.

REPUTATION

A sword can also carry a Reputation: Reputations from the original owner of the sword carried. For example, if you have the Reputation “Great Duelist,” your sword can also carry that Reputation. If you had the Reputation, “Great Hunter,” your sword can carry that Reputation as well.

The Clan Sword

A Clan’s Executioner carries the Clan’s Sword. The Clan’s Sword has a number of Sword Qualities equal to the Executioner’s rank. Your Daimyo determines which Qualities the Sword has.

Breaking a Sword

A Sword breaks if the samurai holding it does not beat 10 on his roll and his opponent spends one wager. So, to break an opponent’s Sword, you must win privilege and have a wager and your opponent must roll less than 10.

You must spend a number of wagers equal to the Quality of the Sword. A Normal Sword costs one wager to break. A Good Sword costs two wagers to break. A Fine Sword costs three wagers to break. An Exquisite Sword costs four wagers to break.

Koku

In Old Japan, the currency is rice. Without rice, everything falls apart. Therefore, rice is the most valuable commodity.

A Koku represents enough rice to feed a samurai for one year (approximately 278.3 litres or 73.52 gallons). Realistically, each Province (or han) should generate around ten thousand koku. The largest han in Old Japan generated around one million koku. That’s a bit much math for a roleplaying game. So, we’re going to pretend that generating koku in the tens rather than the thousands is the standard.

Each Season, your Province generates Koku—if you have a Rice Farm, that is. I’m assuming your lands generate enough Koku to keep everything running. The Koku you deal with (from Rice Farms and

Gambling Dens, for example) is the excess you can use to purchase additional Holdings, equipment, etc.

Officers & Koku

I assume all Officers are well paid, have castles and staff of their own and are far from impoverished. In their Daimyo's lands, they have no need to pay for anything. If they need a horse, they take it from the Stables. If they need a sword, they take it from the Blacksmith. Their Daimyo provides everything they need.

But additional Koku provides a samurai with funds above and beyond his needs. If the Daimyo's farms produce extra Koku, it is the Seneschal's duty to hand it out to the Officers who deserve it.

At the End of the Year, Officers can spend any additional Koku they may have on just about anything they want. Want a new kimono and you don't have a Silk Farm? Koku replaces that need. Want a new Sword and your Blacksmith is busy? Koku replaces that need.

Officers may also spend Koku to make their own vassals happier. Any Koku spent on vassals (such as the General's Ashigaru, the Spy Master's spies or the Bodyguard's personal guard) gives that Officer a bonus equal to the Koku spent.

An Officer cannot spend more Koku than his rank.

HATAMOTO (GENERAL)

Koku adds to the General's Troops. Every Koku increases their rank by one until the end of the Season.

KARO (SENESCHAL)

Koku adds to the Seneschal's Staff, adding one rank per Koku.

KAISHAKU (EXECUTIONER)

Koku further motivates the Executioner, making him a more threatening individual. Each Koku adds to the dice he gains for intimidation.



ONIWABAN (SPY MASTER)

If a Spy Master gets Koku, he can spend it on his agents, adding to the number of times he can learn secrets.

ONMYŌJI (SPIRITUAL ADVISOR)

Benefit: You may give your Daimyo's Officers a number of Blessings each Season equal to your Giri Rank. See *Magic & Religion* for more information.

Donations to the local temples and shrines (through the Onmyoji) gives the Spiritual Advisor more Blessings. One additional Blessing per Koku spent.

TAKUMI (COURTIER)

Koku gives the Courtier more bribes, thus earning him an additional favor per Koku spent.

YOJIMBO (BODYGUARD)

Additional Koku increases the morale of the Bodyguard's Samurai Guardsmen. Each Koku increases their rank by one.

Equipment & Koku

If a samurai has Koku, I assume he has enough resources to pay for any mundane needs. A night at the inn, a bowl of rice balls, sake, whatever he needs. Remember: one Koku is enough rice to feed a samurai for a year. That one Koku represents all of his needs for an entire year. Fiddling over the cost of a night at wayside inn is just silly.

If he needs a new kimono, he gets one. It doesn't give him any bonuses and it is just a Normal Quality kimono, but it will do. A samurai receives his equipment from his Daimyo. He does not have to pay for his sword or his horse or his armor. His Daimyo expects him to fight for the Province, therefore, the Daimyo provides him the proper equipment to do just that.

Usually, your Daimyo provides you with Normal Equipment. This provides no bonus or penalty. However, you may seek out finer equipment... but you need to know where to look. Famous blacksmiths can provide fine or even exquisite swords and armor, but they are often difficult to locate. (In other words, it's an adventure hook.)

The quality of your equipment is important. Equipment comes in four categories, listed below.

Poor equipment includes anything found on the battlefield, left-over or otherwise scavenged. If your samurai has poor equipment, he

gains the tag *Poorly Equipped*. Any other samurai can tag you for two bonus dice on any appropriate risk.

Normal Equipment provides no bonuses or penalties. A samurai can purchase Normal Equipment as long as he has one Koku. One Koku lasts him the entire year and covers all of his costs.

Good Equipment provides a bonus of one die to any appropriate risk and costs one Koku, regardless of what it is.

Fine equipment provides a bonus of two dice to any appropriate risk and costs two Koku, regardless of what it is.

Exquisite equipment provides three bonus dice to any appropriate risk and costs three Koku, regardless of what it is.

Finally, all Equipment lasts one Year. Then, it must be replaced. The only exception to this rule is Swords. Swords last until they are broken.

Espionage

Your Daimyo is capable of Espionage Actions. These allow you to spy upon and sabotage other Daimyos. When the Daimyo commits an Espionage Action, he sends one or more spies out to gather information and bring it back. Espionage actions are dangerous. You can easily lose your spy if he is caught, or worse, have your spy turn on you, becoming a traitor in your midst.

Also, to be clear: your Daimyo cannot perform Espionage Actions without an Oniwaban.

How Espionage Actions Work

Unlike most elements of this game, I highly suggest all Espionage rolls be made in secret. This adds an important element of mystery to the game. Was my Action successful? If you can't see the roll, you don't know. If you don't even know what roll you made, you won't even have an idea if it was successful.

Every Season, your Daimyo can use one or more of his Season Actions to perform Espionage. He gains



a bonus number of Espionage Actions equal to his Oniwaban's Giri Rank.

If you want to perform an Espionage Action, you make a contested risk against your enemy. An Espionage Action is a contested Cunning risk using the Oniwaban's Cunning as a base. Each rank of Spy Network also adds a die to the Espionage Action.

To represent Espionage Actions, we use "the five spies" from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. Each Action is represented by a particular kind of spy who performs different kinds of actions and delivers different kinds of information.

For example, my Daimyo wants to spend all three of his Season Actions on Espionage. He chooses two of these Actions to be Local Spies while the third will be a Doomed Spy.

Another example. The Daimyo decides to commit one Espionage Action to a Surviving Spy, another to a Local Spy and his third to a Converted Spy.

The Five Spies are listed below and detail the kind of Espionage Actions you can commit.

The Five Spies

"When all five are used, and no one knows their Way, it is called the divine organization, and is the ruler's treasure."

— *Sun Tzu, The Art of War*

For this Espionage system, we are going to employ Sun Tzu's "Five Spies."

Each time you use an Espionage Action, you employ one of the Five Spies. The information you get depends on which of the Spies you use.

Local Spies: Employing local members of your own Province to maintain secrecy and intelligence. This includes farmers, merchants, samurai and others. It is important that the spies remain ignorant of each other. No spy can know who is also a spy.

Inward Spies: Making use of our enemy's officers.

Converted Spies: Spies we have captured from the enemy who are now reporting to us instead of their former masters.

Doomed Spies: Spies we send to our enemy with the purpose of getting caught and spreading false information.

Surviving Spies: Spies who infiltrate our enemy's borders and bring back information.

Each spy accomplishes a different kind of Espionage Action, providing the Daimyo with different information. Let's take a look at how to use each of the different spies.

Local Spies

Local Spies provide us with information in our own lands that we might not gather otherwise. They also provide us with counterintelligence: an important factor in maintaining our own secrets.

The number of Local Spies we have active at any time in our own Province provides the rank of Security an enemy spy must overcome to gain information about our own lands. For every Local Spy present in our lands, we may roll three dice against any infiltration attempts by foreign spies.

Local Spies may make wagers to produce additional effects. For example, if we catch an enemy spy in our lands, we may make him a Converted Spy who will send us information about our enemy. The number of Seasons he remains in our enemy's lands (before he is discovered and executed) is equal to the wagers we make at the beginning of the Season.

Inward Spies

Inward Spies we use to gain personal information about Daimyos and their Officers. Inward Spies are our "double agents." They are officers who have been overlooked for promotion, greedy mistresses, jealous wives and husbands and ambitious bodyguards.

ESPIONAGE ACTION

You may use Inward Spies to gain knowledge about your enemy's most trusted samurai—through their character sheets. If an Inward Spy is successful, he can tell us a number of things that are true about our enemy's character sheets. If an Inward Spy gains privilege, he can tell us one thing that is true about one enemy's sheet. Each wager gives us another piece of information.

Local Spies

Please note that I have taken the liberty to change one of Master Tzu's Spies: the Local Spy. Instead of employing your enemy's farmers and merchants, I have transformed them into the basis for which your own security is based. This provides a basis for counterintelligence and security in the Daimyo's lands: an essential mechanic I could not avoid. My apologies to the spirit of Master Tzu and hope he and his admirers—of which I count myself—can forgive me.



Converted Spies

If a Spy fails to escape our security, we may convert him to our own side and allow him to return to our enemy with false information.

If we gain privilege against an enemy's Espionage Action, we can choose to convert that spy to our own service. That spy can return with false information. Also, upon his return to his master's lands, he can send us information about our enemy. The number of Seasons he remains in our enemy's lands (before he is discovered and executed) is equal to the wagers we make at the beginning of the Season.

Doomed Spies

Doomed Spies are sent into enemy lands for the purpose of their capture. Doomed Spies do not know they are being sent in such a manner—their ignorance fuels their authenticity.

Doomed Spies always fail to gain privilege and are always captured by our enemy's security.

Once captured, our enemy may try to convert them. If he does, they will only feed misinformation to our enemy. If he wants to know what Virtue is our weakness, he will give false information. If he wants to know one of our Aspects, he will give false information. If he wants to know the size of our armies, he will give false information.

Like the Converted Spy, he will eventually be executed (he's only good for a number of wagers made by the Local Spies).

Surviving Spies

Surviving Spies are those you send into enemy territory to bring back information.

When you send in Surviving Spies, they roll three dice for each Spy you send. Thus, the more Spies you send, the more likely you will gain privilege.

If you gain privilege, you can gain information about your enemy.

If Surviving Spies are captured, they can be made into Converted Spies by our enemy.

ESPIONAGE ACTIONS

Surviving Spies can take two Espionage Actions:

Information: You can gather information about your enemy's lands. If you gain privilege, you learn one thing about your enemy's Holdings, production, or Season Actions.

Sabotage: You can sabotage construction of a Holding or any other Season Action. You must identify which samurai's actions you want to sabotage. The Narrator will then randomly determine (through dice rolls or random number picking) which Action is sabotaged.

Last Word on Espionage

As I said above, I highly suggest making Espionage Actions the only secret rolls in the game. If all other rolls are above board, making Espionage a complete secret (the Narrator making all the rolls behind a screen or whatever) makes them unique. Or, if you like, you can

make them above board with privilege like every other roll in the game.

It's up to you.

End of the Year

Another important date. The End of the Year.

And, oh yeah, you should know something. Winter sucks.

The winters in Japan are not kind. Cold and terrible. Ah, but Spring will come soon.

Soon...

In Winter, samurai mark the end of the Year by looking back at their accomplishments and defeats. But more importantly, each and every one of them take one more step toward inevitable death.

Age

On your character sheet, you'll find a space for Age. When you created your character, you were instructed to roll one d6 and write that number there. It is the end of the Year. Time to add to that total.

At the End of the Year, each samurai rolls one d6 and adds those Age Points to his Age.

When your samurai's Age reaches 60 Points or higher, your character advances to the next Phase of his life. Spring to Summer, Summer to Autumn, Autumn to Winter, Winter... to Death.

Once you reach 60 or higher, erase that total. You now have zero Age Points. At the end of next Year, roll 1d6 and write down your roll in that spot.

Sex & Children

Okay, since we're talking about long term plans, we have to talk about children.

Any sexual encounter between male and female characters presents the opportunity for pregnancy at the end of the Season.

The players involved both roll a die. If both roll a 1-2, 3-4, or 5-6, the woman gets pregnant. That is, if both players roll a 1 or 2; or if both players roll a 3 or 4; or if both players roll a 5 or 6. That makes a 33% chance of intercourse resulting in pregnancy. Two samurai can also use a Season Action (one for each) to produce offspring. That way, you don't have to roll.

Pregnancy lasts three Seasons. At the end of the third Season, the baby is born. Also, the mother adds one die of Age Points to her character sheet. At the age of sixteen, a child can enter play as a rank 1 Vassal, Son or Daughter. Make the usual rolls for Age as an adult, outlined in the section above.

A Child (rank 1 Vassal) has one Season Action. He can take any Action you can. But, he's still a rank 1 Vassal. He needs training to become an NPC. Children train just like all other Vassals. One Season at a time. As soon as your Child Vassal becomes an NPC, he gains Virtues, Aspects and everything else. Even his own Vassals. All he's missing is land of his own.

And who do you think will give it to him?

Spoilage

At the end of the Year, any Resources you cannot store are lost: they were used to repair existing structures during the harsh Winter, used for bribes, stolen or spoiled. Either way, they are gone.

Also, all Equipment the samurai have is gone. Horses, kimonos and everything else. Only Swords last through the years.

Phase to Phase

When your character moves from a Spring to Summer or a Summer to Fall or Fall to Winter, he may make certain changes. He can change his Name, change Aspects and even switch his Virtues. Listed below are all the changes your character can make when he moves from Phase to Phase.

Name

You may, if you like, change your Public Name. Changing who you are. Changing your Destiny. Taking on a new path.

Aspects

When you move to a new Phase, you also gain new Aspects.



Spring to Summer: gain two Aspects

Summer to Autumn: gain one new Aspect and one Winter Aspect.

Autumn to Winter: gain one new Aspect and two new Winter Aspects.

Winter Aspects

A Winter Aspect has only a Compel and no Invoke. It must be an Aspect like “Bad Leg” or “Blind Eye” or “Quivering Hands.” When your character moves into Autumn, you gain one Winter Aspect. When your character moves into Winter, you get two more.

Contacts

You also get to make a new Contact. Choose anyone you like.

Virtues

When your character enters a new Phase, he may switch his Virtues. For example, as your character grows older, he may switch his Wisdom and Strength or perhaps his Prowess and Cunning.

You may switch your Virtues as you wish, but remember, you always have a Weakness.

Death

Winter Phase. You’ve reached 60 Age points at the End of the Year. Time for your character to pass away.

Chapter 9

War

Warfare is an important part of samurai tragedy. In nearly every tale, characters are either at war, go to war or suffer the scars of it. The system in this chapter provides you with a way to present warfare in a way that is narrative rather than tactical. Yes, tactics can come into play, but more importantly, it allows the players and Narrator to tell the story of the conflict. There is also an element of arbitrariness in the system—which players can modify—allowing for a sense of real danger and helplessness in the midst of epic struggles.

The War Rank

Your Daimyo does not live in a vacuum. He has neighbors. Living on a tiny island with very few resources, each neighbor represents an opportunity for expansion. His lands are rich and well-developed. You could take them and make them your own. Of course, your neighbor is thinking the very same thing about your Daimyo's lands.

War is inevitable. It will happen. It's only a matter of time.

To represent this fact, each of your neighbors has a War Rank representing how close you are to outright warfare with that neighbor. The lower the rank, the further you are from War. The higher the rank, the closer you get to War.

You only have a War Rank with neighbors you meet and interact with during the campaign. If you have no contact with samurai from the Bizen Province, you have no War Rank with that Daimyo.

Escalation

Once you have established contact with samurai from another Province, you automatically receive a War Rank 1 with that Province. Every Season, that War Rank increases by 1 unless you take direct actions to stop it from going up. You can also take actions to decrease the War Rank between you and another Province... but the samurai from the other Province may do the same—both increasing and decreasing the War Rank.

During your game, when you interact with samurai from other Provinces, your actions may (or may not) increase the War Rank with that Province. Listed below are all the ways you can increase and

War Before 10

Question: Can you declare War before the War Rank reaches 10?

Answer: Yes, you can. Reaching 10 means War is inevitable.

decrease the War Rank with another Province.

Duels

A duel with a samurai from another Province can either increase or decrease your War Rank with that Province.

If the samurai face off in a Friendly Duel (see Violence), the War Rank decreases by one.

If the samurai face off in a Deadly Duel (again, see Violence), the War Rank increases by the Giri Rank of the samurai who died.

Failed Espionage Actions

If a Province sends a Spy into another Province and fails in his mission, the War Rank between the two Provinces increases by one.

Gifts

If you send a Gift to another Province, the War Rank between the two Provinces decreases by a rank equal to the rank of the Gift.

Gifts can include Resources. If you send Resources, decrease the War Rank equal to the number of Resources you send.

Insults

If you insult the Honor of another Clan, the War Rank increases by one.

Murder

If a samurai from another Province is murdered in your Province, the War Rank increases by a number of ranks equal to his own Giri Rank.





Other Actions

During the campaign, a samurai may commit an offense that justifies increasing the War Rank. You know those pesky players; always coming up with something you and I never thought of...

Declaring War

One the War Rank between two Provinces reaches 10, War is inevitable. It will occur the next Season.

War is a Season Action. It is the only Season Action a Daimyo and his Officers can take for that Season. All resources and efforts are dedicated to War.

That is, if you declare War, you may take no other Season Actions.

Calculations

When determining the outcome of a War, we must calculate the Advantages each side has. For this, we shall look to Sun Tzu and his Art of War. His wisdom will give us the outcome.

Winning one of the calculations means you gain Advantage Points. Whichever side has the most Advantage Points at the end of the calculations will most likely be the victor.

Although, some other factors may come into play after the calculations are made...

THE FIRST CALCULATION: THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

Whose government is able to establish a moral cause and gain the whole people's enthusiastic cooperation?

The Courtier of each Daimyo makes a Beauty risk. (Speeches may be necessary from the players. Your choice.) The one who gains privilege adds his wagers as Advantages. The loser only adds half his wagers, rounded up, as Advantages.

Do Holdings such as the Sake House add to Courage in War?

Yes. All of them influence their appropriate virtues in war.

THE SECOND CALCULATION: GENERALS

Whose generals are most capable?

Next, determine the Giri Rank of the Generals. Each General gains a number of Advantage Points equal to his rank.

THE THIRD CALCULATION: HEAVEN AND EARTH

Who can take advantage of the benefits of Heaven and Earth?

Now, the Oracle for each Daimyo makes a Wisdom risk (Aspects and other benefits are appropriate). The one who gains privilege adds his wagers as Advantages. The loser only adds half his wagers, rounded up, as Advantages.



THE FOURTH CALCULATION: ORDERS

Whose orders will be carried out most successfully?

Each General makes a Cunning risk. The one who gains privilege adds his wagers as Advantages. The loser only adds half his wagers, rounded up, as Advantages.

THE FIFTH CALCULATION: COURAGE

Whose army is strongest?

Add the total ranks of Ashigaru for each side. Each rank of Ashigaru is an Advantage Point. The Yojimbo's Guardsmen do not add to this Calculation.

THE SIXTH CALCULATION: TRAINING

Whose troops have the best training?

All Officers make a Prowess risk (target number 10, as usual). The victor keeps all of his while the defeated only keep half. The wagers made by each side count as Advantages.

THE SEVENTH CALCULATION: MORALE

Which Army's Rewards and Punishments are Fairest and Strictest?

All Officers make a Courage risk (target number 10, as usual). The number of wagers made by each side count as Advantages.

Waging War

Once the Advantages have been calculated, it is time for War.

Wars occur in Waves. Each Wave is a Season.

During the Wave, each side uses its Advantages to cause casualties. Each player writes down his orders secretly and hands them to the Narrator. The damage done by Advantages is revealed all at once.

An Advantage can cause one of your opponent's Ashigaru to lose one rank. If an Ashigaru is reduced to zero ranks, it is destroyed.



Or, if you prefer, you may use an Advantage to cause damage to your opponent's Province. You can reduce the rank of any Holding by one for each Advantage you use. If a Holding is reduced to zero ranks, it is destroyed.

Both Ashigaru and Guardsmen may use their ability to protect Officers from Injury. They lose a rank for doing so.

You may also use Advantages to give Injuries to prominent samurai and NPCs on the opponent's side. Each Advantage is a rank 1 Injury. You may use further Advantages to aggravate Injuries.

End of the Wave

At the end of each Wave, either side may surrender. Surrenders must be negotiated. If one side is unhappy with the negotiations, War may continue for another Wave and another Season.

When all casualties are counted, recount each side's Advantages and perform another Wave.

Remember: no Season Actions other than War may be taken while War is declared.

“Wow. War Sucks!”

It costs you Season Actions.

It costs you Resources.

It costs you Ashigaru.

It costs you Officers.

It costs you Holdings.

War sucks.

Consider it carefully.

Winning the War

War can end two ways.

First, one side can surrender. If they do, the winner of the war determines what happens to the loser. The Daimyo and his Officers place themselves in the winner's hands. Or, they can all commit seppuku. Their choice. Negotiations should be roleplayed, of course.

Second, one side can be completely destroyed.

When War is over, the winner claims the Province of the loser.

Player

This chapter is for you, the player. We're going to talk about how to play the game. You already know the rules (if you read the rest of the book, that is), but now, we're going to talk about how to use those rules to get the most out of your game.

This chapter has specific advice on the *Blood & Honor* game system, but it also has a bunch of advice on how to use things like your Virtues, aspects and wagers to really milk the system for all it's worth.

But, it's also about troubleshooting. Making sure your game works. For many different reasons, it's difficult to keep a tabletop game together. Real life commitments, jobs, family, and that evil, vile temptress the MMORPG have stolen us from our first and truest love. It's hard enough to keep a game together. We shouldn't be sabotaging our own efforts. So, this section is for you, the player. How

to keep your game regular, exciting and fun. And free from nutty gamer drama.

Those who are familiar with Houses of the Blooded may recognize some of this advice. Yes, I've cribbed myself. But, there's also a whole bunch of new advice you've never seen before. So, players both new and old, enjoy!

Communication is the Key

All too often, I hear the same kind of talk from gamers at conventions and parties and stores. I get asked the same kinds of questions and usually give the same



kinds of answers, and out of all those questions, it seems this one gets asked more than any other.

“Why do games always go off track?”

Well, in order to solve that problem, we usually have to ask the same questions. “Is the group communicating?” The typical answer is “No.”

So, to curtail 90% of the problems gamers have, I’m giving you a lot of advice that seems simple, but in fact, is actually rather difficult. Communication is hard. But, if you use it effectively, you can keep your game running. Remember that. It’ll come in handy later.

A Different Kind of Honor

Blood & Honor is a bit different than most traditional roleplaying games. With the system, players have a lot more control over the narrative, taking the reins and creating the story themselves. I’ve run entire sessions where, as the Narrator, I didn’t say a word. Dice rolled, risks taken, clues discovered, lives lost... and I didn’t say a word.

That’s because the players have a lot of power in this game. As much power as the game master, if they want it. Now, why would I do a silly thing like that?

Because I trust you.

Most roleplaying games are designed with cheaters, wankers and munchkins in mind. Designers put guards in place to keep those people from abusing loopholes. After all, this is a roleplaying game. Loopholes exist. So, instead of putting so many limits on the players that they can’t even breathe, I’ve done the opposite. I’ve put the power directly into your hands. Again, you may ask, why would I do such a thing?

Because I trust you.

I trust that you understand it isn’t just the Narrator’s job to make sure everybody’s having fun. It’s everybody’s job to make sure everybody is having fun.

Whenever I find myself on the other side of the screen, as a player, I inevitably find myself playing the role of Pocket Narrator. That is, I engage other players in ways that get them to talk about their character. I put myself in a position where the other characters are in the spotlight, and I do whatever I can to make that moment fun.

The Pocket Narrator. Making sure other people are having fun.

Now sure, I enjoy my moment in the spotlight as much as everyone else, but it’s my hope that if I spend extra time with the

other players, when it comes their turn to do the same, they will. Why?

Because it's everybody's job to make sure everybody is having fun.

Finally...

Now sure, you can take these rules and run trucks through them. Find the best way to make your character better than everybody else's character. Overpower the session with your ego and take over the whole game. You can do that. Nobody's really stopping you. After all, the other players are your friends and they don't want to hurt your feelings.

But see, I'm not your friend. And I really don't give a crap about your feelings. So, I get to say this for them.

If you're gonna ruin everybody else's fun, go find yourself another game.

We're all adults here. Let's play like we are.

Okay, now that I've got that out of my system, on with the show!

Bushido

This is the heart of it, right here. Bushido. The way of the warrior. A set of rules for noble warriors.

Much like Feudal Europe developed chivalry as a kind of moral code for knights, bushido developed in much the same way. Bushido is a self-prescribed ethic written and refined by the samurai themselves. But bushido has one key difference that differentiates itself from its Western counterpart: chivalry derives its mandate from religion; bushido stems from philosophy.

In the past, the warrior class of Japan had conquered all and had its way with the "lesser people." With no wars to fight, warriors turned insightful, looking to defeat inner demons rather than external enemies. This led to a code of conduct that would define Japan even unto the modern era.

Bushido is seen by its practitioners as a practical result of thousands of years of warfare. This is the most efficient and proper way for a samurai to act. A samurai who ignores bushido seeks to undermine his own success in the world and the success of his family and Clan. Those who look outside its precepts are not just immoral but are fools.

This isn't to say that practitioners of bushido do not recognize the need for innovation. On the contrary, one of bushido's most

important virtues is the conformity to truth. As knowledge of the world expands, what we know about the world does as well. If a samurai tries to excel without knowledge of the world around him, his ignorance will punish him sooner or later.

While many have made valiant attempts to codify bushido, it remains a difficult task. Bushido is a philosophy: a living process of thought and perception and action. The best I can do is list the “seven virtues” of bushido most agreed upon by scholars. These are typical but not exclusive and many would even argue these. But bushido is an argument. It is not an answer, but a question. “What does duty demand from a samurai?” That is bushido’s question. Many feel these seven virtues are the answer.

How your own samurai interprets these virtues says much about his own approach to bushido. Samurai argue about bushido all the time. No samurai has a casual attitude toward this subject.

I will give no further words other than the words themselves. No definitions. The ambiguity leads to questions and questions lead to truth. Following another’s path only leads to where he walked. You must walk there yourself.

RECTITUDE (GI)

COURAGE (YU)

BENEVOLENCE (JIN)

RESPECT (REI)

HONESTY (MAKOTO)

HONOR (YO)

LOYALTY (CHUGO)

Questions for Your Character

What is the true definition of bushido?

Which of the virtues is most important?

What do the virtues mean?

Castes

Old Japan is a divided country. Divided by Clans, divided by castes.

The three castes in Old Japan are the samurai (the warrior caste), the clergy (those who pray) and the peasantry (those who work). Samurai are on the top, the peasantry are on the bottom and the

clergy are... on the side. There is also a sub-caste among the peasants called the hinin, or non-people. We'll talk about them separately.

Samurai

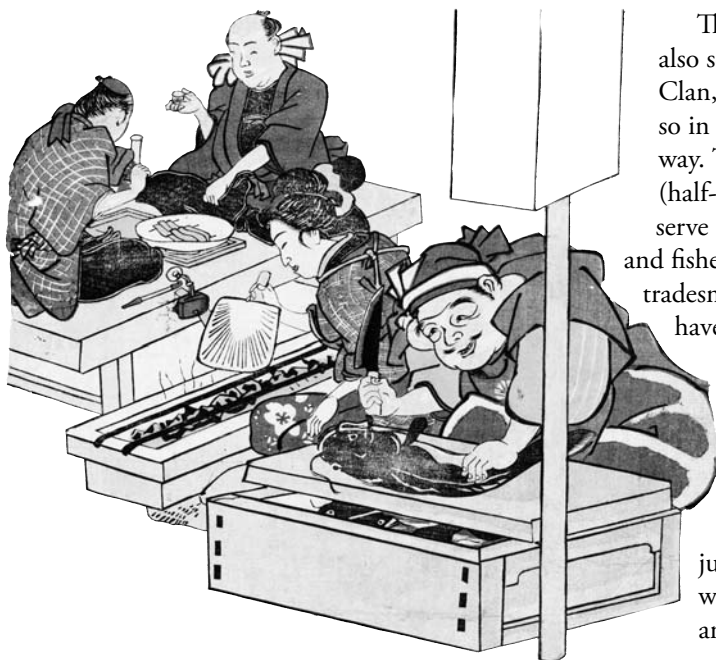
As a samurai, you are feared and respected. Respected by those who are within your own caste and feared by those who are not. You are among the only caste allowed to carry weapons. You are also permitted to murder those who are below you. Not a serious crime, but it is an action that may carry consequences, depending on the Daimyo of the land.

As a samurai, you are the equivalent of a European knight. You have land and title and vast amounts of cash on hand. You never need to pay for anything: everything in your lands belongs to you, anyway.

Your duty is to protect the lands and dynasty of your Clan. Everything else is ego. Only your Clan matters.

From a very young age, you were trained to be a warrior. Even if your giri (your duty) is to be a courtier or a spy, all samurai are trained in the martial arts. It is a samurai's duty to fight and die for his Clan without thought to his own safety or security. These values were burned onto your soul from the time you were born. This is your duty. Your destiny. Nothing else matters.

Peasants



The peasants also serve the Clan, but they do so in a different way. The heimin (half-people) serve as farmers and fishermen and tradesmen. They have no legal rights when samurai are concerned, but may appeal to samurai for justice when wronged by another peasant.

Within the caste itself, farmers are regarded as most important. They provide rice and without rice, Old Japan would fall apart.

There is a sub-caste among the peasants: the hinin, or non-people. These are people who perform jobs that make them untouchable. (The highly derogatory word commonly used in this era is eta, which means “an abundance of defilement.” This word is now considered as offensive as “nigger” or “wetback” in American slang.) Any profession that involves exposure to flesh or blood is considered hinin. Caretakers, tanners and torturers all into this category.

Clergy

Buddhist monks and Shinto priests fall into a strange category here. They are not samurai but they are also not peasants. This is a blurry region where it is difficult to tread. There are no clear cut rules, only a few guidelines.

Because holy men are not samurai, they do not deserve the respect that samurai receive. On the other hand, they do have access to strange forces which demands a certain amount of respect. Peasants show respect to holy men because they are superstitious and afraid. Samurai show them respect for exactly the same reasons, but they will never admit it.

No doubt, it is bad luck to harm a clergyman. It is even worse luck to kill one.

Priests and monks have their place in the order even if it is unclear exactly what place that is.

Questions for Your Character

The social order of Old Japan demands an almost ruthless attitude toward the peasant class. How does that fit with the bushido virtue of benevolence?

Bushido is only expected from samurai because only they have the will and character to adopt such a demanding philosophy. Does this mean the peasantry is actually a lesser breed of human than the samurai? Are they just lesser people?

The philosophers of Old Japan speak of a celestial order of things: everything is born into its place. Does this mean a man of the hinin class may never find the courage of a samurai?

Devil and the Details

Gamers seem obsessed with details. They ask a general question, you give a general answer. They ask a more specific question, you give a more specific answer. Then, their questions start getting really small. Like fit in your pocket small. Here's an actual example of a conversation I had many years ago with a fan of a different samurai RPG.

Question: How much does a horse cost in (Old Japan)?

Answer: You don't need to pay for anything. You're a samurai. Your Daimyo provides for you.

Follow-Up Question: Yes, but it has to have an actual cost.

Answer: If you need a horse, go to your Daimyo's stables and take one.

Follow-follow-up Question: Yes, but it has to have a cost. Everything has a specific cost. If I want to buy a horse in a village, how much koku do I have to spend?

Answer: GAHHHHHH! How much does a car cost? Give me the exact cost right down to the penny. Every car has an exact cost, right? No haggling. No negotiating. Nothing based on your credit at all.

Follow-follow-follow-up Question: Yes, but it has to have a baseline cost.

Answer: ADFOIAHPOIHWVPAHDSPGHASPOVNPANV PAURGPOHRGPOH!!!!



Don't get caught up in the details. After all, wagers make details, remember?

Like I said above, there are a lot of ways to abuse the rules in just about any roleplaying game. This one is no exception. The difference is, I didn't spend a whole lot of time coming up with new rules to cover my ass.

See, I don't believe "good game design" is about fixing holes. Instead, good game design focuses on making the game fun to play, making sure every element of the game gives the players another tool.

Why do you think the cost of a horse is so vague? The economy just doesn't work! It doesn't work!

Huge gaping holes. Samurai culture is full of them. Questions that aren't easy to answer. Nor should they be easy to answer. No clean-cut yes or no. No clean-cut right or wrong. No clean-cut good or evil.

Our own culture is a great example. Take nearly any important issue in modern society. Show me the clear cut answer. Abortion. Immigration law. Taxes. Economy. The death penalty. Gay marriage. Okay, that one's pretty straight-forward, it's just that the people on the other side of the debate are ignorant and don't understand the real issues.

See how easy that is? How easy it is to make the issue simple and one-sided. But, frankly, it isn't. It isn't simple, clean-cut, or easy. It's hard. Messy. Ugly. And people are willing to fight for it. Each side convinced they are the Good Guys and those who oppose them are the True Heart of Evil.

* * *

Now, excuse me for a moment. I have to take what appears to be a tangential break, but in the end, this will all come back together. I promise.

I have a lot of historical reenactment friends. You know, the ones who study the Civil War or the Renaissance or Ancient Rome and write huge papers on the subject, create authentic costumes, build elaborate structures. All that kind of stuff. It's impressive. Their knowledge is extensive and they're a lot of fun to talk to.

But don't ever watch Rome with them. All they do is complain about how everything is wrong. Same thing with Dune fans. Watching the movie or the mini-series, all they do is complain how everything is wrong.

And in some cases, my friends are right. Inaccuracies, anachronisms. These things happen for a lot of reasons. But sometimes, they happen because my friends and the person doing the research on the show rely on different authorities.

I hear that capes are wrong. Well, maybe there were different styles of cape. After all, there are different cuts of t-shirts, right? There isn't just one single style of blue jeans or slacks or even khaki pants. Why should there be only one style of toga? Sure, we've only found one style or toga—or perhaps even two—but that doesn't mean there was only one style of toga in all of Ancient Rome. Right?

* * *

The point of that little sidewinder diatribe is this. We know next to nothing about the samurai. We have no maps, no illustrations, very few written documents. What I've cobbled together here is only a smidgeon of what we do know. There's still more to be discovered. Universities have documents that have yet to be translated. (Like I'll ever get my hands on those.) And, honestly, I've made some stuff up.

I know, I know. It's an incredible confession, but it's true. I've made some stuff up. Now, before you ask, no, I'm not telling. Besides, unless you're a scholar, you won't know the difference between the facts, theories and the fiction.

I guess what I'm trying to say here is that there really is no canon. No real authority. This is a game of make believe. So, make believe. Add details. I have my own ideas about the samurai, but they really shouldn't influence you anymore than you want.

How do the Japanese react to a situation? How does anybody react to a situation?

As each of us would, in our own way.

No culture is a collection of carbon copies. Each is an individual. Everyone responds as they would, given the circumstances, their own personality, their own experiences.

Make believe. Make the world. Make Old Japan.

The Eastern Hero

For many American and European fans of samurai literature, many of the themes and events can be quite confusing. Character behaviors seem out of line with Western values such as individualism and freewill. That's because our own hero—the Western Hero—is a manifestation of those values. We expect our heroes to walk their own path, adhere to their own private code of ethics and buck the system. But the Eastern Hero is quite different. He reflects the values of a different culture. To most accurately emulate samurai literature, we should take a look at the Eastern Hero and how his values differ from his Western counterpart.

As I said above, the Western Hero's values focus on freewill and self-determination. Our Hero defines his own role in the world. He goes out into the wilderness and makes his own way. He doesn't rely on others—although he may find other strong-willed individuals who assist him because they recognize strength in each other—and he eventually becomes a king in his own right.

The Western Hero's adventure begins with a sense of unease. Something is wrong. The Western Hero goes out into the world—into the wilderness—to find a cure for his unease. The adventure transforms him into that cure. He becomes what the world around him needs. Through that transformation, he cures both himself and the world.

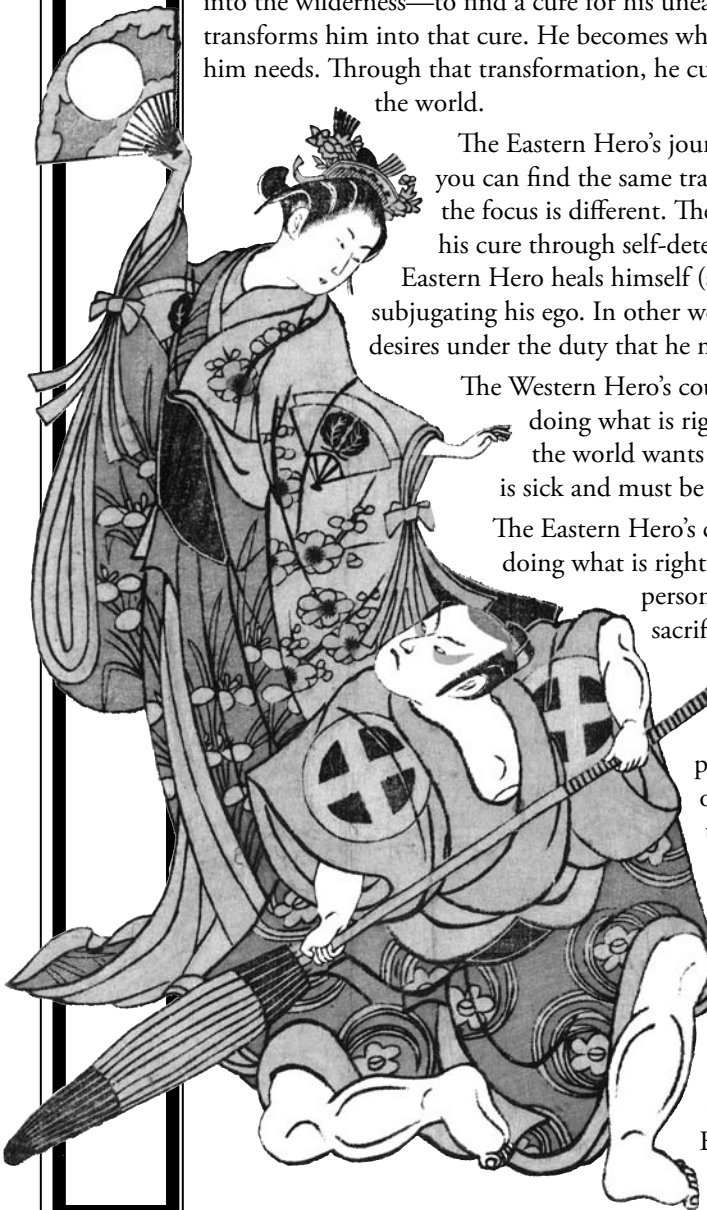
The Eastern Hero's journey is very similar—you can find the same trappings, in fact—but the focus is different. The Western Hero gains his cure through self-determination, but the Eastern Hero heals himself (and the world) through subjugating his ego. In other words, he buries his desires under the duty that he must perform.

The Western Hero's courage comes from doing what is right regardless of what the world wants him to do. The world is sick and must be healed.

The Eastern Hero's courage comes from doing what is right regardless of his own personal desires. He must sacrifice what he wants

for the greater good. To quote a famous Vulcan philosopher: "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few (or the one)."

The Western Hero feels a call to adventure, but this call comes (usually) comes from within. It is his desire to fix what is wrong. The Eastern Hero's call to adventure is external:



the world has a duty for him to perform. Only he can perform this duty and no other. The world has a place for him and he must accept that place or the world's machinery will grind him down. The longer he refuses his duty, the harder the world's punishments will be. Desires and fears will come to taunt and humiliate the Hero, and he succumbs to those fears for a while, but eventually overcomes them and continues on his journey.

While these differences may seem trivial, they are actually a great wall between the East and the West. The West who sees the individual as a lone hero who has to defy the world and define his own existence on his own terms and the East who sees the individual as someone who must accept his place in the world.

To Eastern eyes, the Western Hero is selfish and egotistical. He thinks only of himself and has no regard for others. To Western eyes, the Eastern Hero is a "yes man" who accepts his fate and goes along with the flow of the world. An unquestioning milquetoast who does what he's told.

But in the world of Old Japan, the Hero is one who has an appointed duty in the world that must be fulfilled. The more he denies this role, the more the world is an enemy, forcing him to fit. Your character is an Eastern Hero. He has a duty to fulfill and a higher authority to appease. Society expects him to act and react in certain ways. When he does not, he demonstrates that he doesn't fit, and as the old saying goes, the hammer will soon knock his tall nail attitude into place.

When your samurai views others who put their own ambitions in front of social responsibility, he should act accordingly. In fact, complete disgust is an appropriate response, although even strong reactions are almost always subdued and understated in Old Japan. Strong reactions are kept for the most heinous offenses (see Sincerity, below).

But this isn't to say that the values of the Eastern Hero and the Western Hero don't show up in each other's cultures. In the West, the idea of duty resonates through our literature. The film *Saving Private Ryan* is a great example of the values of the Eastern Hero: a squad of men who are doing what they are told and the courage it takes to do so. Likewise, in Japan, the films of Akira Kurasawa make heavy commentary on the American values of the individual.

This is the key difference between the Western Hero and the Eastern Hero. For a look at exactly how these two characters clash, I suggest watching a back-to-back double feature of Akira Kurasawa's *Yojimbo* and Sergio Leone's *A Fistfull of Dollars*. I'll be talking about both films in the Movies appendix, later in this book.

In the end, the virtues of the Eastern Hero are expressed in the behaviors of the characters. How these characters respond to dueling duties and expectations is what causes conflict and conflict is what gives us stories. I'll be talking more about that in the *Narrator* chapter.

But for now, let's take a look at what's expected of your samurai. Beware! We are about to enter the very complicated and convoluted world of Japanese etiquette...

Questions for Your Character

What is your role in the grand design? What is your ultimate destiny?

What is a suitable punishment for those who put ego ahead of their giri?

Etiquette (That Matters)

Authors have spent millions of pages talking about etiquette and custom in Old Japan. I'm not going to do that here. Instead, I'm going to focus on a philosophy I use when running games in Old Japan (and other more fantastical realms that attempt to emulate it). I'm going to focus on etiquette that matters.

In the world of Old Japan, you could spend an entire game session obsessing over manners. In fact, I could spend a few dozen pages just on the etiquette of bowing. Just bowing. I'm not going to do that. Instead, I'm going to encourage you to focus on etiquette that communicates something to the Narrator and the other players. Let me explain.

A performance of etiquette should communicate something to the other players. It is only important if a character makes an exception to that proper etiquette; then, he is communicating something important to the players and the plot. For example, we can all assume samurai bow and greet each other with the proper etiquette. But what if your samurai meet a stranger on the road? You are all samurai and there, at a weigh station, is an old monk. Everyone greets the monk and performs the proper bowing ritual, but my samurai takes a moment to bow deeper and longer than the others. Why does he do that? I'm communicating to the others, "I recognize this man and we have a history." What kind of history? Perhaps the old monk was my samurai's teacher. Or, perhaps we were friends before he retired and joined the monastery. Or, perhaps he is a family member. Any number of possibilities spring to mind.

The simple act of bowing a little lower and a little longer communicates something to the other players and adds depth to the story.

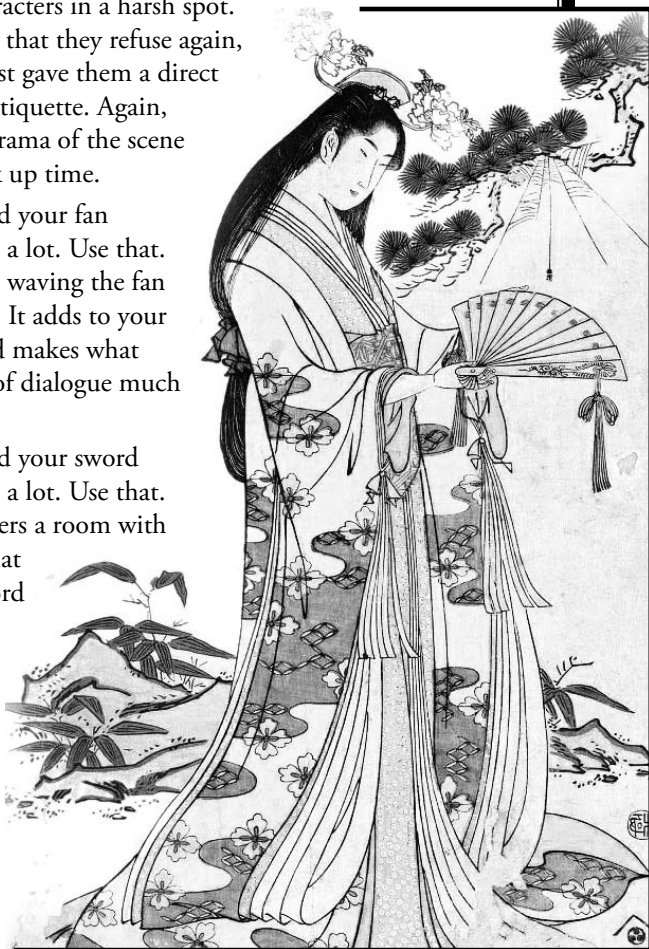
During playtests, one group of officers had a particularly difficult Daimyo. They looked through the list and were unsatisfied with the choices. I asked them what they wanted and eventually, they concluded they wanted an “Inscrutable Daimyo.” They wanted a Daimyo who was always one step ahead of them.

At one point, the Daimyo offered them gifts. Now, there’s a ritual for accepting gifts in Old Japan: the recipient should refuse it three times to allow the giver an opportunity to prove his sincerity. They began running through this complicated procedure but upon their first refusal, the Daimyo said, in a stern voice, “Accept my gift... and do not question my sincerity again.”

This put the characters in a harsh spot. Etiquette demanded that they refuse again, but their Daimyo just gave them a direct order to break that etiquette. Again, etiquette added to drama of the scene rather than just took up time.

The way you hold your fan when you speak says a lot. Use that. Show your character waving the fan around dramatically. It adds to your character’s flavor and makes what could be a droll bit of dialogue much more exciting.

The way you hold your sword when you speak says a lot. Use that. When a samurai enters a room with another samurai, what he does with his sword says something. If he pulls his sword from his obi and puts it on his right side, it means he does not feel in any particular danger. The sword is difficult to reach and unsheathe on your right side:



you must go through multiple motions to do so. Therefore, either you trust the other samurai in the room or you don't feel threatened by him. On the other hand, if you lay your sword on your left side—where it is easy to reach—that also says something about your opinion of the other samurai in the room. Just that simple motion—the laying down of a sword—communicates volumes.

In Old Japan, if two samurai pass each other and their swords come into contact, they have shamed the weapons and a duel is necessary to cleanse the shame. A samurai who wears his sword close to his body says, "I don't want to get into any duels." Meanwhile, another samurai who wears his sword perpendicular to his body is daring others to either get out of his way or pick a fight.

The katana is often worn with the curved blade toward the ground. But, if a samurai feels offended, he may turn the blade up. This makes drawing the blade and cutting an opponent easy as the draw and strike are a single motion. Again, a silent movement that communicates your character's mood to the other players.

More often than not, exceptions define your character. When your samurai breaks with tradition, that will say something. Jess Heinig likes to say that many of my games force players to choose between the expedient choice and the correct choice. Etiquette in Old Japan is filled with these kinds of landmines and bear traps. Your samurai will be faced with many of these choices. How he responds is more often than not a test of character rather than an expression of etiquette.

Questions for Your Character

What non-verbal cues do you use to communicate to others?

A peasant accidentally bumps your sword and immediately falls to his belly and begs forgiveness. How do you respond to the situation?

Makoto (Sincerity)

While the word makoto is often translated as "sincerity," the truth of the matter is, it doesn't mean sincerity at all. Makoto is a highly valued trait in Old Japan and a difficult concept for most Western minds to grasp. For a Westerner, such as myself, sincerity means honesty and genuineness. But for the people of Old Japan, it means something else entirely.

To speak with makoto means to eliminate your ego to ensure harmony is maintained. It also implies that one should strive to maintain the honor and dignity of all involved.

Makoto is a complicated concept and boiling it down to “sincerity” does not do it justice. Makoto stresses harmony. A plea for the most harmonious solution.

Two samurai present two solutions to a problem. The first solution is forthright and presents the facts clearly and plainly. These facts, if they should come to light, will cause many to lose dignity and honor and means a good deal of cleanup will be required to set things right.

The second solution avoids certain facts, presents others in an obscuring light but saves a good many people a great deal of embarrassment and allows everyone to go home without ever thinking about the problem again.

In Old Japan, the second solution has makoto. A samurai will do everything in his power to ensure problems are solved elegantly, cleanly and without fuss or trouble.

Questions for Your Character

How does your samurai view the concept of makoto? Remember, this is not a trivial concept in Old Japan: it is how Old Japan works. Dismissing it means you dismiss a cultural pillar. If you do dismiss it, what price have you paid in doing so?

The Colville Rule

My buddy Matt has a rule. When he plays a board game—or any game, for that matter—the assumption is the players are playing a friendly game. That is, if I make a mistake, I can ask, “Friendly game?” and if everyone agrees, I can take my move back.

The attitude of a friendly game is just that. It’s friendly. Everyone at the table is friends. We’re learning how the game works, we’re trying different things, we’re having fun. A friendly game. We’re playing for the purpose to have fun. Win, yes, but have fun doing it.

But, if at any point I ask “Friendly game?” and someone says, “No,” the rules change. Now, we’re all playing to win. The difference between a friendly game and a not-friendly game is simple: two different goals.

Friendly Game: Playing with your friends is fun.

Cut-Throat Game: Winning is fun.

Both of these are true. They co-exist, are completely opposed to each other, and are both true. (Thank you R.A.W.)

You must, before you begin playing, ask this question. “Friendly Game or Cut-Throat Game?”



Friendly Game

Now, treachery in a friendly game is different, and in a lot of ways, it's more difficult. In a friendly game, treachery is all above board. As the rules already state: no notes, no secret meetings, none of that. Everyone announces their Virtues, aspects and everything else.

We trust each other to plot against our enemies and ourselves because we want a big, dramatic game full of intrigue and romance and revenge.

We assume our greatest enemy (one of the other player samurai) will betray us, but because the player sees the betrayal (no secret meetings, remember), he can play into it. He knows the circumstances. He knows the poison is in the wine. He knows when he drinks it his enemy will mock him and kick him and laugh and laugh and laugh... and leave him choking to death. So the hidden servant can come out of the shadowed corner and save him.

In Old Japan, vendettas last forever. Sometimes even for generations. It isn't until everything has gone too far that the matter must be settled by Swords. And even then, the children carry the matter into another generation.

The point of a Friendly Game is not to beat everyone else. The point is to illustrate a great and tragic life. To be a proper tragedy, your character must die unfulfilled or at the worst possible moment... just when he was about to claim victory over his worst enemy, just when she was about to declare her love, just when he was about to admit his greatest crime... it all falls apart.

That's the point of the game. Tragedy. And I'm putting it in your hands. If you trust your friends to be your enemies and help you achieve that goal, then the Friendly Game is for you.

The Cut-Throat Game

Now, Cut-Throat Games are usually very short-lived. The whole point is to knock off the

other players and "win" by stealing their power. But tales of samurai revenge aren't so simple. We don't want to just kill the man who offended us. Oh, no. Our revenge must be complete! Your enemy doesn't just steal your land. He steals your land, your children, your lover, and then watches you die slowly while he eats your food at your own table, pouring your sake and laughing in your face.

That's samurai revenge.

So, if you want to play that way, feel free. Just go in with the understanding that it's pretty likely that you'll be the one lying on the ground, poisoned, getting laughed at. In a 6-person game, you have a one-in-six chance of winning. You'll probably lose. Go in with that understanding, and you'll come out the other end just fine.

I recommend making a character you don't care about. Don't become too emotionally invested. I know that sounds counterintuitive to why we enjoy roleplaying games, but it works out better this way. Create a character who is doomed to die.

Now, I have to admit... this kind of game is not for me. I don't just like my characters, I love my characters. I spend a whole lot of time and effort coming up with a character I like, and then even more

time and effort fine-tuning that character over the course of months. And so, this particular kind of game doesn't really suit me. I do not enjoy it.

But, other people do. In fact, I know a few people who won't play a Friendly Game. They don't see the point. You play a game to win. Especially this kind of game. You play to win or you don't play at all.

That's what this is all about. The Cut-Throat Game.

A few table rules change here.

First, secret notes and meetings are back in. Secrecy is the key to a PvP game.

Second, players don't announce their Virtues and Aspects, but instead, just announce how many dice they can gather. Discovering your enemies' Virtues (and weakness), Aspects and Devotions suddenly becomes a vital part of the game.

Third, everyone signs an agreement. The agreement states the following:

This is a Cut-Throat Game. We agree all but one of our characters will probably die. We agree this is the experience we want to have and will not be whimpering, sobbing little babies about it if we lose.

So say we all.

With that understanding done, you can go on to treating your friends like your worst enemies. Good luck. And don't come crying to me when you lose.

Narrative Control

In most games, narrative control ends at the tip of your own character's nose. You don't have any authority, you don't have any narrative control, beyond your own character. Each player has narrative control over his own character and the Narrator has authority over the rest of the world.

In *Blood & Honor*, that's not true. Every player has a degree of narrative control, a certain amount of authorial authority. In other words, everybody gets a moment as game master.

If an NPC asks you a question about your background, you have the authority to say just about anything you want. Anything you say creates background for your character, but also creates facts about Old Japan. If you talk about a dog you had as a child, that dog existed—

and may still exist. If you talk about your father, any detail you say exercises narrative control. Talk about your uncle, your mother's castle, your older brother's assassination. You've become the Narrator. You've become the author of the world.

Usually, in most roleplaying games, your degree of control ends there. You can't say anything true about another character because each player has final authority over his own character. In this game, that isn't necessarily true.

In this game, if you want final authorial control over your own character, you have to spend Honor. You have to be open to the idea that other people's ideas about your own character may be just as valid as your own. Now, you have to trust me on this. I find that pretty difficult to swallow myself. I'm a control addict, clinging to the concept that I'm the only person who gets to say what's what about my own character. But, when I thought about it from a different perspective, things began to change.

I asked myself, "What if my character was just an NPC? Would I feel the same way?" I had to think about that a lot. I had to think about the way I treated my own NPCs.

NPCs are a staple of my own gaming style. NPCs are how I get players to care about a story. Players love my NPCs and hate my NPCs. (Nobody cares about a game because the ranged attack mechanic is cool.) They care about a game because they care about their characters and the best way to get players to care about their characters is to give them other characters to interact with.

I know, this sounds like it belongs in the Narrator section, and it does to a certain degree, but in this game—in this game—I'm trusting you, the players, to be the Narrator for a little while. Even if it's just for a moment. And I'm also advocating the concept that every player is the Narrator to a certain degree. And that means every character in the game—even player characters—are NPCs. You have narrative control. And you have to be willing to use it. You also have to be willing to use it responsibly.

Before the game begins, the players should get together and talk about how much authorial control they want. Should wagers be able to affect PCs? To what degree? Find a comfort zone, a place where all the players are willing to say, "Yes." If you don't feel comfortable with what's being said, be sure to say so. I'm assuming you're playing with your friends. You shouldn't feel awkward about speaking up and saying, "You know, I don't think I'll have fun with that."

But this little philosophy—that all characters are free to edit—can be challenging at first. It's not the most conventional way of handling narrative control, but give it a try. Start small and get more daring as

you go. If it doesn't work out for you, change how much authority players get with wagers. There is no rule that says you can't. In fact, this whole section is a rule that says you can.

Talk to the Narrator

I can't say this enough. Communication is the key to a successful roleplaying group.

If you want to play a particular kind of game, tell the Narrator. If you don't want to play a particular kind of game, tell the Narrator.

I know of too many stories that end with a player walking away from a game because it wasn't what he wanted it to be. That's because he wasn't talking to the Narrator.

The Narrator is your friend. Not in a metaphorical way, but in a real way. He's your buddy. You've known him forever. Talk to him.

But, unfortunately, as much as I say this, you'll never do it, not unless there's a rule of some kind. So, I've given the Narrator a tool to help facilitate communication. It's in his section of the book and it gives you an in-game bonus when you use it, but you're not allowed to read that part of the book, so you'll have to try a different tactic.

You'll have to ask him about it.

Failing Forward

One part of this system that knocks players for a loop is the whole idea of narrating your own failure. After all, dice rolls don't determine success or failure; instead, they tell us who gets to narrate the success or failure. So many players ask me, "Why would I want to say that my character fails?"

Because failure is half the fun of drama, that's why.

When you get to narrate how your character fails, you get to say how he fails. That means, you can fail forward. Let me explain.

In most samurai drama, when a character fails, he does so in a way that moves the plot forward. Unfortunately, in roleplaying games, that doesn't really happen. If the party is on one side of a locked door and they can't get it open, the adventure is over. They may as well go home. The rest of the adventure is on the other side of that door and if they can't get it open... well, the GM just has them re-roll until they get the door open.

The "locked door" isn't always a locked door. Sometimes, it's an NPC you have to convince. Fail to convince the NPC, the adventure stops. Sometimes, it's a clue the characters have to find. Fail to find



the clue, the adventure stops. Physical, social and mental locked doors all accomplish the same thing: they stop the adventure.

As players, when you narrate your character's failures, you can unlock the door but add complications.

A physical adversity would be something like jumping across a rooftop to another rooftop. You roll Strength and get privilege. This means you can say how your character succeeds or fails. Let's say you decide to fail and start plummeting down toward the ground. But, you have wagers and with those wagers you can say...

"My character lands on a balcony just under the rooftop," and

"The room that I've landed in belongs to someone I trust," and

"That person hides me from the guards I'm running from."

With those three wagers, you've turned a failure into something else. You could even turn the "someone I trust" into "someone I don't trust" and now that person will hide you... if you pay their price.

Another kind of adversity is *social adversity*: trying to get what you want through dialogue rather than violence. Let's say you are trying to convince the Daimyo's (unfaithful) wife to sleep with you to get evidence of her infidelity. You make a seduction risk and get privilege. You can succeed or fail. Success means she goes along with you. Failure means... she goes along with you. But wagers make things

interesting. She doesn't believe you. You failed. But she goes along with you anyway because...

"She goes along with me, but she suspects I'm up to something." Or,

"She goes along with me because she wants to kill me in my sleep." Or,

"She goes along with me because she's been in love with me for years, waiting for me to say something."

Any three of those things complicate the matter. If you complicate the matter, you're likely to get Honor Points from the Narrator. He likes it when you complicate things and he will reward you.

Mental adversities work out in much the same way. Finding clues is a popular Cunning risk. Just what clues you find make all the difference. Clues complicate everything, especially when they are inconvenient. You enter a room with a dead body. Do you find any clues? Why yes...

"I find a clue. It is a piece from my wife's kimono, torn at the seam."

"I find a clue. One of my own wakizashi!"

"I find a clue. My Daimyo's son in the corner of the room, tears in his eyes, a bloody blade in his hands."

"Does my character succeed or fail?" isn't an important question. "How does my character succeed or fail?" That's what you want to be asking yourself.

Does the result of your character's action result in moving the plot forward? Does it result in complicating things? Does it result in revealing something new and different about your character? Ask these questions when determining the success and failure of your character's actions.

Success and failure are only byproducts of drama.

The Morley-Wick Method of Gaming

(When going out to conventions and game stores, one of the things I hear most is, "I loved that essay you wrote about method acting and gaming." It was a lot of fun to write. Here it is again, slightly edited for content, for your enjoyment.)

Sheldon was a bullfrog. Was a good friend of mine.

Actually, Sheldon is an actor and a musician. He's still a good friend of mine. And by "actor," I mean real actor. Not us wanna-be community theater actors, no, my buddy Sheldon has skills.

So anyway, Sheldon and I used to go to LARPs. (That's "live action roleplaying" for all you unsophisticated heathens.) A lot of LARPs. But Sheldon and I seemed to have a problem. We were

driving home from a particularly boring LARP, complaining as we usually do. I don't remember which of us suggested it, but one of us said, "Maybe we're doing something wrong."

But what could we be doing wrong? We had great characters. Characters with history. Deep history. Well-written and easy to work with. We were rich with potential. Untapped potential.

And yet, there we were. Bored out of our skulls. We'd interact with the other players, but only in a shallow way. There was just nothing to talk about.

And when we looked around, it seemed to us that the most successful players had the most shallow characters. That is, there really wasn't anything to them. So, again, why were we having such a miserable time when those other folks were having so much success?

Our first thought was that the other players were playing the game incorrectly and we were playing the game correctly. We were wrong. Our observation had betrayed us. It took deeper analysis to understand our problem. So, we sat at Norm's (at 2:00 AM) and talked about it. Sheldon came up with the solution.

"We're playing the wrong game," he told me.

I grabbed the ketchup and Tabasco for my eggs. "What do you mean?"

"Our characters have deep secrets."

"Yeah," I said.

"That nobody knows but us."

That made me pause. And think. "Yeah," I said. Slowly.

We spent the rest of the night talking about the problem. It wasn't a problem with the other players. They were playing the game correctly. The problem was with us.

I think Sheldon also nailed down the guy who could solve our problem. David Mamet. The director/screenwriter. His books and essays on "the method" approach to acting really inspired Sheldon, which in turn, inspired me. Using Mamet's critiques, we came up with a solution to our problem.

From Mamet, to Sheldon, to me. To you.

What's Wrong?

So, after that long introduction, let me explain what Sheldon and I were doing wrong and why it relates to David Mamet.

"The method" is an acting technique. Actors try replicating real life emotions, calling on sense memories from their own past, similar

to the emotions the character experiences. Method actors also create “rich interior landscapes.” That is, they create detailed histories for their characters. They know everything about their characters, so when a circumstance arises, they’ll know how their character would respond.

Rich interior landscapes.

Watching an actor on stage, watching him respond to something seemingly innocuous with a cryptic sigh or a mysterious glance or some other enigmatic gesture. The audience doesn’t know what it means, but obviously, the actor’s done his research. He’s done the work. He’s using the method.

Unfortunately, the audience doesn’t know what it means. The actor isn’t communicating anything to the audience.

In other words, he’s failing the entire purpose of acting. Communicating to the audience.

As gamers, we have a similar problem. We come up with elaborate and detailed backgrounds. Rich internal landscapes. And then, when



we start playing, whole sessions go by without the other players having a single clue.

Characters have secrets. Sure they do. That's fine. But authors use devices to give the audience clues as to why a character responds a certain way. We get to see that rich internal landscape. Even if a reaction is a mystery, we trust that somewhere down the line, the author will let us in on the secret. We'll eventually understand all those cryptic sighs, mysterious glances and enigmatic gestures. Eventually.

But in roleplaying games, we keep secrets. We write the Narrator private notes. We take him aside for a whispered meeting. We keep that 24 page background to ourselves. Nobody else gets to see it. It's ours and ours alone.

The method. Secrecy. Otherwise known as mental masturbation.

You are, quite literally, playing with yourself.

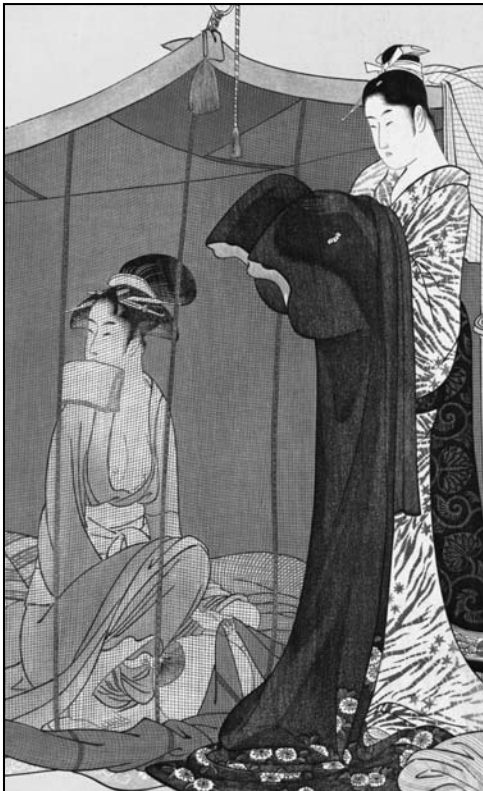
Nobody else is invited. Nobody else gets to know about your character's past. That lost lover. That blood feud with your father. That secret conversation you had with your mother. Your childhood rivalry

with your sister. Your hidden marriage. That secret you've kept for twenty years and never told a soul.

All that rich background you're selfishly keeping to yourself that no other player will ever know. It's yours and yours alone. And you're the only one who will ever enjoy it.

This is what's wrong. We've got great characters and nobody knows but us. Why is that? Why do we feel we need to hide our characters' secrets from the other players?

Well, most LARP settings are PvP (player vs. player), so we don't want others to know our secrets. We assume the other players will take advantage of out-of-character information. And, sadly, we're usually correct in this assumption. But at a table top



game, surrounded by friends and people we trust, why do we still follow the same behavior?

Reflex perhaps. Maybe just habit.

Well, let's break that habit. Let's get out of the "method" philosophy of character creation and play. Let's try something different.

Let's have open secrets.

Open Secrets

Now, I should be up front about this. Many of these techniques are not new—I didn't invent them—but putting them together in one set, with one philosophy guiding them, I think qualifies as a new approach.

I'll take you through it, step-by-step. Read through them, adopt the steps you like, throw out the ones you don't, come up with your own. After all, this whole chapter is about modifying things to your own group's tastes. Step-by-step.

Character Background

One page.

That's all you get. One page. That's all you get. Don't try writing small or using a tiny font.

One page.

I know, you've got a lot to say about your character. This is what I call "Character Control Syndrome," or "CCS." You think this is the last time you're going to have any control over your character, so you want to squeeze as much content and detail in there as possible.

Relax. Take deep breaths.

Just write one page. In fact, don't even finish filling out the page. Leave a few details open. Figure out what you think is important, but leave the rest blank. Vague. Open. Let me tell you why.

I was playing a character once. A magic cop. I really didn't have any idea about his past. I just kind of made him an arcane Columbo. But I bumped into a story involving a kidnapped girl. Something triggered in my head. I had no idea about my cop's family. Wife, kids. No clue. I hadn't really thought about it. But at that moment—that very moment—I knew he had a daughter. And he lost that daughter. I didn't know how or why. I just knew it. I knew it.

That one little detail, a detail I didn't know until I started playing, changed the entire course of the character's past and future.

Completely changed him. Turned him from an arcane Columbo into something much deeper. And, in a lot of ways, a lot scarier.

All because I had kept a detail open and filled it during play.

From that moment on, that little detail consumed the rest of the character's path. That one little detail informed so many of that character's decisions from that moment on. Something I made up on the spot. If I already had the character's family detailed out, if I already knew everything there was to know about that character, I wouldn't have been able to grasp on to that story. I wouldn't have been able to say, "I lost a daughter, too." And the character who was nothing more than a cliché gimmick turned into one of my favorite characters.

Because I *didn't* know everything about his past.

So, one page. That's all you get. If that. You don't need to know all the details before you roll dice. Some details—most, in fact—you can discover days, weeks, even months after the first session. You'll bump into things that inspire you to fill in those blanks. Keep an eye out for even the tiniest details. After all, like grandma says, it's the little things that make the soup.

External Exposition

Tony is a friend of mine. He has a style of play that's always intrigued me. Specifically, he practices what I like to call "external exposition."

He doesn't just tell you what his character is doing, he tells you why his character is doing that. Like an author, he narrates his character's action, using his character's inner thoughts as a guide to his physical actions. For example...

Tony's playing a samurai historian. He's one of the many samurai visiting the Daimyo during a winter party. As the Narrator, I ask Tony, "What are you doing?" This is his reply.

"I stand up," he says. And he stands up. "And I walk across the room. My pace is slow. My head, hung low. My hand hangs on my katana pommel. Gripping it. Like I don't know what to do with it. When I get to the Daimyo, I hesitate. You can see there's something in my eyes that tells you I don't want to do what I'm about to do. And I think about the promise to the Spy Master I made. And the promise she made me. And then, I say, 'My lord... I find myself in the position where I must challenge you to a duel.'"

Tony pantomimes all these behaviors. He pantomimes his hand on the sword. He walks across the room slowly. Uncertainty in his

stride. And when he talks to you, his tone reflects the exposition he's giving.

The exposition punctuates the action. Not only does he give you external clues, but he gives you internal clues as well. "I think about the promise..." He even gives a bit more information than he should. "And the promise she made to me."

Tony leaves himself wide open when he plays. He exposes his character's weaknesses, keeps no secrets. Why does Tony do this?

Because he knows his friends won't take advantage of him and sabotage his fun. Besides, part of the fun is knowing other characters' weaknesses. And having other players know yours. We put weaknesses on our sheets because we want them exploited. We want to get hurt, get knocked down, get beaten within an inch of our lives. How can we come back from the bottom if we never even get knocked down?

You're probably familiar with the term "Mary Sue character." Over-idealized characters who never make a mistake, never flounder, never flub their lines. You see them all the time in fan fiction. You see them all the time in professional fiction, too.

You see them even more in roleplaying games. A lot more. Especially when you run con demos. Oh, Blessed Eris. Flashbacks. Flashbacks!

Excuse me for a moment...

It's okay. I'm back.

One of the reasons I designed this system with weaknesses was to avoid Mary Sue characters. Now, if you play your character close to the chest, if you don't let the other players see his foibles as well as his strengths, no-one will ever get to see that great background you developed or hear that inner monologue they'd usually get to hear if they were reading a book or watching TV.

Use external exposition. You don't have to do it like Tony does. You can find your own way to do it. But do it. Let the other players in. Let them see the man behind the curtain. Armed with wagers, they'll be more than happy to let your character live out that tired old Chinese cliché about "interesting times."

And you'll thank them for it.

Using Fashion

A good tool for using external exposition is fashion. Now, samurai symbolism, heraldry, use of color and style is ten times more complicated than the most elaborate heraldry systems of our own

middle ages. So complicated, in fact, I could write seven books about it. Instead of going through the elaborate rules, let's try something different.

Make it up yourself.

Use your clothes to tell a story about your character.

Trust me, if you knew the actual rules, you'd see how completely arbitrary they really are. So, instead, let's just make them up.

When your character appears, tell the colors she's wearing, but more importantly, tell what they mean. If you know some of the rules for Japanese fashion, please feel free to use them, and even teach the other players, but please—please!—don't be a "fashionista." Don't tell the other players what they do wrong and insist everyone do everything "right." Besides, during this era in Old Japan's history, fashion rules are changing all the time based on the whims of the elite.

"The brown in my vest and the green in my sleeves means, 'I am working, but I am also looking for companionship tonight.'"

"The red rose I wear across the blue sash means, 'I am looking for assistance with my Revenge.'"

"The black swathes in my grey dress means, 'I should have done more to protect him.'"

No Passing Notes in Class

Many players like passing notes and having secret meetings with the Narrator. Especially in a game like this one where everyone has a secret to keep.

Here's the news. That's done.

It's no fun to sit around while the Narrator goes off into another room with another player and has a private chat. For those of you who've done this (including in games I've run myself), I applaud your patience and your selflessness, but you don't need to do it anymore.

Secret meetings get handled in front of other players. You got a note? Say it out loud.

Once again, we're all grown-ups. We're all friends. We all want to have a good time.

And nobody gives a single flaming turd about your rich internal landscape if they never get to see it.

Share Plots

One of the side-benefits of being open about your character's past is finding parallels with other characters.

You've got a vendetta? I've got a vendetta!

You've got a secret romance? I've got a secret romance!

You've got a hated uncle? I've got a favorite uncle! Maybe they're the same!

The more connections with other characters you can make, the better. Giving you both something in common, something to talk about, something to commiserate about.

Trigger Other Characters' Plots

This takes a lot of trust. Use at your own risk.

The Narrator is a busy guy. He's got five to six players to worry about, and sometimes, he just doesn't have the time or focus to hit everybody every session. Sometimes, players get overlooked. Sad, but true.

With this little trick, you'll never get overlooked.

As above, share your backgrounds with the other players. Send them all around the table. Everybody gets a peek. Look for trouble areas. You know, places where you could cause trouble if you were the Narrator.

When you see an opportunity to cause trouble... do it. You've got wagers, you've got Wisdom and Cunning risks. Do it.

When other people know how to push your buttons, they get pushed. And as bad as that might sound, it's a lot better than getting overlooked by a busy Narrator.

Flashbacks

I also allow other players to trigger flashback scenes with style points. If another character does something odd, reacts in an unexpected way, or otherwise catches the players off-guard (even if it's the player in control of the character), someone spends a style point and we're off to a flashback sequence.

Each player can spend a style point to participate, playing a part in the flashback. The player with the spotlight can run the scene as the Narrator or let the Narrator do her own job or let another player be the Narrator for a while. We invent a scene, right there on the spot, with circumstances similar enough to the scene we were just playing, adding deeper meaning to the scene and the character.

But remember the Lost Rule. Don't make the flashback more important than the current scene. Flashbacks provide additional flavor to current action. Flashbacks do not eclipse current action.

Of course, you could run an entire session as a flashback scene if it's really important. An example of that may be Shara reading her mother's missing diary pages, finally discovering who killed her mother. Three degrees of cool here.

1. First degree of cool: the Narrator tells me what they say. Eh.
2. Second degree of cool: the Narrator makes the prop pages himself and gives them to me to read. That's pretty hip.
3. Third degree of cool. The group plays out the events in the pages with all of us discovering together what happened. Yeah, it'll take me weeks to recover from that.

Conclusion

Here's the big lesson. Keeping secrets is fun. Revelation is fun. Revealing a secret you've been keeping for months is a lot of fun. You don't have to use all the techniques I've listed above, nor do you have to get rid of secrets.

But keeping everything to yourself isn't just selfish, it's spoiling everyone's fun. Including yours.

Women

Women have less power in Old Japan than men. Certainly, there are women who hold title, but this really is a man's world.

Women must be crafty and cunning to gain power here. They must be stronger than men. In Old Japan, a man is given everything. A woman has to fight for it with every ounce of energy she can muster. This makes being a woman in Old Japan more difficult... but that also makes it more fun.



Questions for Your Character

If your character is a woman, what did she have to do to gain her position? It was not granted to her—most samurai positions are granted to men—so what did she have to do to gain it? What sacrifices did she have to make?

As a woman, your position is to serve a man: your husband, your brother, your father, etc. Which man do you serve above all others? If you want to say, “I serve myself!” then consider exactly what man you show respect to make him believe you serve him above all others.

Musha Shugyo

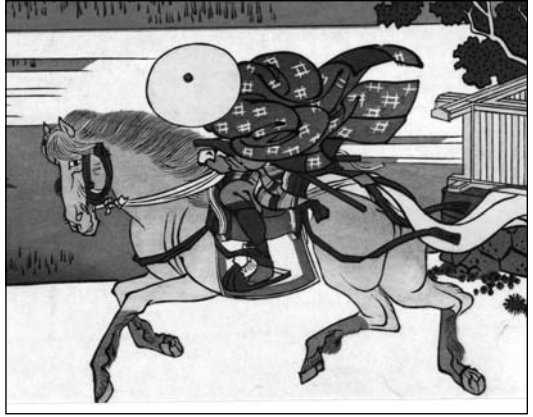
If a samurai undertakes *musha shugyo* (“warrior’s quest”), he displaces himself from his family, his Clan and all that keeps him safe and goes out into the world as a ronin with nothing but his sword. The purpose of his journey is to hone his skills.

Undertaking such a journey is not a trivial matter. While most Daimyo will respect a samurai’s need to go on a *musha shugyo*, giving him a specific amount of time in which he must return, others will see such a request as a neglect of duty.

Any samurai who walks the warrior’s quest must do so without any indication of Clan or status. To the rest of the world, he is a ronin and nothing more. He may visit other Clans and challenge samurai to hone his skills. He may even join another Daimyo’s army (so long as that Daimyo doesn’t turn him against his actual Daimyo).

Questions for Your Character

Has your character taken a warrior’s quest? What happened? If not, when?



Musha Shugyo in the Game

If a samurai (or even multiple samurai) wish to undergo the *musha shugyo*, they may do so as a Season Action. A samurai may only perform the *musha shugyo* once in his career of service. At the end of the term, he returns with his Giri Rank one rank higher, regardless of what rank it was before he left.

A Final Note

I just want to say this one more time.

I trust you.

As a Narrator, as a game designer and as a fellow player, and, finally, as someone who loves roleplaying games, I trust you.

I didn't make rules to stop the wankers and cheaters and selfish bullies who ruin the game because they're too caught up in their own ego to notice other people are sitting at the table.

I didn't do that because I trust you.

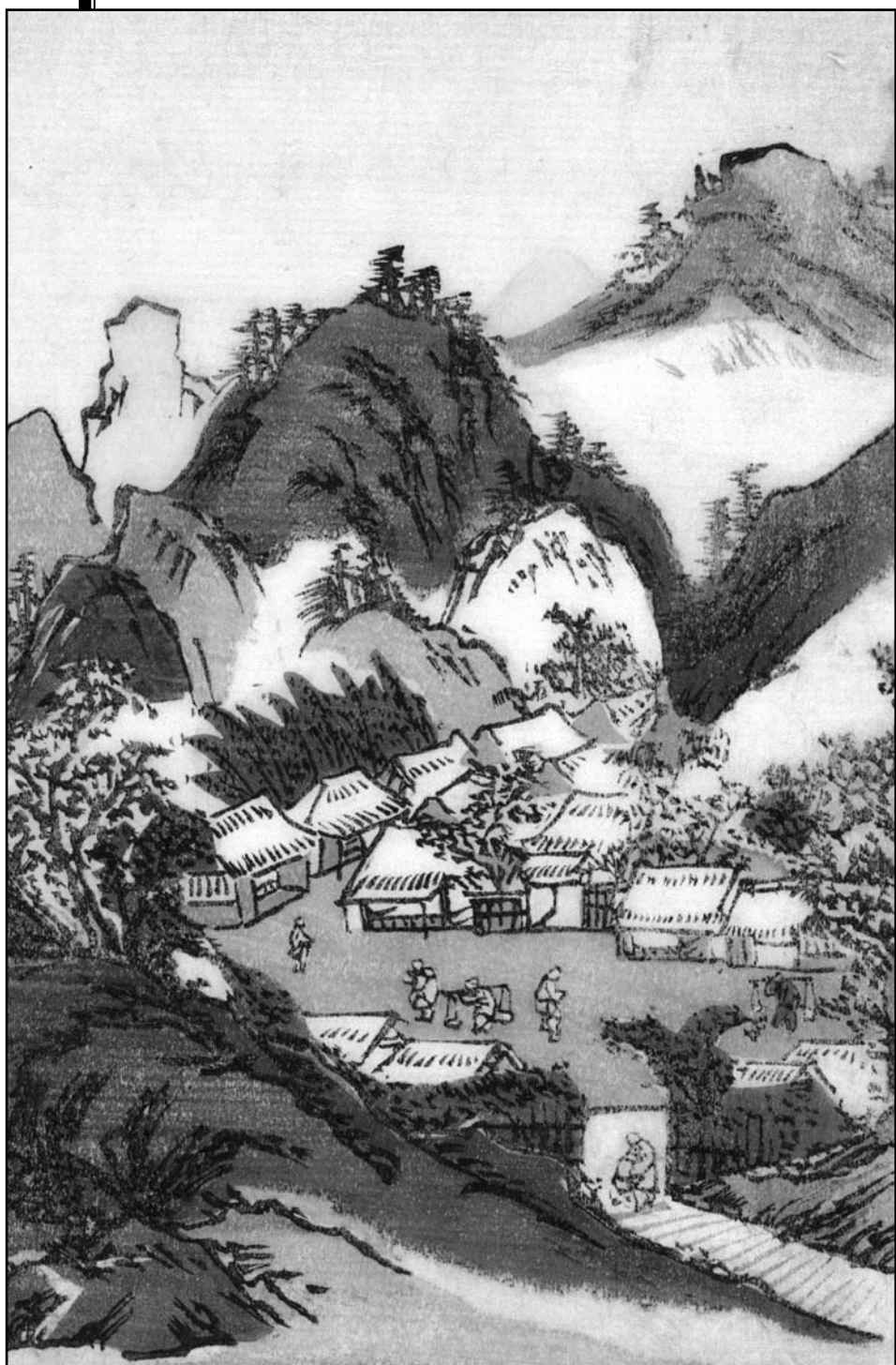
I trust you to help your fellow players make your time around the table—no matter what game you play—as enjoyable as possible. That's always my goal when I sit down. Maybe it's because I started my gaming career as the Narrator, and I learned early on that my job was a hard one. Looking out for other people's enjoyment.

I trust you to do that, too. And I hope I've showed you ways to do that with this chapter.

And with that in mind, I have one last question...

... friendly game?





Narrator

As you may have gathered from the title, this chapter is for the Narrator. Players can read it if they wish—there are no metaplot secrets or spoilers—but reading this chapter is a lot like learning how a magic trick works. And trust me, learning how a trick works is a lot less sexy than watching the trick as a sucker sitting in the audience. In the audience, everything appears effortless. Magic. Once you know about the trap door in the floor or the marked cards or the slight hand gesture that hides the bird from plain sight... trust me, knowing how the trick works isn't as cool as it sounds.

After all, a Narrator is a kind of magician. Magicians create something out of nothing. Pulling rabbits out of hats, making beautiful assistants appear and disappear, pulling your card out of a deck of 52. Creating something from nothing.

The characters the players own are creations of fiction, but if the Narrator does his job, he'll convince you that your character does exist. To pull emotions out of you from pure fiction.

When you feel your enemy's sword pierce your flesh.

When you feel the passion of revenge bursting your heart.

When you feel the cool mist of the morning, looking over the hills of Old Japan.

That is the work of the Magician. Making something from nothing.

In a dark theater, watching the hero on the screen, and you feel his pain as your own.

Watching the TV, feeling the heroine's heartbreak, the pain as real as your own.

Reading the novel, the suspense in the detective's chest, pounding as hard as your own.

This is the Narrator's primary goal. To make the players feel what the characters feel. What they see. What they smell. A hint of danger. That whiff of scented hair. The taste of the wine. The bliss of new love. The cut of steel against flesh.

All of these things are possible. Something from nothing.

Magic.

I can help you. I wrote this chapter to help you. But if you're a player, reading any further will ruin the trick. So, stop now.

山は決して落ちません。
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But, if you are the Narrator, keep reading. You and I have a lot of work to do.

How This Chapter Works

Okay, now that we've gotten rid of the players, you and I can talk in earnest. And yeah, I know, you've got that one player who's gonna read this chapter anyway. Don't worry about him. I've got a trick for him, too.

This chapter is sort of a mish-mash of advice. Storytelling is more of an Art than a Science, so I've decided to take a less formal approach here. A conversation between you and me.

First, we'll talk about some basics. Things you could apply to just about any roleplaying game. Narrator techniques that may, or may not, already be familiar to you. Advice I've found useful for running games.

Then, I'll start giving you specific advice. How to use the system to your best advantage.

The Narrator Toolbox

Every mechanic has a toolbox.

You don't need to use everything. Just the right tool for the right job. Some tools, you never use. Some, you think you'll never use... until it just so happens to be the exact right tool at the exact right time.

Every Narrator should have a toolbox.

You don't need to use everything. Just the right tool for the right job. Some tools, you never use. Some you use so often, you need to replace them from wear and tear. Some, you think you'll never use... until it just so happens to be the exact right tool at the exact right time.

Consider this chapter a kind of hardware store. Full of tools. You don't have to use all of them. You don't even have to use some of them. Go ahead and browse through the aisles, try things out, give them a good look, and figure out which you want to add to your toolbox.

By the way, you should get yourself a notebook. Write "Narrator's Toolbox" on the cover. Start writing things down. Writing ideas that come to you out of the blue. Ideas from other people's books, blogs and podcasts. Ideas from this book. Write them down. Keep them for that every other Friday when you run your game. When one of your players presents an opportunity to use one of those tools, use it.

The purpose of this chapter is to fill that toolbox. Give you as many tricks and techniques as we can. To keep your players on their toes, to make them feel that magic. As we go along, you may bump into a tool you don't want to use. Don't feel compelled to use it. Read through each section, decide if anything is appropriate for your group, then either write them in your book or leave them alone.

I ran *Blood & Honor* for many different groups and for each group, I ran it a little differently. Different rules for different groups, but the same game. I listened to what each group wanted and modified the game to suit that group. That meant I emphasized some rules, de-emphasized others. I even dropped a few rules and added others.

Listen to your group. I'll be saying that a lot this chapter.

The Magician

I've made this analogy before. The Narrator as magician. Making something from nothing.

In order to perform his trick, a magician needs to take certain steps. First, he needs preparation to know what he's going to do before he gets up on the stage. He needs to know the trick. Second, he needs the proper skills to make the trick look convincing. To fool the audience who is ready to be fooled. To be able to sell the trick.

Preparation and Performance.

Let's take those one at a time.

Preparation

Setting up your illusions requires just a little bit of prep work. Fortunately, the best thing about a trick is that the audience is doing all the work. Just a little sleight of hand and their imaginations fill in the rest.

As a Narrator, you've got the same advantages. The players want to be entertained. Want to be fooled. That means you've got them right where you want them.

For most roleplaying games, preparation comes in writing adventures. Sitting down for hours on end, writing up characters, settings, plot twists. Fortunately for you, *Blood & Honor* doesn't work like that.

The Revenge of Lady Shiko

(This was originally a Houses of the Blooded adventure. When playtesting Blood & Honor, I simply converted the details over from “ven” to “samurai.”)

Writing adventures for *Blood & Honor* is easy. I mean, easy.

I’ve run the game for multiple groups. Convention games, house games, no matter. Months of playtest taught me many things about the game, but the one I found most remarkable was this:

If you let them, the players run the game for you.

Take for example a particular house game I ran for one playtest group. I’d forgotten I was supposed to show up and was in a rush. I had no idea what to do. So, when the game began, I turned to one of the players...

It’s early morning and you aren’t quite recovered from last night’s festivities. A servant knocks on the floor and you give him permission to enter.

“Sir,” she says, “it seems we’ve captured a spy.”

I went ahead and told the player Three Things about the spy.

1. She has long, brown hair.
2. She is Courageous (establishing her highest Virtue is Courage).
3. She has said nothing since her capture.

The other Officers quickly joined and the servants brought in the spy. When the spy was thrown to the floor, one of the players said, “I have the Aspect Knows Everybody. Do I know her?”



I answered, “I don’t know. Make a Wisdom risk.”

This is very important. Whenever a player asks you a question about the world, about another character, about a ritual, about anything, your answer should be:

“I don’t know. Make a Wisdom risk.”

He made a successful Wisdom risk with three wagers. He determined the following things about the spy:

- She is from an enemy Clan.
- She is cousin to one of the Officers.
- She is my close friend.
- She is sympathetic to our Clan.

After that, other players started making Wisdom and Cunning risks, further defining her character. From those risks, we determined:

- She was in the castle to gain revenge for her sister.
- And a baby was involved.
- A bastard child.
- But nobody at the table was responsible.

I took it from there. When they asked her more questions, she filled in the details. Her name was Lady Shiko, a Spy Master and neighbor. It turned out their Daimyo took advantage of her sister and one Season later, the consequences came. Birth killed her sister and she came to the castle looking for revenge.

The players then found themselves in a predicament. Here is a legitimate claim of revenge. In their home.

The entire “adventure” wrote itself. Actually, to be correct, the adventure was written by the players. They used wagers and style points, determining the facts surrounding Lady S and her sordid past. They created problems for themselves. Of course, I rewarded them with Honor Points.

Another example.

The Officers learn of trouble in a village within the Daimyo’s Province. Something to do with bandits. I offer the opportunity for Wisdom wagers. This is what the players come up with.

- The village produces rice and sake.
- The villagers are sympathetic to the bandits.
- The villagers are giving rice and sake to the bandits to sell on the black market.
- The bandits are waiting to trap the officers when they arrive.
- The bandits are led by a general from another Clan.

- Our Daimyo destroyed the enemy Clan and now reigns over their lands.

These are the wagers my players came up with. All I told them was, “There’s trouble in a village.” That’s it. The players built the rest of the adventure. A trap they were walking into.

What Did We Learn?

Both of these “adventures” came from the players. All the Narrators did was set up the circumstances. We put the meat in the stew, but the player threw in everything else. The players created the situations. Of course, you have to show them they can do this.

The first couple of times you play, encourage the players to use wagers to define the world around them. Chances are, they won’t know what to do. The concept is fairly alien to most roleplayers: the line between player and Narrator firmly drawn.

Get rid of that line. Obliterate it. Nuke it from orbit. It’s the only way to be sure.

When the players ask, “Is it cool for me to do this?” answer, “Yes!” Enthusiasm. Let them know they can define the world. That’s part of the game mechanic. It’s a rule.

Of course, now that you have a bunch of Narrators sitting around the table, your own style of running the game has to adapt. You can’t set things in stone. You have to be ready to go with the flow.

Don’t make plans. Make contingencies.

NPCs

Prepping the game also includes having a long list of NPCs ready for the players to interact with. Now, this really is my favorite part of the game. I love making characters. So much so that I’m a really bad player. I’ve always got new character ideas running around in my head. Because I get to be the Narrator all the time, I get to explore these character ideas, but when I’m a player, I only get to use one at a time.

As a Narrator, you should keep a whole cornucopia of characters around at all times. Heroes, villains, victims, martyrs, traitors, and the betrayed. Having a good character waiting in the wings makes you look prepared. Having the right character waiting in the wings makes you look like a magician.

When designing an NPC, start with the Three Things. That’s Three Things that are true about the character. I usually pick from a short list:

1. The character's Clan,
2. The character's highest Virtue,
3. A prominent physical feature,
4. A prominent reputation,
5. A relationship with one of the Officers,
6. Married or single
7. Or just about any other detail that's important to the group at hand

That gives the players something to work with. If I have a more concrete idea about the character, I list a few other things as well, but I like to keep my options open.

Sometimes, I even let the players in on the character's goals. "She wants to get married," or "She wants to arrange for her husband's murder." Giving away secrets like that really isn't giving away secrets. When the players have knowledge, they use it. Sometimes, they even use it to set themselves up for tragedy.

This is a Good Thing. We give them style points for stuff like that.

Getting involved with a dangerous lover or plotting with an obvious villain makes stories happen. Players who avoid danger and trouble don't get rewarded. Playing it safe avoids story, avoids conflict, avoids fun. Makes my job hard. Bad form. No style.

So, when you make NPCs, make them fun. In fact, when we get to the next section, I'll show you a little trick your players can use to set themselves up for tragedy.

Technique

A magician can have all the preparation he needs and still pull off a lousy trick. That's because how you present the trick is just as important as the trick itself.

This section discusses Narrator Technique. What you actually do during the game. How you stand, how you speak, how you present information. Everything.

When I go to conventions or game stores, I see a lot of Narrators sitting at tables, hiding behind a screen, a monotone drawl oozing from their lips as they chew on potato chips and suck down soda.

Now, I don't use this kind of language a lot, so pay attention.

This is **bad**. This is **wrong**. This is not how you **engage your players**.

Instead, I suggest the following.

Mood & Atmosphere

One of the most important things to establish right up front is the mood and atmosphere of Old Japan. Now, some groups may not be comfortable with music in the background, candles lit, costumes, or other things I've got listed here. I've tried to give you different kinds of ways to establish a thoroughly Japanese feel to your game. Pick the ones you think your players will like.

To begin, think of your favorite samurai films and novels. The way they look. Think of the smells. Hot rice. Perfume. Scent is a powerful and underestimated sense. Perfume the room with scented candles. Go to the used bookstore, get some old books and leave them open around the room. Old bibles and those Reader's Digest books are the best: they're big and smell great. Nothing beats the smell of old books.

Dim the lights, but not too much. People have to see their character sheets. Give the table a single source of light. Get one of those paper lanterns and put it right in the center of the table, then turn off all the other lights.

You can also influence the way your room feels by baking bread. This is really pretty easy and goes a long way to making a room feel different. Freshly baked bread has a distinct smell that invokes specific emotions. It just feels old.

Also provide exotic foods for your players. Finger foods are generally very affordable, but don't get chips and salsa. No, no. Get cheese and those crackers that look home-baked. Cheese and crackers are generally just as cheap as chips and soda—sometimes even cheaper, depending on where you shop. Same thing, completely different feel.



You can also pick up a cheap sake set in most grocery stores these days for twenty bucks or less: about the same cost as a set of plastic cups. Fill up those glasses with your favorite non-soda. Instead of snacking on potato chips, get a bag of edamame. (It comes in cheap boiling bags these days and costs just about as much as potato chips.)

As for music, I've collected and arranged a whole CD worth of music from kabuki theater.

As for maintaining the delicate mood you've set, I recommend using a story candle. Here's how it works.

A little ritual of mine (appropriate for this game). The story candle sits in a special place in the gaming room. Always in sight. When my friends get together, we chat about all the things we've seen and done since we saw each other last. I give them about forty-five minutes or so. Then, I take down the story candle.

Everyone knows that as soon as I light the candle, the game starts. I turn down the lights, take out the matches—don't use a lighter; there's nothing like the smell of sulfur—and light the candle. I usually also play a song appropriate to the theme of the night. If the players pay attention, they may even get a heaping helping of foreshadowing. As soon as the song is over, I give a brief reminder of what's happened so far. Then, the game starts.

As long as the candle remains lit, the game is on. Monty Python quotes, questions about this week's episode of *Heroes* or Star Trek invokes are all bad form. As long as the candle remains lit. Then, when the game closes, I blow out the candle, leaving everyone in darkness for a few moments. Then, we turn on the light. I like that last few moments of darkness. Everyone sits quietly and thinks for a moment. Well worth the silence.

Get Up

Now that you've got the room looking and feeling right, let's get you into order.

First, get rid of your chair.

Stand. Walk around. Talk to the players. Get over their shoulders. Sit on the ground. Invite them to do the same thing.

Get up. Move. Get your blood pumping.

When you fill the role of an NPC, take on that role. If he has a limp, then limp. If he's missing an eye, shut one of your eyes. If he lisps, then lisp.

Every NPC you play should have a distinct and unique voice. Lighter and sweeter. Darker and angrier. Moody. Elated. Seductive. Heart-broken.

When you create an NPC, write down three things (yes, those Three Things) that are true about the NPC. Make them physical characteristics, vocal patterns, mannerisms... something the players can see.

So, get up. Move. Show the players something. If they don't see it, then it doesn't exist.

Don't Look Down

Not just in a metaphorical sense, either.

When you talk to your players as an NPC, engage them. Look them in the eye. Don't look at their shoes or their chins. Look them square in the face.

Talk to them like they actually exist. Talk to them like they are their characters. And when an NPC gets shot down or humiliated or embraced or forgiven... show them that emotion in your eyes.

Don't look at your shoes. Don't look at your dice. Look at me.

Show it in your lips, in your voice, in every part of your body.

Pay attention to the way you move. Pay attention to the words you choose. Pay attention to everything.

And look at them while you're plotting their demise. Let them see that in your gaze.

Don't look down.

Look at them. Show the players something. If they don't see it, then it doesn't exist.

(My editor suggested this cheat. If looking someone else in the eyes makes you uncomfortable, watch the space right below his eyebrows. Don't be too obvious, but



just make sure you are staring at that little patch of flesh. Makes it a bit easier for those of us who could use another rank of Courage.)

Show Me, Don't Tell Me

If the first two didn't get you, this one should.

I can't tell you how many Narrators I meet who show me huge notebooks full of "world notes."

"How much of this have your players seen?" I ask them.

"Almost none of it," they tell me.

My response is always the same. "Then what good is it?"

A Narrator's primary job is to entertain the players. You do this by showing them the world. Not telling them about it. Showing it.

Don't tell them about a super cool and obscure piece of Japanese culture you read about in some archaeological journal. Show it to them. Write it into the adventure. More than that, let them do it.

Let them *feel* the wind on their cheeks. The cool, cool wind on a hot, hot day. The sun beating down, making your breath burn the inside of your nose. But there's the wind, smelling like the sea, cooling your skin.

Let them *feel* the Daimyo's court. The bodies in elegant gowns and robes too hot for such quarters, making everything smell like bodies and perfume. The sweat beading down your back. The itch you wish you could scratch. Silk, satin and velvet stuck to your skin. The seat too small. The wine far, far away. And outside... and outside that Autumn breeze and open air. Not the smell of sweat and jasmine.

Let them *feel* the raucous party. The music overhead from the chamber orchestra playing on the platform suspended over the room. The smell of powder in the wigs and on the makeup. The smell of grilled chicken and steaming vegetables. The cool, biting taste of the plumb wine. And the taste of the hidden kiss you stole in that dark corridor when no one was looking. The smell of her hair still on your skin. Feeling her sweat on the small of her back. The sound of her whispers in your ear. Promises to be kept when all the fires are put out.

Let them *feel* the winter. The winter so cold, it makes your teeth ache. The painful numbness of your ears and your nose. Blinking to keep your eyes moist. Your bones aching. The wind sneaking through your winter clothes, scratching your skin. Your toes burning. So cold, it burns. *So cold, it burns.*

"The little things make the soup," my mother tells me. And I can still taste it. The beef she sautéed all night. The fresh vegetables she just

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picked up from the store, crunching between my teeth. The broth, so hot it burns, but so sweet you don't care.

Show me.

Faking It

Sometimes the players will just catch you off guard. They'll throw you a curve you never saw coming and you've got two choices: duck or swing away.

This is what divides the men from the boys, my friend. The real test.

Can you improvise? Can you adapt? Can you overcome?

If you think you can't, let me persuade you just how wrong you really are.

Just like everything else, improvising is a skill. The more you practice, the better you get. But there are some tricks you can employ to help you out.

And I'm not going to talk in abstracts. Here's a real example from a real game I ran.

Consider this.

In my first playtest group, one of the players said that the Daimyo's wife was unfaithful. As we were playing the game, speculation ran rampant as to whom the Daimyo was unfaithful with.

During the first game session, the issue came up. Someone called for a Wisdom risk. One of the Officers—the Spy Master—was alone with the Daimyo reporting on her infidelities. She made a Wisdom risk and started spending her wagers. The first wager was spent and a young woman said, "She's unfaithful with me." Then, another wager: "And we're plotting to murder him."

Remember: she's alone with the Daimyo right now.

She declares surprise. She makes a Prowess risk. And right there, in the very first session, she murders the Daimyo.

What do you do now?

Take a ten minute break. Your players will understand. They've just completely derailed what your plans were and you need a second to catch up.

Me? I told them I needed to run to the bathroom. Five minute break. I locked the door, sat down and started thinking.

Five minutes in the bathroom. I'm ready for them now. Of course, things will not go as planned. But I've got goals and that's more than what they've got.

So, there you have it. A real example of improvising. How did I do it? Easy.

I knew what my players wanted and I gave it to them.

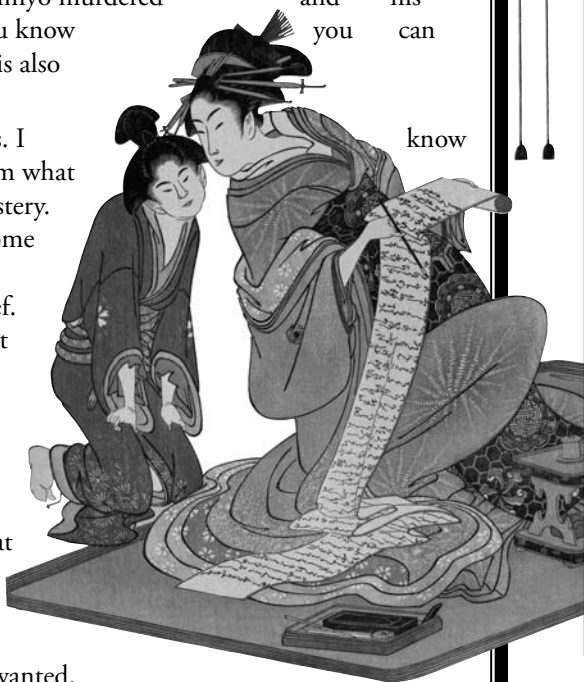
The Spy Master was the new Daimyo. That's fine. I let her find the Daimyo's secret diary. You know. The one that details all his dealings with the other Daimyos. She learned his plots and plans and just how delicate the Province really was. Now, she had to deal with all her neighbors who perceived her as a new Daimyo (a weak Daimyo) and were ready to march when Spring thawed all the snow from the fields.

I told her that the diary would allow her to say one thing that was true about each of the other Officers. Some kind of dark secret they were trying to keep that the Daimyo already knew about. I told her there was nothing they could do to stop her. She was the Daimyo. She could define their characters. She grinned and started putting together awful secrets for each of them.

I also asked her what kind of Daimyo she was going to be. Ambitious? Clever? Mad? As for the other samurai, all the Officers now had a brand new Daimyo to deal with. I also openly told them, "You've seen the Daimyo murdered and his position usurped. Now you know you can do it, too..." Obviously, this also influenced a lot of things.

I listened to my players. I know what they want. I give them what they want. Some want mystery. Others want adventure. Some want romance. The wimp wants to be the comic relief. I give them what they want and drive them by their own desires. In this case, the players wanted a Cut-Throat Game and they didn't know it. Or, they didn't know how to say that openly. They all wanted to compete for the role of the Daimyo. Okay, then. They got what they wanted.

Oh, boy did they.



Spotlight

One concept I've been toying with myself is the idea of "the spotlight." I didn't think of this one; I've been hearing a lot of people talk about it, but I've been toying with it for a while, trying to give it my own twist.

Every session, pick one player. That player has the Spotlight. (Capitalizing it makes it a rule.) This means that player is the focus of the game. The Narrator and the other players work toward making that player's samurai the center of that session.

Using the Spotlight allows you to focus all your powers on a single player. Ask the other players to take the roles of significant NPCs

One character has the spotlight. Other players assist the Narrator in making that moment special. You'll get your own. You play an important NPC in that player's background.

Set your Spotlight on one character per Year. Let the players switch around the focus, helping each other tell their characters' stories.

Mix Backgrounds

If you find a common element in two different characters' backgrounds, find a way to link those elements.

For example, one samurai has a favorite uncle and another samurai is looking for the man who murdered her mother. Turns out both of those NPCs are the same NPC.

One samurai is having a secret affair with a married woman and another samurai suspects his wife is having an affair... Guess who the common element is?

Read your players' background write-ups carefully. If you look hard enough, you'll find all sorts of ways to make your players love you. Or hate you. Same difference, really.

Films

In this section, I've gone through my favorite samurai films with the intention of showing how to incorporate their plots, characters and situations into your own game. Many fans of the samurai genre have seen many (if not all) of these films. If you haven't, I should warn you, there are spoilers ahead. Of course, if you haven't seen these films... what are you waiting for?

A quick note: many of these films share the same director: Akira Kurosawa. This isn't to say that he's the only one making samurai

films; he's just my favorite. These are the films that inspired me to learn more about samurai and Japan in general. These are the ones I can speak upon with some degree of authority.

Yojimbo/Sanjuro

Director: Akira Kurosawa

Writers: Akira Kurosawa, Ryuzo Kikushima

Here's a tale about the plight of a ronin. Always looking for pay, always hungry, always begging or bribing or coercing peasants to give him what he wants. He's little more than a bandit... and yet, in Kurosawa's film, he's the only source of morality. He's the only one with a code of honor. He lies, he cheats, he murders... and he does it all for a "chance to make some good."

Yojimbo is the ultimate example of the samurai apocalypse. Everything is falling apart. Nothing works. Criminals rule everything and scoff at words like honor and duty. It is only when a samurai comes into their world that they are reminded of the power such words carry. A reminder of what the world was. A better world, perhaps. But only perhaps.

Pay close attention to the act that is almost Sanjuro's undoing: an act of mercy and kindness. If he remained ruthless, if he remained dispassionate and detached, everything would have worked out fine. Compassion is a weakness in this new world and it almost gets him killed.

(Whenever I show this movie to friends, they always ask me about the ending: why does Sanjuro give the bandit his gun back? And why does he face down the barrel? Because Sanjuro has won. Death now means nothing. You could also make a different argument, that on a higher level, he knows the gun cannot harm him. I like that answer.)

On the other hand, in Sanjuro, our ronin faces a different problem. Stumbling upon nine young ronin, our hero has to deal with the idealistic naivety of the court samurai. They know nothing. They have all the virtues a samurai is supposed to have—loyalty and duty—but they lack the cunning necessary to live in the real world. Alone in their plush gardens, they have no idea how things really work. The first piece of advice he gives them, to never trust how things look, is a hard one. Perhaps it is a lesson they never really learn.

ADVENTURES

Throwing your samurai into this world—a place where their exalted virtues mean nothing—can really throw a hammer into their faces. Outside their palaces, the yakuza rule

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everything. (I'll be talking about the yakuza a little bit later in the chapter.)

Imagine this. The Daimyo sends his Officers to a large village or small city. He wants to know why the taxes aren't coming in. The Officers arrive to discover the yakuza running everything. The peasants won't say a word: they're terrified of the samurai. The locals trust the yakuza because the criminals protect them from bandits and other dangers. The samurai are never around. They do nothing. Nothing except collect the taxes.

"The yakuza protect us," the peasants may say. "Where are you? Up in your castle writing poems and debating sword techniques while we starved. Now, we eat and sleep well with true protection."

What do the Officers do? Kill all the peasants? Where is the honor in that?

Ran

Director: Akira Kurosawa

Writers: Akira Kurosawa, Hideo Oguni, Masato Ide

By far, my favorite adaptation of King Lear.

Here's a look at ambition and honor and why the two cannot coexist. Men gain what they want by taking it from other men. Where can loyalty exist in such a world?

The Daimyo's decision is so clearly wrong and the loyal son who points this out is banished. Everything that follows results from these two poor decisions.

Watch Lady Kaede as well. See how she uses her sex to get what she wants. She perceives weakness and exploits it. If she was a character in a roleplaying game, she never needs to roll a single die. Everything she accomplishes is through roleplaying alone.

ADVENTURES

The Daimyo makes a poor decision. A blatantly poor decision inspired by lust for an ambitious geisha. She wants to be the Daimyo's wife and is moving things in the right direction to make that happen. The Daimyo has offered her special protections—through his Officers, of course—and she is giving the Officers orders. Finally, she makes arrangements for the wife's death... and she orders the least loyal Officer to do it. He knows if he disobeys, the Daimyo's wrath will fall upon him. He may even be banished. But if he refuses and

explains to his Daimyo that he's being foolish and should ignore the words of an ambitious geisha... he'll be banished.

Damned if you do...

(Yes, it's true that the character of Lady Kaede inspired a rather (in)famous lady from another samurai roleplaying game. If you have not seen *Ran*, go do it and watch Lady Kaede. You'll see it all there.)

Seven Samurai

Director: Akira Kurosawa

Writers: Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni

While the titular characters are not officially a Clan, the seven ronin hired to protect a peasant's village certainly make one out of themselves. Each fills a specific role, fulfilling the requirements set down in this game, at least. They may be ronin, but the home they make for themselves—albeit temporary—is far warmer than the wandering they left behind.

Like all the Kurosawa films listed here, *Seven Samurai* takes a deep look at the meanings of honor. Bushido is a simple philosophy, and like most simple philosophies, it ignores the most difficult questions or merely answers them with pretty platitudes. The most difficult choices in life cannot be addressed with idealistic philosophies. Sometimes, there are no good choices. Just choices that haunt you for the rest of your life.

The young samurai who throws away his blades and joins the farmers planting their crops also intrigues me. There is no wedding scene. So eager and so full of notions at the beginning of the film, he has thrown all that he devoted himself to for love. Poor Kambei; the farmers even took his devoted student from him.

If you watch only one movie on this list, watch this one.

ADVENTURES

So many stories base their premise on this one. The cinematic meme of “gathering the gang” inspired so many others (and is one of the first films to use the device). A group of samurai protecting a village from bandits is the obvious draw, but let's dig a little deeper. Let's find something a bit less... evident.

The deeper theme here is the conflict of class. As Kambei says at the end, “Again we are defeated. The farmers have won. Not us.” The lower castes will eventually overthrow the samurai caste. Not because they study warfare but because they control the economy. Most samurai are too shortsighted

to see this. Most samurai regard the peasants and merchants as a vulgar (but necessary) means to a higher end. And with this oversight, you can make all kinds of stories.

Sword of Doom

Director: Kihachi Okamoto

Writers: Shinobu Hashimoto (writer), Kaizan Nakazato (novel)

Here's a portrait of genuine evil. A hard look at a cold, violent man. *Sword of Doom* has to be one of the most unconventional films I've ever seen. The portrayal of the protagonist leaves me to wonder if there's any goodness (or even sanity) in his head. If you want a model for a bloodthirsty antagonist in your stories, here's a good place to start.

Once again, this film clearly illustrates a woman's role in Old Japan. She is nothing without a male figure to support her. After the murder of her brother—uh, husband—Ohama needs Tsukune's support or she may as well cut off her hair and run to a nunnery. Meanwhile, Omatsu becomes a victim to her cruel husband. The roles women play in these stories are those of victims. Seldom do they ever show any strength, and when they do, it certainly leads to their own downfall.

ADVENTURES

I didn't list the option of the Evil Daimyo until now, in the Narrator Chapter, where you and I can talk about him privately. I've even hidden him here in the Adventures section so the players can't find him easily.

One could make the argument that Ryunosuke Tsukue falls into the category of Mad Daimyo. I disagree. Tsukue is evil. Pure and simple. A man who loves wickedness and revels in making others suffer. This is the cruelest trick to play on your players. Give them the Evil Daimyo.

The Advantage of an Evil Daimyo is that the characters gain Honor when they perform genuinely wicked acts.

The Disadvantage of an Evil Daimyo is just the opposite: characters lose Honor from the Honor Pool when they perform genuinely moral acts.

Rashomon

Director: Akira Kurosawa

Writers: Ryunosuke Akutagawa (stories), Akira Kurosawa, Shinobu Hashimoto

Not actually a samurai picture, but important for you as a Narrator, nonetheless.

For me, *Rashomon* has always been a meditation on the nature of men. The director, Akira Kurosawa, wanted the film to feel real. He didn't want to create a "once upon a time" film, but tell a story that felt as authentic as possible. Why? Because the story he was about to tell was about the impossibility of discerning truth from falsehood. A theme we shall be visiting many times in this chapter.

Are men wicked and selfish or can they rise above baseness and achieve a little good in the world? I think this story makes a case for both. Men can thrive on wickedness but they can also do the same with rightness in their hearts.

Pay closer attention to what is not being said than what the suspects tell you. All four stories sound true but only the Woodcutter's story is free from motive. He was not involved; he has no shame to hide.

The woman herself transforms into four different women: one for each of the tellings. The writing and performance almost give us four different characters who all react to the situation in very different ways. Which is the one that is closest to the actual event? Does it even matter? Men make up their own realities, build their own past with lies and believe what they want to believe... not what they actually saw or did.

The story hammers home all the lies and misery in the world. Lines such as "Dogs have it better in this world!" illustrate how pitiful the lives of commoners actually are. The Priest laments, "I don't want this place to be Hell!" but his wishes seem to be in vain. It isn't until the Woodcutter offers to adopt the baby that a single thread of sunshine breaks through.

And it is the Woodcutter who goes through a transformation here. His initial lie comes from the fact that he didn't want to be involved. He didn't want trouble. He went into the woods to cut wood and stumbled across all of this. But, in the end, he adopts the child. A stunning observation: to do good in this world, you have to give something up.

To me, watching the medium was one of the most chilling moments in cinema. Something that has haunted me for years after seeing it. The samurai of Old Japan are not capable of such magic—summoning spirits of the dead—but others may be. I've tried to make the reality of magic as ambiguous as possible. Such testimony

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would be damning in Old Japan unless you consider the Commoner's question: "Why should a dead man tell the truth?"

ADVENTURES

For Officers of the Daimyo, dealing with issues like this are almost every day occurrences. Who is telling the truth? Probably none of them. But throw three different testimonies in front of your Officers and have them pick from which is most sincere.

Remember, they are Officers of the Daimyo. They could simply make a quick decision and be done with it. But goodness requires sacrifice. Justice requires consideration. But with four different accounts of the same story—and no evidence to back anything up—the Officers are placed in a situation that has no clean outcome. No justice.

There is no danger here. No danger at all. Just the Officers making a decision. They will never draw their swords, they don't need bows or arrows, they will not see a single drop of blood. But their decision changes lives for better or worse. They can be selfish and deal out arbitrary decisions or they can take their time—make a sacrifice—and deal with the situation correctly.

But they'll never know what really happened. Never.

Seven Daimyos

Here are seven of Old Japan's greatest Daimyos. I've provided suggestions, but you can decide on their natures.

Clear credit here: Ben Woerner wrote this section with some minor additions by myself.

Oda Nobunaga (Cruel)

He was the great unifier of Japan, but he was also known to be cruel, cunning, and clever. Many people claim



that he was mad, but others claim he was just very intelligent. However, it is known that he didn't care for peasants beyond their usefulness as soldiers, and while he was unifying Japan he was angering many samurai and bringing about the deaths of thousands of peasants. He is infamous for the Battle of Mt Hiei where he surrounded the warrior monks with 30,000 men, and the slowly marched up all sides of the mountain killing, burning, and looting everything until they reached the top. His famous death was caused, perhaps, by his cruel treatment of underlings. In particular, one named Akechi Mitsuhide...

Akechi Mitsuhide (Cunning)

He was a well-known famous swordsman, but also known as a brilliant poet who brought about the death of Oda Nobunaga. One of Nobunaga's other retainers was besieging a castle and needed help. Nobunaga and Akechi Mitsuhide, one of Nobunaga's retainers, came to help. While there, Mitsuhide brought about a coup d'etat and forced Oda Nobunaga to claim responsibility for the deaths of Mitsuhide's mother, sister, and lover. He was insulted by many of the Daimyo before this incident and while a good swordsman, he was never seen as a calculating man, but as a simple warrior. Many claim this is because he was so calculating and cunning that he was able to hide even his desires from the outside.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Ambitious)

Hideyoshi and Ieyasu were cut from the same cloth, even though Hideyoshi was from peasant stock and Ieyasu was noble born. Both were very clever, but Hideyoshi was spurred on from birth to be greater. He rose from Nobunaga's sandal servant to become Shogun of Japan in all but name. He did so by his continued push to achieve despite the sometimes heavy losses to his soldiers. Hideyoshi is also famous for racing Tokugawa to the site of Mitsuhide's coup. They both knew that whoever reached it first would become the next ruler of Japan. Hideyoshi forced his men to hurry and left behind stragglers (endangering the size of his attack) so that he'd reach there first. When he arrived, despite their being tired

*If a Singing
Bird Didn't
Want to Sing...*

There is a saying in Japan that if there was a singing bird that didn't want to sing,

Toyotomi would say make it want to sing,

Nobunaga would say force it to sing,

and Tokugawa would say wait for it to sing.

from their march, Hideyoshi's men defeated Mitsuhide and secured Hideyoshi's place in Old Japan's history.

Tokogawa Ieyasu (Kind)

His own patience might have been his undoing, but it was his cunning and cleverness that allowed him to endure and succeed time and time again. He was the man who defeated Ishida Mitsunari at Sekigahara and became the Shogun of all of Japan. An entire era is named after him and it lasted for over 100 years. Before becoming Shogun he was known to have been friends with Nobunaga, Hideyoshi and even Akechi Mitsuhide. He was also defeated many times in many battles, only to come out the better for having lost the battle. He was a general under Imagawa when Nobunaga defeated Imagawa and then befriended Tokugawa. He was defeated at the battle of Mikatagahara, by Takeda Shingen's famous cavalry, but he and his generals were able to survive and escape and devise a way to defeat Shingen's cavalry later at the battle of Nagashino.

After his rise to the Shogunate, he is famous for devising methods to keeping the Daimyo in line and keeping control over them by inviting them to the capital, but also causing them to spend large amounts of money. Throughout everything despite being known for his cunning and cleverness he is always known for his patience.

Takeda Shingen (Clever)

The Great! Still beloved by Japan for his famous cavalry charges, his ruthless ambition when his family was about to pass him over, and his many wise generals Takeda Shingen is only rivaled by his life long rival, the great embodiment of the god of war, Uesugi Kenshin. The two are famous for their rivalry and also their many victories elsewhere, and while they fought each other many times, both were most likely killed by simple peasants. He is famous for his clever development of cavalry tactics that were undefeated until Oda and Tokugawa lead their musket-armed peasants against him at Nagashino.

(Takeda appears in the film Samurai Banners. The protagonist of the piece is one of his "twenty-four generals," Yamamoto Kansuke, portrayed by the incredible Toshiro Mifune.)

Uesugi Kenshin (Dangerous)

The Lord of War! Famous for his retainers' loyalty and for the claim by the same retainers that Kenshin was the embodiment

of the God of War, Uesugi Kenshin was known as the Dragon of Echigo who opposed the Tiger of Kai, Takeda Shingen. Early on he deposed his brother to claim title in his family, so his ambition is not questioned. Although he was the rightful heir, his brother attempted to gain the position, and Kenshin, who did not want to kill his brother eventually took the field. Despite this moment of reluctance Kenshin, who became a Buddhist monk, while still retaining his position and titles, never was reluctant to war against Shingen or take on other enemies. In fact, he became so powerful in northeastern Japan that upon his death Oda Nobunaga famously said, "Now the empire is mine."

Date Masamune (Mad)

Famous for his missing eye, his soldiers in black and gold armor, and his crescent moon helmet, Date Masamune was a Daimyo of ambition, cleverness, and cunning. While it is known that he lost vision in his left eye because of small pox, it is not known for sure how he removed the eye. Legend states that when one of his generals claimed that an enemy might use it as an advantage, Masamune plucked the eye from its socket. A different legend states that Masamune has one of his own trusted retainers gouge the eye out for him. Either way, Masamune's mother declared that because he was missing an eye Masamune would never become heir. Perhaps spurred on by this declaration, Masamune gathered his most trusted retainers and attacked all of his neighbors, including his own family. He unified Northern Japan and became known as the One-Eyed Dragon.

Later, when Hideyoshi was unifying the great power blocks of Japan, he forced Masamune and the Northern Daimyo of Japan to participate in his campaign to eliminate

Ben's Choices

Ben couldn't decide which Daimyo should get which nature, so he gave me options. Here they are.

Oda Nobunaga was
Cruel, Mad, Clever, and
Ambitious

Akechi Mitsuhide was
Cunning and Dangerous

Toyotomi Hideyoshi was
Ambitious and Cunning

Tokugawa Ieyasu was
Kind, Clever and
Ambitious

Takeda Shingen was
Clever, Dangerous, and
Cunning

Uesugi Kenshin was
Dangerous, Ambitious,
and Kind

Date Masamune was Mad,
Ambitious, Clever and
Dangerous

the Hojo clan. Masamune refused. Even though he had no real choice in the matter, and he had angered Hideyoshi, Masamune continued to refuse until Hideyoshi was forced to confront him. Wearing his finest clothes, and showing not a trace of fear, Masamune faced Hideyoshi and continued to claim he was 'delayed' from beginning the campaign. Hideyoshi, impressed by Masamune, spared Masamune's life and declared, "He could be of some use."

Many years later, Masamune was the first to build a European style sailing ship. He is also known for encouraging many foreigners and Christians to come to his lands. His daughter was most likely a Christian convert, and although Masamune remained a Buddhist, he was open and friendly with the Christians even after his good friend, the Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, outlawed Christianity.

Using Authority

One of the most powerful tools you can use as a Narrator is authority. Authority is always a tricky business in a culture like Old Japan. Nothing is ever as it appears. Your players will always be asking you this question: "Who has authority here?" By implication, they are also asking, "Who do I want to offend?"

If you play things the right way, setting up conflicts of authority everywhere you go, your players will hesitate at every step. Every action they take should offend someone. If the Daimyo asks them a question, the answer should offend one of his other Officers. If the Daimyo shows favoritism to one Officer, the others should demonstrate subtle signs of insult.

Whenever your samurai enter a foreign Domain, they will immediately know the overt authority structure. But the covert authority structure will remain hidden to them without roleplaying or Cunning risks. Even then, there will be secrets they do not see and games with rules they do not understand.

Creating this sense of double meaning to everything in Old Japan is the key to keeping your players off balance and on their toes.

Apocalyptic Themes

We all know what happened to the world of Old Japan, but the current residents do not. Their world is coming to an end. The arrival

of gunpowder, the rise of the merchants and the influence of the West will force the samurai caste into choosing between transformation and extinction.

You can use these themes to give your world a dystopian backdrop. The system the samurai manage no longer works. Only in their castles, high above such mundane concerns, can the issues of poverty, crime and starvation be ignored. But that's exactly what's happening: the lower classes are ignored in lieu of warrior philosophies such as duty and honor. To a peasant, duty and honor are meaningless. The

samurai don't care about them. Bandits raid the lands, bribe officials and the farmers starve. It's only when the samurai don't get their rice that they pay attention, and when that happens, it's already too late.

When the samurai leave their courts and battlefields, depict the world with as many apocalyptic images as you can. Remember the dog running out of the village at the beginning of *Yojimbo*? That's what I'm talking about. You are about to enter a world without rules. Where things like bushido don't matter.

Dust and wind. Corpses. The voices of dying men from dry throats. Buildings are dilapidated and the people are naked and starving. What good is your philosophy here, samurai?

The Yakuza

The yakuza claim to have a heritage that spans back to Old Japan, so why not include them? Not the historical petty gamblers and merchants of shoddy goods, but the romantic yakuza who protected innocent villagers from wandering samurai.

The yakuza represent everything that opposes bushido. Or, perhaps, they are the logical conclusion of bushido. Both sides believe in honor. Both sides believe in a degree of selflessness. Both sides demand sacrifice. Both sides reward success and punish failure.

But the yakuza recognize the need of the poor. They recognize the tyranny of the samurai. And, they're willing to do something about it.



Your samurai have to deal with an underground conspiracy that's protected by the people it serves. Everyone in Old Japan denies the very existence of such an organization, and yet, it's force can be felt in a real and deadly way.

Forget ninjas. This is where the real danger lies. Not in men jumping around in black pajamas throwing exploding eggs and making magic finger gestures. No. Just plain and simple greed and honor and cold-blooded violence.

Play Dirty

Okay. Now we're cooking with gas.

I promised you a few miscellaneous notes from my experiences running the game. Here they are. In no particular order, in no particular style. Just some friendly advice from me to you, the Narrator.

Go kick their teeth in.

What's It Worth?

Many times, players have disputes about how things go. Sometimes, these disputes are character-driven and fun, but then there are the times when these disputes turn disruptive.



If your players have a player vs. player dispute, the best way to resolve it is by asking, "What's It Worth?"

Ask each player to give up Honor. Just take it right out of the pool. Such blatant disagreement among Officers is disgraceful. Whoever wants to be right will take the most Honor out of the Pool. Don't make it a secret, do it right out in the open. The player who takes the most Honor out of the pool is right and the other person is wrong.

Turning Failure into Success

Another trick. Just because you succeed in a risk doesn't mean the character has to succeed. Sometimes, failure is better than success. Here's an example.

One of the characters in my game has a daughter. She's engaged to marry a neighbor. Unfortunately, she gets pregnant by someone else's son. That's all right. Mom comes up with a solution. She starts wearing a fake belly to parties, planting the idea that mom is pregnant. Mom agrees to rear the child as her own while the daughter gets married after the pregnancy is over.

So, she goes to a party with the fake tummy. Everyone congratulates her. Smiles and embraces. She heads off to bed early—pregnant women shouldn't be up too late, after all—and when she enters the dark room, an assassin attacks.

Our young faux mother is no slouch, but she's not carrying a sword or a knife. We roll for the risk... and the NPC wins. The player expects the worst. After all, I have four wagers ready to aggravate that Injury right up to rank 5. But I don't do that. Instead... the knife plunges into her belly.

Her fake belly.

The blade never reaches her flesh. The assassin's eyes glare with understanding. She can see the hint of a smile spreading under his mask.

"Blackmail," he whispers.

Then, he runs to the window, leaping off into the night.

Turning failure into success.

Players, Wagers & Style Points

In many ways, running *Blood & Honor* is no different than running any other game. More specifically, your players will always come out of left field with some wild scheme and lay waste to your best-laid plans. The difference in *Blood & Honor* is: we give them *mechanics* to do it. They use wagers and Honor Points to screw things up. They'll take your best-laid plans and throw them out the window... just like they do in other roleplaying games.

But you have an advantage here. *You have no plans*. You have a kind of outline and perhaps some motives, but as soon as players figure out they can assign motives and histories on their own, they'll start building the story themselves. So, what do they need a Narrator for?

They need you to throw surprises in the mix. They have to make wagers and spend Honor to add details. You don't. You can make things up on your own... just as long as you don't contradict what your players have already established.

But this kind of power in the hands of the players is a good thing. It means they can tell you—right up front—exactly what they want.

When a player turns an NPC into a cousin or a former lover, it means “I want to have a relationship with that NPC.” They don't have to ask you, they just do it. Same thing happens when a player spends a Style to say, “We've been enemies for a long time.” The player doesn't need to spend points on an “Enemy” to add it to his character sheet, he can play the game for a few sessions, find an enemy he really hates (or loves to hate), throw down an Honor Point, and *BANG!* He's got a new enemy.

Power in the players hands gives them the ability to tell you what kind of stories they want, what kind of allies they want, what kind of enemies they want. You don't have to be clever about it. You can give them *exactly* what they want because *they told what they want*.

That's the advantage of the *Blood & Honor* system: it allows the players to create characters, plots and mysteries all on their own. You aren't a “dungeon master” or a “game master.” You're a Narrator: guiding the story along, working *with* the players—not against them—to make a story you all want to hear.

The Vach Question, Part 1

I have a friend named Vach. He's a great roleplayer. I mean a great roleplayer. But Vach has this... thing.

Vach always asks if he can play something that isn't in the game.



If we're playing *Ravenloft*, he wants to play a kenku samurai. If we're playing *L5R*, he wants to play a gaijin. You get the idea.

Now, I know Vach is not alone. I know there are tons of players with the same disease. So, we might as well address them right here.

Yes, Vach, you can play a ronin. I know the game is about playing a Clan, but yes, you can play something that isn't that.

I've given you all the rules to play a ronin in the first chapter. You get no Honor. You get no Clan bonus. You get no equipment, you get no allies, you get no food, you get nothing.

But here's the thing. You're gonna have fun doing it.

So, there you go. You're the outsider.

Have fun. I know you will.

Who is the Protagonist?

This comes to me, writing about NPCs...

I recently came across an observation about the roles of protagonist and antagonist in a story. The concept that the protagonist of a story is the one who changes and the antagonist is the instrument of that change. For example, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we know that Huck is the protagonist, but it could be argued that Jim is the *antagonist*. Jim challenges Huck's assumptions in the world, instigating a vital change in his character.

Likewise, in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, one can argue that Red (the character played by Morgan Freeman) is the protagonist—he is the narrator of the story and the viewpoint character—while Andy Dufresne (the character played by Tim Robbins) is the antagonist. Andy is the instigator in the transformation in Red's character. Red begins the story without hope. A broken man. By the end, his transformation could not have occurred without Andy.

Likewise, in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago serves as the antagonist—this time a deadly one—but his hatred for the Moor is not what defines him as such. Instead, it is the fact that he does not change but inspires change in Othello himself that defines Iago as the antagonist.

Like most observations about literature, I do not mean to say this is an absolute truth in every story—it most certainly is not—but it helped me refine the roles of my own antagonists in stories. I hope it helps you do the same.

Always Ask for Wagers

Whenever a player makes a risk, make a habit of asking, “Do you want to make any wagers?” Players forget these things and until they’ve got the habit on their own, keep feeding it to them.

“Do you want to make any wagers?”

“Do you want to make any wagers?”

“Do you want to make any wagers?”

If you forget, how do you expect them to remember?

Wisdom Risks

Whenever a player asks you a question about the world, your answer should be, “I don’t know. Make a Wisdom risk.”

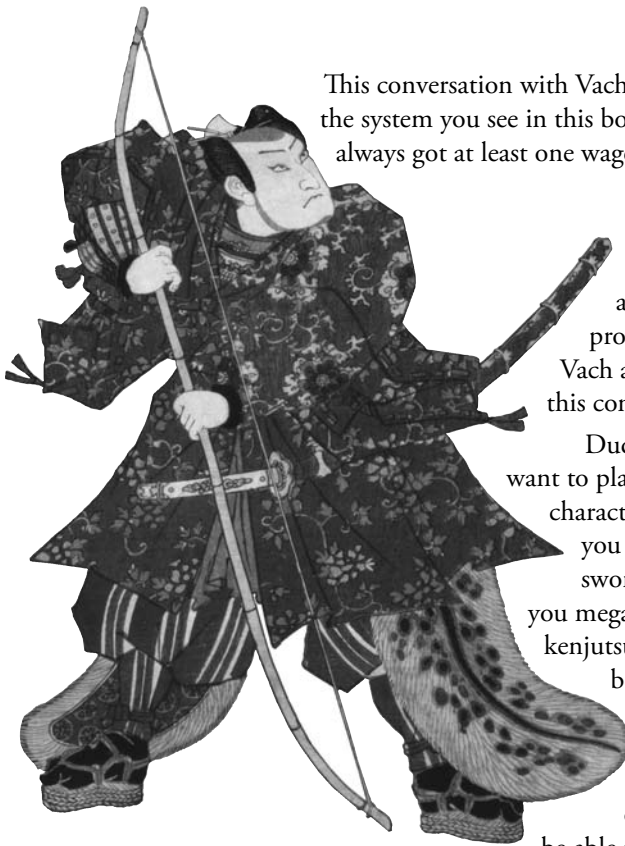
The Vach Question, Part 2

It’s easy to categorize players as “munchkins,” “actors,” or “rules lawyers,” but that misses the point. There’s a *reason* gamers act the way they do. I find, most of the time, that reason is as simple as “I want my shtick to work.” Let me show you what I mean.

Elsewhere in this chapter, I mentioned my buddy Vach. In every game, he always wants to play something completely outside of genre. What I didn’t mention was that Vach is also one of the world’s best munchkins. He can tweak any system beyond its limits, almost breaking it. He completely exploits rules. Completely. So, one day, I sat down with him and asked him why. What I found out during the conversation made sense.

Vach wants his character to be distinct. He doesn’t want to be “just another samurai.” He wants his character to stand out, to have his own voice, to be something unique. As for the munchkin stuff, Vach also wants his character to *work*. What I mean is, if his character is supposed to be stealthy, he wants to sneak across a crowded room without anyone knowing he’s there. Even if he rolls like crap, he still wants his stealth to work at least a little bit. After all, if he’s the greatest swordsman in all of Old Japan, shouldn’t he be able to get some level of success from even an abysmal failure?

I agree with Vach on both points. Players *should* feel their characters are unique. After all, we’re talking about the samurai from Old Japan! They should have a distinct voice and flavor all their own. At the same time, I also agree with him on the other point. If he’s the greatest swordsman in Old Japan, he should get *some* level of success, even if he fails.



This conversation with Vach inspired much of the system you see in this book. You've almost always got at least one wager to play with.

So, here's my solution for Vach.

(This is the actual solution I proposed back when Vach and I actually had this conversation.)

Dude, I know you want to play a distinct character, so I recommend you play a blind swordsman. I'll give you mega-bonuses for your kenjutsu and you'll be the best swordsman in the game. You'll have insight that no other character has. You'll be able to recognize sword cut through the air. You'll be

styles just by hearing the blades able to tell a man's skill just by the way his stance disturbs the world around him. You'll be awesome.

Finally, remember that your unique circumstance also puts you at a serious disadvantage. Whatever kind of outsider you choose to play will put you on what Sun Tzu called "serious ground." You'll always be at a disadvantage, always be treated as an inferior, always get spit on—even if it's behind your back. I know you like this kind of challenge, but I wanted you to know it is there.

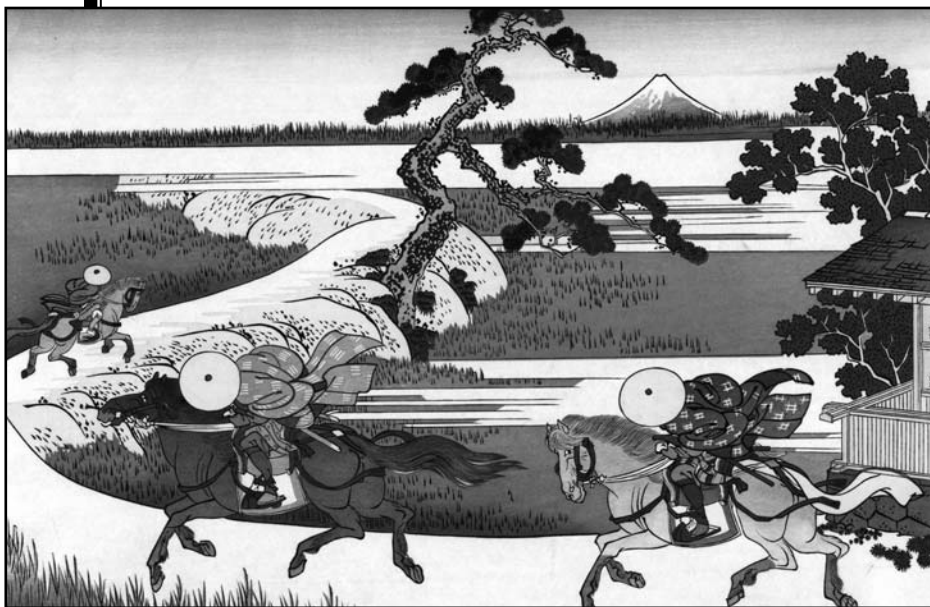
You'll need another character to lead you around because you can't see. You'll miss important plot details because you can't see. If you lose your sword, you'll be helpless. **Helpless.** I want to say that again. If you lose your sword, you'll be helpless. And if you think for a moment that little plot difficulty isn't going to come up when I'm running the game, then you really don't know who you're dealing with.

You'll be awesome. You'll be distinct. You'll be at an incredible disadvantage.

I won't use it to piss you off, but I will use it to make stories.

I won't use this as an excuse to be a jerk, but your enemies will.

山は決して落ちません。



What a player does and why a player does it are two different things. Go beyond the cliché. Find the motivation.

Just a few questions turned Vach from a “munchkin” to a “storyteller.” It all rests in the motivation.

Last Words

An aphorism I learned while writing *Legend of the Five Rings*: “Japanese fix the problem; Americans fix the blame.”

No roleplaying game will be fun for everyone. No game is perfect. No “generic” system will make everyone happy. It’s an impossible task. That’s why we have 31 flavors of ice cream, that’s why your TV has fifty thousand channels, and that’s why everyone has a different favorite roleplaying game.

If you aren’t having fun with a mechanic in the game, change it. If you aren’t having fun, it isn’t my fault, it isn’t your fault. It’s nobody’s “fault.” You and I just like different flavors of ice cream.

Change the mechanic to something you like more. Don’t worry; I don’t care. And nobody is going to stop you from having fun with my game. Least of all, me.

Enjoy! (And make mine mint chocolate chip.)

Appendix 1

Sword Schools

I had a lot of trouble with this. I designed three different systems for sword schools. They're such an integral part of samurai literature, I felt it was necessary to make them a part of the game.

But sword training already exists in the game. It's implicit: reflected by a samurai's Prowess. But that's not explicit. And if a mechanic isn't explicit, the players don't notice it and that means it doesn't exist.

And so, the final draft of my sword school mechanics are here as an Appendix to the main text. I like them very much, but I also have a little bit of a problem with them. I'll explain.

With these mechanics, it's entirely possible for a Courtier to become a better swordsman than the Daimyo's Assassin or Yojimbo. I don't like that. The Assassin and Yojimbo always gain bonus dice for their Giri, that's true, but the Courtier could learn more sword schools than either of them, and thus gain an advantage.

On the other hand, if the Courtier becomes a better swordsman than the Assassin or Yojimbo... what the hell are the Assassin and Yojimbo wasting their time with? Flower arranging? It's time for the Daimyo to order them to kill themselves and get better swordsmen.

I also like the idea of all the Daimyo's Officers spending Season Actions learning how to become better swordsmen. The Dangerous Daimyo would like this very much.

So, there's a bit of a disadvantage and a bit of an advantage. That seems to fit the game rather well.

The System

While Old Japan has many different sword schools, I give you the option for five types of Sword Schools. The full-page illustration nearby shows how the five Schools relate to each other. Each provides a bonus or penalty against a different School.

Each Sword School gives your samurai bonus dice in a duel. However, if your opponent has also studied under a Sword School, he may gain additional bonus dice because of his studies. Some Schools are better suited to take on others.

A samurai may learn the techniques of a Sword School with a Season Action. This gives him one rank in that Sword School. He gains a bonus die for each rank he learns from that School. Additional ranks and bonus dice may be gained as well, but each costs additional Season Actions.

まず最初に、男性は三振します。

- Increasing from rank 1 to rank 2 in a Sword School costs two Season Actions.
- Increasing from rank 2 to rank 3 costs three Season Actions.
- Increasing from rank 3 to rank 4 costs four Season Actions.
- Increasing from rank 4 to rank 5 costs five Season Actions.

Each School is associated with a particular Virtue. You may only gain a number of bonus dice from a School up to the Virtue associated with that School.

For example, if your Cunning is 3, you may only gain three ranks in a School that has Cunning as its associated Virtue.

When facing an opponent from an opposing School, you either gain additional dice or your opponent gains additional dice.

You must place your School somewhere on the chart on the following page. It must be an Water School or a Wind School or a Fire School, etc. Regardless of where you place it, some other School will have an advantage over you. No technique is perfect and every technique has a weakness.

Earth (“Chi”)

Schools of the Earth teach students supreme confidence in both mental and physical tests. Schools of Earth give bonus dice based on a student’s Strength.

Fire (“Ka”)

Schools of Fire teach students that action and forward motion is the key to success. Schools of Fire give bonus dice based on a student’s Courage.

Wind (“Fu”)

Schools of Wind teach students to watch an opponent carefully and deduce his weaknesses. Schools of Wind give bonus dice based on a student’s Cunning.

Water (“Sui”)

Schools of Water teach students to be fluid and ever adapting. Flexibility allows victory. Schools of Water give bonus dice based on a student’s Beauty.

Void (“Ku”)

Also known as “Sky” or “Heaven,” Schools of Void teach their students the philosophy of “no thought.” Reacting without knowing. Emptiness in motion. Schools of Void give students bonus dice based on their Wisdom.

まず最初に、男性は三振します。