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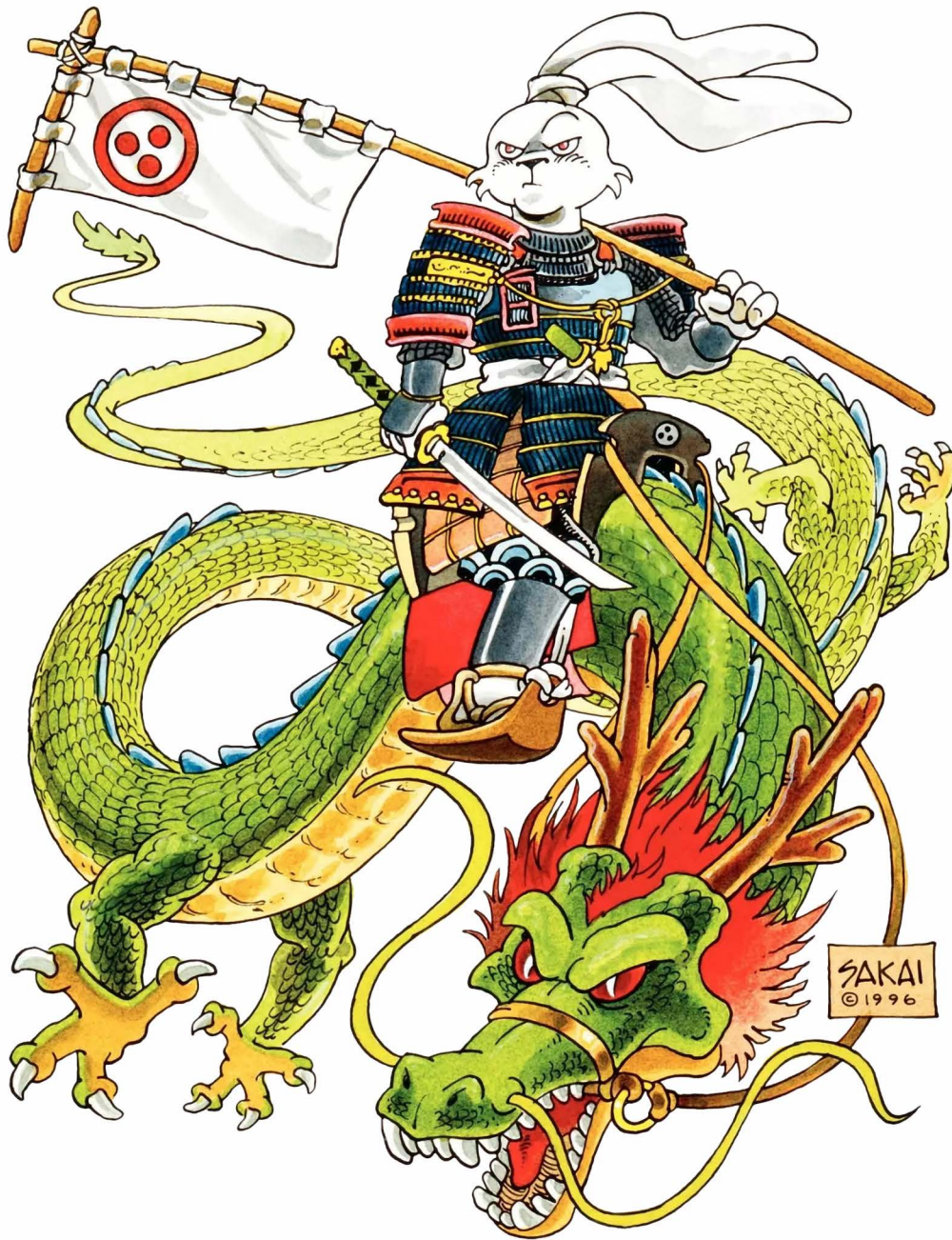
USAGI YOJIMBO

Role-
Playing
Game

2nd edition



SAKAI



Enter the world of *Usagi Yojimbo*! Stan Sakai's award-winning comic series tells the story of Miyamoto Usagi, a swordrabbit with the heart of a hero, as he wanders a fantastic version of 17th-century Japan. Now, Sakai's Japan and its cast of anthropomorphic characters come to life in stories you create yourself. Explore immense castles and humble villages; meet bounty-hunters and crime bosses; battle ninja spies and scheming lords; and encounter monsters from beyond the natural world.

A complete game in one volume, this latest edition of *Usagi* has been updated and revised with material from over thirty years of award-winning *Usagi* comics. Take on the role of a fearless samurai, a crafty ninja, a wise priest, or other adventurer in fantasy Japan. Immerse yourself in a richly-detailed world with valiant Usagi, sly Kitsune, gruff Gennosuke, clever Ishida, and other heroes from the comics. Face your challenges head-on, and be a hero!

To play this game, you will need two six-sided dice, counters, and a sense of adventure. Recommended for ages 12 and up.

If you've never played a role-playing game...

One of you takes on the role of the Master of Ceremonies (MC). The rest of you assume the role of a Player-Character (PC) in a story of a fantastic Japan set in the Tokugawa era of the early 17th century.

Like the director of an improv play, the MC will describe a story or situation to you. You and your fellow players then make moves to push the story along, using the rules as your guide. Sometimes, you'll roll dice to add uncertainty and drama to the story. As you push the story along, you'll earn *story points* (that increase your ability to push the plot in the directions you want) and *support points* (that let you help your friends).

Use your imagination, building upon the story as it's described to you, and have fun!

If you've played a computer game before...

One of you takes on the role of the Master of Ceremonies (MC). The rest of you will have your own Player-characters (PCs). The MC administrates the content of the game, presenting quests to you and your fellow players. You won't be blocked by invisible walls or other railroading; you, your fellow players, and the MC can take the game in any direction you want.

For randomness, dice will be rolled for certain tasks, especially combat. Challenges are tiered as weak, strong, and grand. You may suffer setbacks that impair your abilities; you'll have story points that let you improve your rolls and let you affect the story. It's all about role-playing here, so remember to be creative and to have fun!

If you've played a tabletop game before...

The Master of Ceremonies (MC) presides over the action, and everyone gets one Player-character (PC). When the player's action does something, it's a *move*, and when the MC does something, the players *respond* to it.

This game only uses six-sided dice, and the players do all the rolling. A roll of 10 or better usually gets you what you want; up to 9, and it gets complicated. You'll be earning *story points* to increase your rolls, which then turn into *support points* that increase your friends' rolls. There's no "hit points"; lesser enemies go down in one hit, greater enemies take two or more and will ignore low rolls. Players suffer *impairments* that hinder your rolls; get too many, and you'll be incapacitated.

This game is fast, loose, lean, and mean. Have fun with it!

Credits

Sanguine Productions and Stan Sakai present *Usagi Yojimbo: The Role-Playing Game (Second Edition)*

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THE CLOSE OF 16TH CENTURY JAPAN IS REGARDED AS THE AGE OF CIVIL WARS, AS FEUDAL LORDS FOUGHT AMONGST THEMSELVES FOR LAND AND POWER.

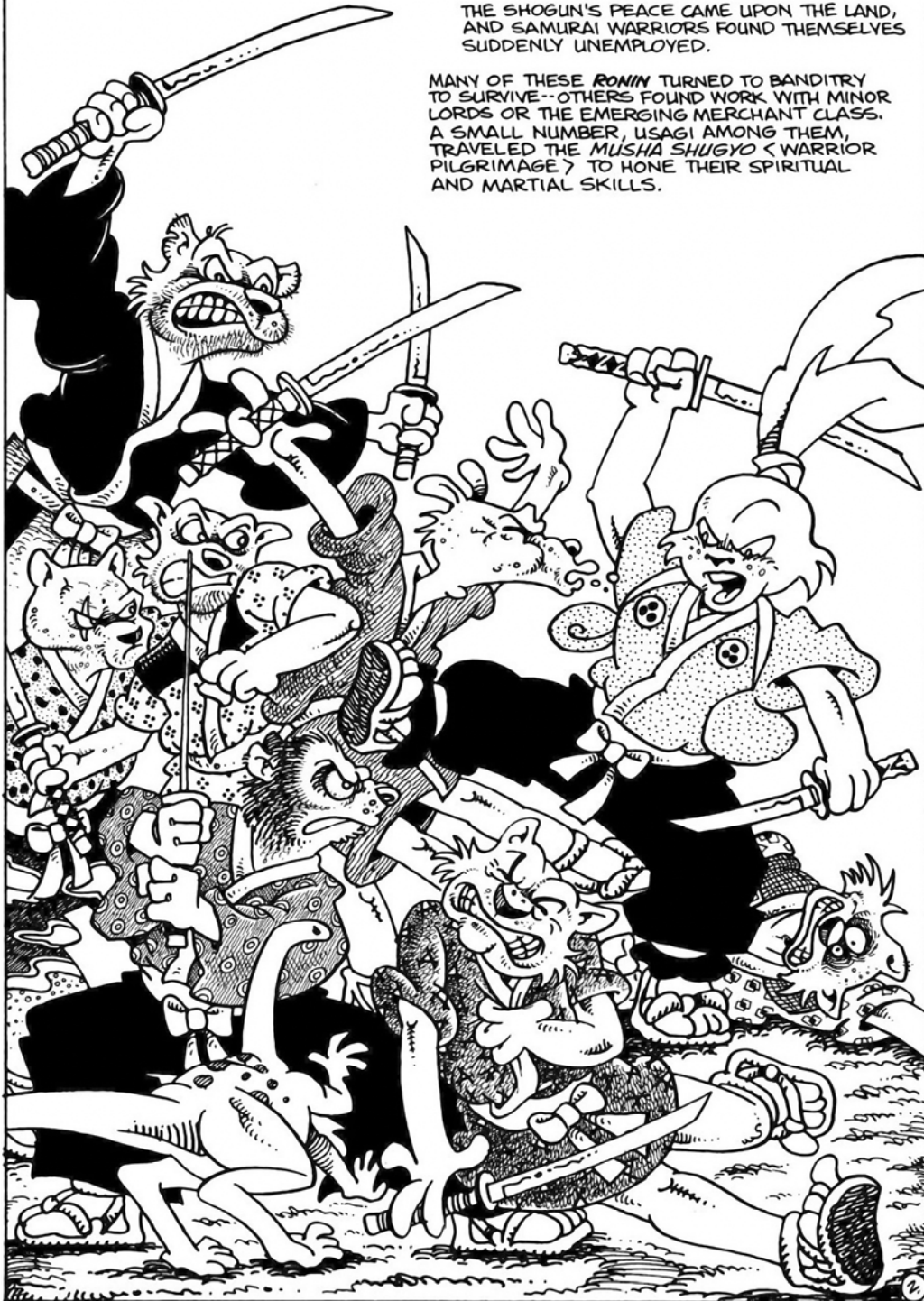
IT WAS DURING THE BATTLE OF ADACHIGAHARA THAT THE SAMURAI MIYAMOTO USAGI LOST HIS LORD MIFUNE TO THE ARMIES OF LORD HIKIJI.



FINALLY, ONE LEADER ROSE ABOVE THE OTHERS AND WAS PROCLAIMED **SHOGUN** <MILITARY RULER>.

THE SHOGUN'S PEACE CAME UPON THE LAND, AND SAMURAI WARRIORS FOUND THEMSELVES SUDDENLY UNEMPLOYED.


MANY OF THESE **RONIN** TURNED TO BANDITRY TO SURVIVE--OTHERS FOUND WORK WITH MINOR LORDS OR THE EMERGING MERCHANT CLASS. A SMALL NUMBER, USAGI AMONG THEM, TRAVELED THE **MUSHA SHUGYO** <WARRIOR PILGRIMAGE> TO HONE THEIR SPIRITUAL AND MARTIAL SKILLS.



USAGI HAS MADE MANY ALLIES ON HIS ROAD-- INCLUDING TOMOE OF THE GEISHU CLAN, GEN THE BOUNTY HUNTER, AND ZATO-INO THE BLIND SWORDSPIG.

THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN MANY ENEMIES, CHIEF AMONG THEM IS LORD HIKIJI, WHO, WITH HIS SECRET ARMY OF NINJA, PLOTS TO OVERTHROW THE NEW GOVERNMENT AND SET **HIMSELF** AS SHOGUN!





USAGI CONTINUES
TO WANDER
ALONE ACROSS THE
NATION -- OVER
MOUNTAINS, DEEP
INTO VALLEYS, THROUGH
TOWNS AND FARMLANDS,
AND ALONG RUGGED
COASTS -- SEARCHING
FOR HARMONY.

RULES

The purpose of the game rules is to make sure everyone has the same idea about how the story is to play out. We know that your character may be quick, smart, or brave... but we may not know just how often these abilities work out in your favor. Rules also help us introduce *emergence*, randomness that changes the story in unexpected ways.

Roles: Master of Ceremonies and Players

One of you takes will have the role as the *Master of Ceremonies (MC)*. Like the director of a movie or a play, the MC's role is to moderate the game.

Everyone else is a *player*, and each one has a role to play as a *Player-Character (PC)*. Each player has the option to customize their character

The MC will present a situation to the players, such as “You are all walking down a country road when you hear a cry for help”, or “It’s the annual Kite Festival and everyone is out in the fields”, or “Suddenly, two dozen *shika-kunin* (hired killers) storm out of the bushes!” The players will tell the MC how they want their characters to react.

After listening to their ideas (and maybe rolling some dice for some unexpectedness), The MC will decide how the story changes. Play continues for a few more hours until the story session is over ... for now.

Mood: Casual, Dicey, or Combat

When you’re enjoying a story, there can be moments of low tension and of high energy.

In game terms, the *mood* of the situation tells us how formal we need to be about rules.

Casual mood lets us talk freely

For most of the story, you will be able to freely describe what your characters do. Common activities like walking across the street, asking regular people to do their regular jobs, punching a hole through a paper door ... all of these can be described in just *casual* conversation, without the need for calling up a lot of rules.

When the mood is casual, we won’t be worrying about whose turn it is. The Players and the MC should speak freely.

Dicey when it's up to chance

Sometimes, part of the story could be uncertain.

Could your character jump across that gorge?

Would the local magistrate have audience with you? Can you hit the bandit with your sword?

Sometimes other characters will oppose you, and it might not be given if you can just succeed.

When things are *dicey*, the MC will stop the game and ask a player to roll dice. If the total on the dice is low, things might not go so well for the player-character. If the total is high, things might go better than expected.

After making a roll, the player should wait for the MC to respond, to tell them how they expect the roll to come out. The players may have resources they can spend to improve the roll before the outcome is played out. Many rolls ask the player to a choice, so we should all

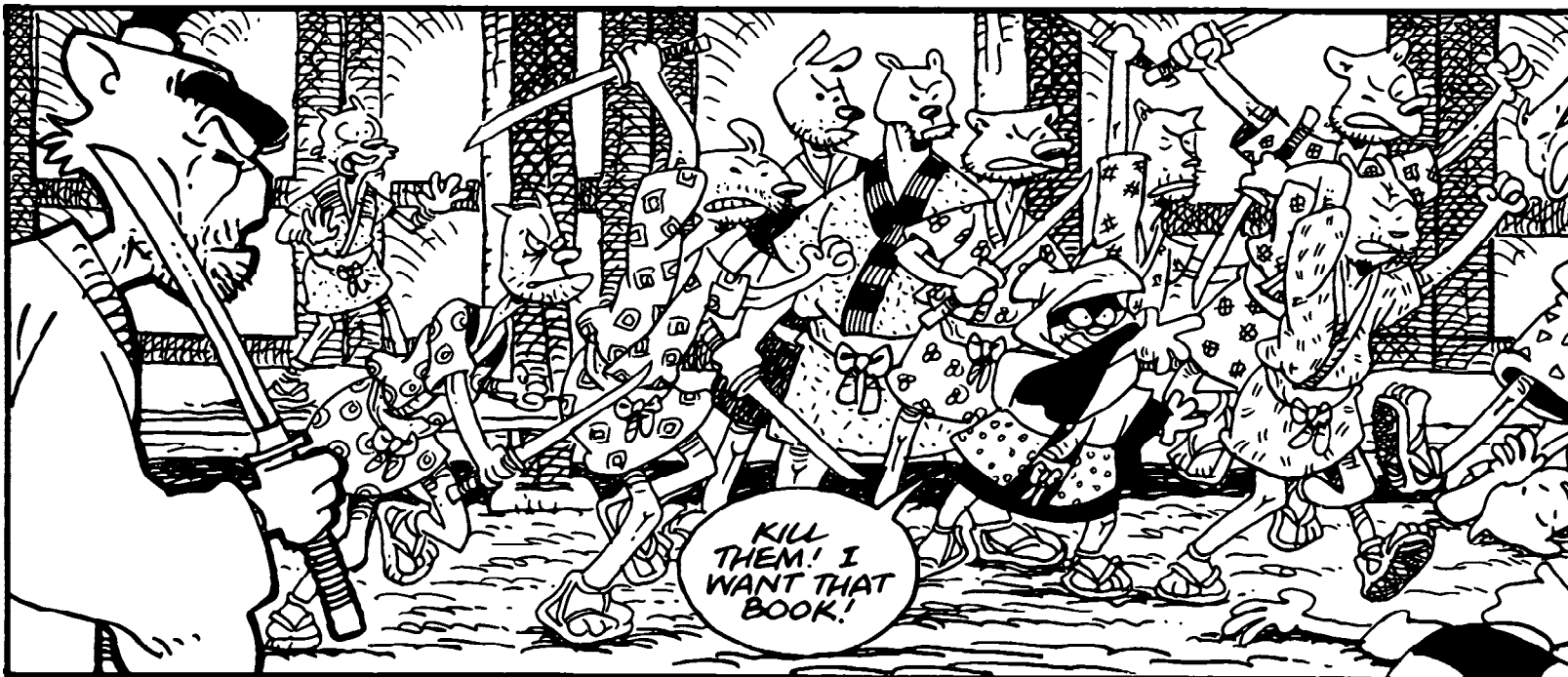
give a moment to let them decide. After the roll, the MC may have a follow-up response to what just happened.

You don't have to take turns when it's dicey, but it can help to let other players get their own moves into the story so they can help. If no one has any objection, you can still make two, three, or more rolls in a row.

In **Combat**, everyone takes a turn

There's nothing more dicey than when people are trying to kill you. When the story switches into a *combat* mood, it's important that everyone gets a chance to do something. Lives are on the line!

Each player should get one chance to make a move. We call this a *round* of combat. After all the players have had a turn, the MC describes how their characters respond, and if there's still one or more people who are still fighting, the combat will continue.



When the story is in a combat mood, we'll say, "you are in a combat". When the combat mood ends, "the combat is over". After a combat mood ends, there's some down-time, and then the mood becomes a combat again, "the next combat" has started. In general, a combat doesn't last much longer than five minutes of the story's narrative time, and then there's usually five minutes before another one starts.

And that's narrative time. In stories like *Usagi Yojimbo*, time is often compressed to show each detail of the fight, so it might take more than five minutes of real, game time to play out a fight that only took a few minutes of time from the story's perspective.

Time

The *Usagi* role-playing game is about telling stories. Just like how a novel, comics, or other stories might describe a few seconds of the story using several pages... while years might go by in the blink of an eye ... time will change in your story, too.

For convenience, we'll refer to the *story time* (how many seconds, minutes, hours, etc. pass for the characters in their fictional world) and *game time* (how much time passes for you and your fellow players in the real world).

Most story-time will fit into *scenes*, intervals of time where you and your fellow characters resolve a single element of the story. Scenes are usually five to ten minutes of time both in the story's



A Roll is two six-sided dice

Pick up two six-sided dice (the kind you find in many board games) and roll them, adding the total together.

When the text says “roll”, it’s two regular dice, usually adding some modifier. Most of the time, the rules will tell you to roll and add something else. For example, “roll +schooling” means, “Roll two six-sided dice, add them together, and then add your schooling attribute. The result is your total.

Rolling puts uncertainty into the game. If we never rolled dice, the game might get too predictable, or we might get hung up on who should be able to do what. We’ll only be rolling dice when it would be more interesting to leave the choice up to fate. Otherwise, we should just casually tell our story the best way we know how.

We’ll sometimes use “2d6” as an abbreviation for “roll two six-sided dice”. That’s a notation that many other role-playing games use, too.

Some rolls will have **Modifiers**

After rolling, apply the modifiers to the roll. Modifiers that increase your final total will start with “+” and mods that decrease your total will start with “—”.

If a roll asks you to add something that you don’t have, then just add zero. (If you’re asked to “roll +story” when you have no story points then just roll two dice and total them up, adding nothing.)

Forward applies to your next roll

If you “take +3 forward”, after you make your next roll, add 3 to the final total.

Some forwards only apply to certain rolls. “Take +1 forward to fix the door” means that if your next rolls are to get the tools, to climb the ladder, and to tar the roof, the forward doesn’t apply. It’s not until you make a roll to fix the door that you apply the +1. In general, a forward doesn’t go away until it’s applied to a roll, or until too much time passes for the forward to matter anymore.

Once you use a forward bonus, it’s gone. If you had “+1 to deal with this situation”, then the first roll you make to deal with this situation, you will add +1 to the roll.

Sometimes a forward bonus is only good for your *very next move*, and then only for certain types of moves. If you have a +1 forward if your very next move is to fix the door, then if you do anything else, you lose the bonus.

Back applies to the last roll you just made

If you have “+3 back”, look at your last roll and add three to it. This may turn change your last roll from an undesirable failure into a success.

Don’t wait too long before applying this bonus. If you want to re-write your last outcome, you need to do it before the story proceeds to the next move.

A common way to apply a bonus back to your last roll is to spend a story point to take +3 back. Other players can spend a support point to give +1 back to your last roll, too.

When you roll doubles, it is an **event**

For game purposes, doubles are when you roll dice, two or more of the dice are showing the same number: 3 and 3, 4 and 4, etc. If you're rolling more than two dice, doubles are when any two of them match (3, 3, and 5, etc.)

When your roll is **impaired**, an event means **something bad happens**

If your situation is bad in some way, or if you suffered some setback earlier, your roll may be impaired. When an event happens on an impaired roll, something bad happens, usually related to the roll. For example, an event on an impaired initiative roll may make you stumble and drop something; an event on an impaired righteousness roll might make you lose your nerve, etc.

Events may **trigger a special ability**

For example, "Katana Critical" triggers when you successfully hit a target with a katana and you roll doubles. This event adds +3 to the total that you just rolled. So if you were rolling two dice +1, and you roll came up 3 and 3, you'd have a final total of (3 + 3 + 1 + another 3 from the event =) 10.

Events may **end a lasting condition**

Some conditions expire when any event happens. (A character who is strengthened until the next event keeps the bonus until someone rolls doubles.)

Characters can act by making **moves**

Sometimes, a player will ask to make a move, an action or conscious decision to do something. When the mood of the story is dicey, a move requires a roll. The text will list several results, in order from lowest rolls (the worst) to the highest (the best).

Example Move

Roll 2d6 +bonus	Choose one
up to 6	Miss. You might suffer something terrible.
up to 9	Weak result. You can resolve a weak problem. You might be able to resolve a strong problem if circumstances are good or if you can pass a hard bargain.
up to 12	Strong result. You can resolve a strong or weak problem. You might be able to defeat a grand problem if circumstances are good or if you can pass a hard bargain.
13 or more	Grand result. You can defeat a grand problem, or you can resolve a strong or weak problem without breaking a sweat.

After rolling, choose a single result from the *menu* that your roll qualifies for. You'll often have one or more choices, but you can only pick one.

The better you roll, the better your menu choices are. These menu choices are the best that we, the designers, could come up with, to keep the right level of challenge in the game. You and your fellow players can work together to come up with more choices, using our menus as a guideline.

Every player-character has the **common moves**

In the attributes section, we list the four attributes that every player-character has (initiative, negotiation, righteousness, and schooling) and a common move for each one.

Each playbook has a **unique move** and a **combat move**

Your character comes with a *playbook* that describes certain aspects about your character: their social class, their starting inventory, and (most importantly) their special moves.

The unique move for your character may give you a special ability, or it may be an improved version of a common move.

Your combat move determines the class of weapons that you can use the best. (A samurai will fight better with a katana than with a woodcutter's axe, etc.) You can still try to use any weapon, but you'll be much better if you fight with your appropriate style.

If you use the right combat move with the right weapon and then roll the right result, you can use **special attacks**

If you fight using Bushido, you wield a *katana*, and you roll a 10 or better, you'll be allowed to use the katana's specials of aiming for a better hit, for riposting for advantage, or for cutting down an entire group of foes. You can fight with any weapon you want, using any style you want... but only when style, weapon, and high roll all come together will you get your best results.

Sometimes a miss gives you a bonus to try again on your next move: **Ladder**

Attack moves list a +3 forward if your very next move is another attack move. Other moves may list even bigger bonuses.

Moves with ladders means that you'll eventually get some good result if you keep at it. The question isn't "will you succeed?", it's "how long will it take until you succeed?" If others are fighting to stop you, you might not have enough time.

A common ladder is a player's combat move, where the worst result will give +3 if the very next move is combat.

Characters will have to deal with the responses to their actions

Unlike a move (which is a directed action by a player), a *response* is when the MC puts a choice in front of the player and they must make a decision, a dice roll... or a decision about what dice to roll!

When things are dicey, a player may make two or more moves in a row without any formal issue. In a combat situation, after each player has made their move, the MC will present each player with a response. It might be the same response, or it might be unique for each player.

An example response would look like this.

Player chooses one of these responses:

Ignore or deflect the situation:

roll +appropriate bonus (Initiative? Schooling? etc.)

up to 6 = You fail to ignore this and you suffer something bad (like 1 setback point)

7 or 9 = Choose one: deflect the problem but make a hard bargain in the process... or suffer, as above.

10 or more = You deflect the problem

Confront the problem:

roll +appropriate bonus (Negotiation? Righteousness? etc.)

up to 6 = It doesn't work and you suffer something bad (like 1 setback), you also embarrass yourself, lose money or a personal item, or suffer some other humiliation

up to 9 = Choose one: defeat the problem but make a hard bargain in the process... or suffer, as above. (A common bargain is that you can defeat the problem but doing so would commit a crime or would offend someone.)

10 or more = You defeat the problem

Change the venue of the problem:

roll +appropriate bonus (Negotiation? Schooling? etc.)

up to 6 = It doesn't work, and you may have made things worse!

up to 9 = Either things get worse ... or you can change to something better, but you make a hard bargain in the process

10 or more = You change this problem into something easier to deal with.

In general, rolling six or less is bad, rolling 10 or more is great... and rolling up to 9 is something in the middle.

There's a lot more discussion of responses in the "Master of Ceremonies" chapter.

Something in the middle: Situations, Hard Bargains, and Compromises

Some of the fun from a role-playing game is the randomness from die rolls, which lead to events that we didn't quite plan for. Extreme die rolls lead to extreme results, such as clear triumphs or unambiguous failure.

It's also fun to find ways to mold the events to the story. After a player makes a move or a response, if the result is somewhere in the middle, we should take a moment to ask, is there anything that might change this outcome?

The situation may change this outcome, for good or for bad

When a roll is in the middle range (say, up to 9), the MC and the other players are encouraged to examine the situation. Think of the game as a story that you're all telling together. What would make sense? What would be more interesting?

- Is the lighting bad? If it's dark, foggy, or otherwise hard to see, then attacks might miss their targets, and avoiding other people should be easier.
- Who has the leverage here? If you're outnumbered or outclassed, a character might refuse to listen to your request. If they're in your debt or they owe you a favor, that could tip the scales in your favor.

- How does your character concept affect this? Samurai would know more about warfare and dynasty; priests would have experience being charitable and compassionate; criminals are worldly but untrustworthy; etc. A middling result could turn into a success if you're the right character for the job... and it could become an embarrassing failure if you're not.
- Did an event occur? When you roll doubles, weird events could happen. Maybe something random happens that makes the event unusual. An attack could miss... but also cut an awning support that traps the target. The person you're bargaining with might suddenly notice your resemblance to someone else (a loved one, an old enemy, a missing person they want you to pretend to be, etc.)

Always remember to be fair, to build up, and to have fun. The characters we are playing, the places we are going, and the situations that we get ourselves into are an important part of the narrative.

Never use a situation to turn a great roll into a failure (or a bad roll into a rousing success, either). If the situation was so overwhelming that success or failure was guaranteed, then we shouldn't have been rolling in the first place. Only roll dice when we're uncertain on how things will play out.

How badly do you want it: **Hard Bargains**

Many menus will list an option for a *hard bargain*: when the player-character gets something they want, but at a price. Here's some suggestions:

- The person has the information that you need, but you must pay them a large amount of money first.
- You jump across the gap, but you almost don't make it. You grab the edge of the far cliff, dropping one or more of your possessions into the river, far below.
- The enemy is willing to let you go, if you hand over all your money, first.
- You get the information or items that you need, but you offend someone important in the process. If they ever see your face again, there will be hell to pay.
- You hit the target, but you also fumble in the process. You fall over, you drop your weapon, or do something else that's tense and dramatic.
- To get what you want, you must grovel or to debase yourself before a crowd. In Tokugawa-era Japan, this loss of face could seriously hurt your social standing and morale.
- Your supernatural meddling calls forth a spirit who promises you all the power you desire and more ... but at a cost most dire!
- Or make something up! You and your fellow players should work together to make something interesting and dramatic.

We call these “hard bargains” because these options appear as choices in the menus. “Choose one: either fail, or get what you want but make a hard bargain.” The hard bargain becomes an opportunity for role-playing. Given a choice between failure and a costly success, what would your character do?

Hard bargains appear when a roll’s result is just a little short of what you need to succeed with no questions asked. (The hard bargain is the question!)

The middle of the road: **Compromise**

Unlike a hard bargain, where the player is given a choice to either “succeed and suffer” or “fail and be fine” ... the *compromise* is when the Master of Ceremonies describes the result of the roll as “you get part of what you want.” Some examples:

- The person has the information that you need... but they leave a key detail. (The compound is guarded by trained attack *tokage*; the minister isn’t home, he’s at his house in the bean orchard; the way to the seaweed farm is over the river, but the bridge collapsed in last week’s earthquake, etc.) The omission might be malicious, because they want our heroes to fail... but it could also be simple ignorance because they didn’t understand the request.
- You jump across the gap but don’t quite make it. For a brief moment, you are frozen in terror but you catch a ledge, and now you need help to get over the top.
- The enemy captures one of you, but the rest of you escape.

- You hit the target, but you are also hit, suffering a wound in the process. How dramatic of you to run up the blade, like this!
- Your negotiation is a technical success but a political failure. You get what you want, but you lose face with one or more important people.
- A supernatural power only has partial control over you: instead of draining your life-force completely, you’re merely weakened; or instead of being compelled to do evil, you’re merely paralyzed, etc.
- Or make something up! You and your fellow players should work together to add new twists to the story.

Meta Rules: Story Points can change all this

If your character has story points, you can spend 1 story point to take +3 back to your last roll. This bonus could boost your character from this middling result into a clear success.

If your roll was an abject failure, the +3 back from a story point might just move you into this middling range, where situations and hard bargains will have sway. Just how badly do you need to win?

CHARACTER CREATION

As a player in the *Usagi Yojimbo* game, you will assume the role of a character in a mythic version of Japan in the early 1600s. Your world is populated by talking cats, dogs, rabbits, and other characters. Centuries ago, your world was shaped by powerful, supernatural forces. A few years ago, your country was torn apart by civil war: *Sengoku*, the Warring-States era. When the chaos settled, Tokugawa Ieyasu is now the Shogun, the military general who demands tribute from all other lords (*daimyo*).

The Warring States affected almost everyone. Many homes were lost, and many people were killed. Many samurai warriors still retain their noble status... but their masters are dead, their estates subsumed by rivals, their purses empty and their prospects gone. Lords continue to plot against one another with their sophisticated networks of ninja spies. Criminals seize opportunities to shake down the populace, to set up their own organizations. And commoners struggle to just get by, day to day.

Your character will be one of heroes of this world.

Pick a Species

Your first choice is what sort of character you want to be: cat, dog, rabbit, maybe even something we've never seen before. More information is on page 33.

Species	+Initiative	+Negotiation	+Righteousness	+Schooling
Bear	=0	-1	+1	=0
Canine	=0	=0	+1	-1
Cat	+1	-2	=0	+1
Fox	+1	+1	-1	-1
Goat	+1	-2	+1	=0
Monkey	=0	-1	-1	+2
Panda	-1	+1	=0	=0
Pig	=0	-2	+2	=0
Rabbit	+2	-1	-1	=0
Rhino	+1	-1	+1	-1
Rodent	+1	=0	=0	-1
Snake	=0	+1	-1	=0
Unknown	=0	=0	=0	=0

Copy your four attributes to your character sheet.



You can raise and lower attributes.

At this stage, if you want to move some attribute numbers, you can. For example, if you choose “Monkey” as your species, you can choose to lower your +schooling from +2 to +1 and then raise your +righteousness from -1 to =0.

- You can't raise an attribute above +2.
- You can't lower an attribute below -2.
- Your attributes must balance; the final total must be exactly zero.

Add some distinguishing features

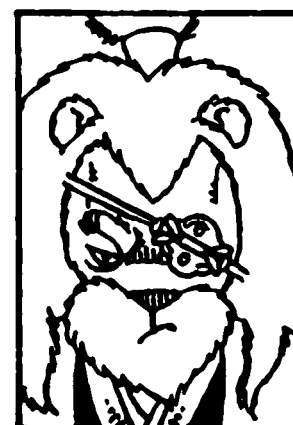
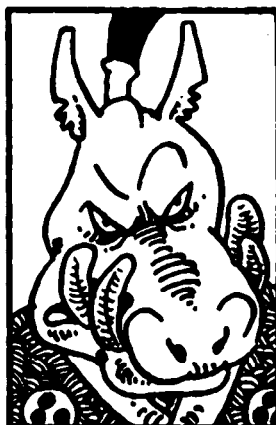
What does your character look like? How long are their ears? Do they have big hands or tiny paws? What color are their eyes? Do they have long hair, a top knot, or something else? Are they tall or short? Use your attributes as an inspiration about your appearance.

Pick a Playbook

Your playbook will determine the special abilities about your character. (Other games might call these “character classes” or “archetypes”.) The playbooks' descriptions begin on page 40.

Playbook	Social Class	Unique Move	Attack Move
Bodyguard	Samurai	Dairokkan	Bushido
Bonze	Priest	Buddhism	Sohei
Bounty Hunter	Samurai	Stalking	Bushido
Fugitive Ninja	Ninja	Stalking	Ninjitsu
Gambler	Criminal	Risk	Ranto
Mendicant	Priest	Buddhism	Kikotsu
Mountain Warrior	Priest	Buddhism	Bushido
Street Entertainer	Commoner	Teamwork	Ranto
Sorcerer	Commoner	Majutsu	Kikotsu
Thief	Criminal	Stalking	Ranto
Undercover Agent	Ninja	Teamwork	Ninjitsu
Veteran	Commoner	Teamwork	Kikotsu
Vigilante	Commoner	Kiwami	Kikotsu
Wanderer	Samurai	Kiwami	Bushido

Your **social class** gives you access to certain weapons, privileges, and rights in society. Your **unique move** is a special ability that you can call upon to get stuff done or to do certain things. Your **attack move** will work with all weapons in the game... but you can unlock special attacks with certain weapons. (If you will be playing with the variant rule of *upgrades*, from page 193, your playbook's moves also give you access to unique advancements in your career.)



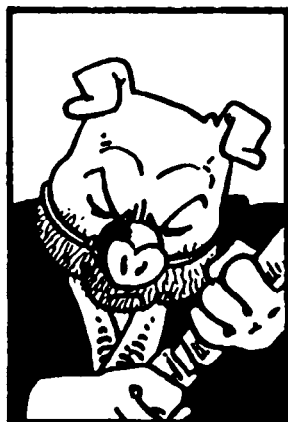
Add some distinguishing features

Now that you know your character's lot in life, how does that affect their appearance? What clothes do they wear? Do they carry weapons, and what kind? Are they battle-scared? Calloused from hard work? Bent with age? Fresh-faced and ready to take on the world? Be creative and have fun with it!

If you want, pick a Quirk

A *quirk* is optional, and you can only choose one. Your quirk gives your character a positive and a negative change in the context of the rules. Quirks are described in detail on page 70.

Quirk	Positive	Negative
None	None	None
Companion	NPC friend helps you	NPC gets into trouble
Difficulty	Extra story points	Your life is complicated
Former Life	Swap combat move	Outsider to society
Honorable	Bonuses to rolls	Must be honorable
Imposing	+one die and -3 to righteousness rolls	
Jumpy	+one die and -3 to initiative rolls	
Noncombatant	+1 to rolls in combat	+1 setback if you attack
Selfless	Give story points away	Or have them taken!



Quirk	Positive	Negative
Smooth	+one die and -3 to negotiation rolls	
Spirited	+one die and -3 to impair rolls	
Unpredictable	Roll a 6? Add another die!	Roll a 1? Suffer -4!
Wealthy	Solve problems with money	Suffer money problems
Worldly	+one die and -3 to schooling rolls	

Add a motivation

Most people with sense would stay home and live out an honest, peaceful life. So why does your character wander the countryside, getting into fights and into situations where they don't belong? *Motivation* is a hook for the Master of Ceremonies to write adventures that would involve your Character. By providing Motivation, the stories will feel more personal.

Some possible motivations:

- Strong sense of honor
- Improving combat skill
- Defending the helpless
- Looking for a lost loved one
- Money (wants it or needs it)
- On the run from a clan, organization, or powerful individual
- Finding the other half of this scroll

- Ending the life of Furanku Kitanai, even though such a death would never undo the wrongs that he has done to you and to yours
- On a quest or pilgrimage, such as to wash one's sword in the waters surrounding all four main islands of Japan, or to visit one hundred shrines
- Or make up your own!

Finish your character's description

You can add or change more details about your character's distinguishing characteristics.

Choosing your character's Personal Name

The English translations offered here might not be the same for all versions of the name; many names can be written multiple ways, each with a different translation. You are encouraged to look to historical sources for more ideas about how to name your character.

Female Names	Male Names	Unisex Names
Ai ("love")	Akira ("intelligence")	Aki ("bright")
Akako ("red")	Botan ("peony")	Anri ("restful")
Ami ("friend")	Gen ("Spring")	Chiaki ("thousand")

Female Names	Male Names	Unisex Names
Ayame ("stag flower")	Goro ("fifth son")	Hajime ("beginning")
Cho ("butterfly")	Hiroshi ("generous")	Hiromu ("abundant beauty")
Hana ("blossom")	Ichiro ("first son")	Ibuki ("wind")
Hide ("excellent")	Jiro ("second son")	Jun ("genuine")
Hitomi ("eye")	Ken ("strong")	Kazumi ("peace")
Izumi ("fountain")	Mitsu ("light")	Kurumi ("walnut")
Kei ("reverent")	Rin ("park")	Midori ("green")
Kiku ("chrysanthemum")	Ryu ("dragon")	Natsuki ("summer")
Mai ("brightness")	Saburo ("third son")	Natsuo ("summer")
Megumi ("charity")	Sanyu ("happiness")	Rei ("graceful")
Nami ("wave")	Shin ("virtue")	Rin ("bell")
Naomi ("pleasant one")	Shiro ("fourth son")	Ryoh ("refreshing")
Nozomi ("hope")	Tanaka ("from the rice field")	Shigeri ("luxuriant")
Sachi ("blessed")	Tomi ("rich")	Teru ("bright")
Sakura ("cherry")	Toshi ("mirror image")	Tsukasa ("control")
Shinobu ("perseverance")	Udo ("ginseng")	Yoshimi ("beautiful")
Sumi ("elegant")	Yoshi ("best")	Yuri ("reason")



Modifiers to Personal Names

For variety, a personal name can have a suffix added. For female names, common suffixes are *—ko* (meaning “child”) or *—mi* (“beauty”). Noble, unmarried women might have *—hime* (“princess”). For male names: the suffix *—ichi* or *—kazu* means “the first son”; *—ji*, the second son; and *—zo*, the third son. For example, “Shinzo” means “The third son of Shin”.

Surnames

If your character is a samurai, you will have a *surname*. In the Tokugawa era, there are thousands of noble surnames. Many surnames are far removed from their original language, so that they have no direct translation into Japanese words.

When making your character, you can choose a historical example, or you can make one up by combining two of the choices below.

Samurai Surname (combine any two)

Aki	Kuni	Mochi	Nobu	Tada	Tsuna
Fuji	Masa	Mori	Nori	Taka	Uji
Fumi	Mitsu	Moto	Sada	Toki	Yama
Hide	Kage	Mune	Sane	Tomo	Yasu
Hisa	Kane	Mushi	Shige	Toshi	Yori
Ichi	Katsu	Naga	Suke	Tsugu	Yoshi

Telling the Commoners Apart

Merchants, peasants, and other commoners are legally prohibited from having a surname. Some characters may distinguish themselves by their occupation (Akira the Tailor), their place of origin

(Daishuso from *Geishu*), their physical characteristics (Big Ano), or their disposition (Angry Kaede).

You character might prefer to use a nickname, such as “Stray Dog” or “Lone Goat”. Or you might use a shortened version of a long name, such as “Gen” instead of “Gennosuké”.

You can make changes to your character later in the game

Don’t worry if you haven’t figured everything out about your character! Part of the fun of a role-playing game is the experience of your character changing as the story unfolds.

As you play the *Usagi* game, your character will have adventures, momentary defeats, and hard-won victories. Each game session ends with a *debriefing* where you can discuss how you want your character to change and grow.

After each session of the game, you can adjust your attributes, moving numbers up or down (as long as they total zero when you’re done.) You can swap your quirk for another one, or you could even choose to have no quirk at all.

You and your fellow players may want to consider using a variant rule of *upgrades* (described on page 193). These upgrades will make your character more capable as you “level up” with experience... but each upgrade adds a new thing to track, making the game much more complex.

ATTRIBUTES

Fixed Attributes

These are numbers from -2 (the worst) to +2 (the best). These four are **+initiative** (alertness and speed), **+negotiation** (charm and diplomacy), **+righteousness** (strength and willpower), and **+schooling** (experience and intelligence). These attributes remain the same throughout the adventure, but they can be changed after each session of play. (See “Debriefing”, page 171.)

When things get dicey, you will roll two dice and add your attribute

In the story, if your character asks an innkeeper to serve you food, that’s not a thing we really need to “game out” using numbers; that’s a casual request.

But what if you ask a samurai to spare the life of a peasant that accidentally touched his sword? Will this stranger agree to your request? To add an unknown element to the game, you may be asked to roll dice: in this case, you might roll two dice and add your **+negotiation** attribute to the total.

In general, a roll of 7 or better will solve most problems to your satisfaction; a roll of 10 or better will solve the stronger issues; and a roll of 13 or better can solve the grandest of problems. See “Moves” on page 14 for more details.

When bad things happen, attributes can become **impaired**

When your character suffers some physical injury, mental breakdown, or social misfortune, their abilities to get things done can be reduced.

In game terms, your attributes may become **impaired**; any rolls you make that include the attribute are at risk for a bad event.

Events happen when you roll doubles on the dice (whenever two or more dice show the same number). So if you roll two dice and they come up showing 4 and 4, that’s a match, so that’s an event. If you make a roll that adds **+schooling**, *and* your schooling is currently impaired, then something goes wrong.

You can suffer impairments from **impairment rolls** — whenever you receive a setback point, you must roll two dice and **subtract** your current setback total. See page 31 for more details.

You might also suffer impairments from particularly bad rolls on certain moves, from other characters, from hard bargains, or from other story-related incidents. (A bad jump could have you falling off the roof and hurting yourself. Running into a burning building to save someone could mean grievous injuries. Upholding your honor could still make you lose face and respect from your peers, etc.)

Initiative (observation and timing)

This attribute is for seizing the moment and keeping your wits about you. Characters with high +initiative can be quick, observant, and decisive. Characters with low +initiative might be slow, clumsy, or careless.

Common move: Read a situation

Your character can look for important information at the scene where they are.

Roll 2d6

+initiative

Choose one

- | up to 6 | The MC tells you about obvious things that your character can observe. |
|---------|---|
| up to 9 | Ask one of the following questions of the MC. You get +1 forward on the next roll you make that acts on the answer the MC gives you. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do these people want?• How can these people help me?• Who is really in charge here?• When it comes to violence, who is the biggest threat?• What is here that concerns me?• Is there anything here that isn't supposed to be here?• Is there any trickery, deceit, or other falseness?• What's the best way to deal with these people? |

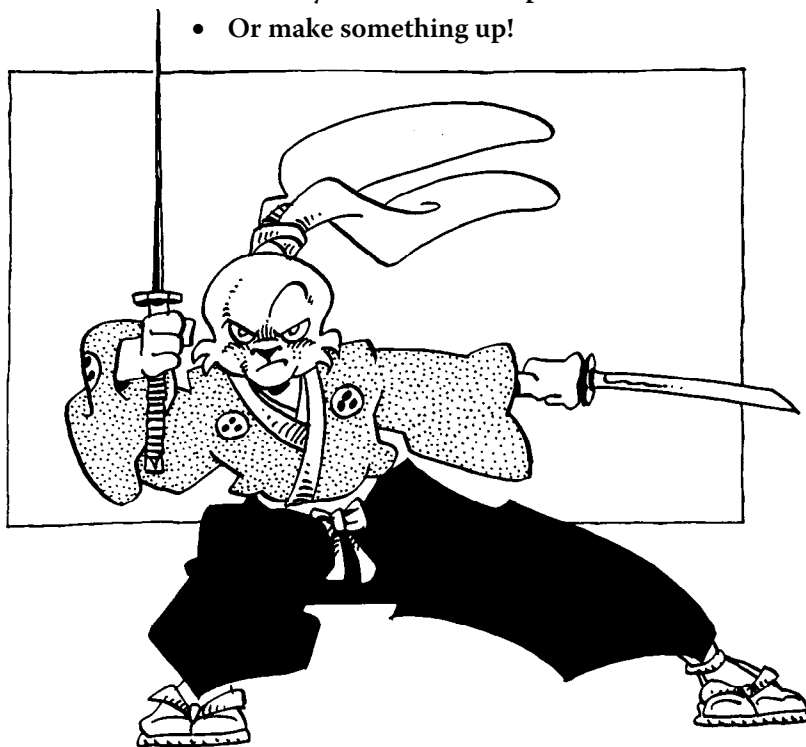
10 or more As above, only you can ask three questions (instead of one)

Impaired Initiative =

Awkward Complication

When you (the player), roll doubles, you can trigger complications for your character. When your initiative is impaired, you become *awkward*. Sample complications:

- You stumble, trip, or fall over.
- You drop something.
- In a chase, you fall behind or get caught.
- You overlook something that you would have seen if you weren't so impaired.
- Or make something up!



Negotiation (social interactions)

You can interact with other people to get what you want. Characters with high +negotiation can be diplomatic, charming, and charismatic. Characters with low +negotiation might be boorish, ill-spoken, or wishy-washy.

Common Move: Negotiate

You can use your smooth-talking skills to talk to non-player-characters.

Roll 2d6 +negotiation	Choose one
up to 6	Make a costly concession to a weak character to get what you want. Or, pass off some lie, forgery or other misrepresentation to someone who really couldn't care less what the truth is.
up to 9	Convince a weak character to make concessions or favors for you (including getting them to confess the truth). Or, make a costly concession to a strong character to get what you want. Or, pass off some lie, forgery, disguise, or other misrepresentation to someone. If their interest is weak, they'll believe you. If their interest is strong, they'll be suspicious but won't challenge you on this issue.
up to 12	Convince a strong character to make concessions or favors for you (including getting them to confess the truth). Or, pass off some lie to someone. If their interest is weak or strong, they'll believe you. If their interest is grand, they'll be suspicious but won't challenge you on this issue.

Roll 2d6 +negotiation	Choose one
13 or more	Convince a grand character to make concessions or favors for you (including getting them to confess the truth). Or, pass off some lie to someone. If their interest is weak or strong, they'll believe you. If their interest is grand, they'll be suspicious but won't challenge you on this issue.

Impaired Negotiation = Embarrassing Complication

When you roll doubles on moves, you can trigger complications from impaired attributes. When your negotiation is impaired, you become *embarrassed*.

Sample complications:

- You reveal some secret information to people who will use this knowledge against the best interests of you or a friend
- You commit some social gaffe, faux pas, or other mortification that makes your target distrust you
- You make some blunder, mistake, or other humiliation that makes others not want to associate with you
- Or make something up!

Righteousness (endurance, hardship, willfulness)

You have a sense of willpower and determination. Characters with high +righteousness values can be stubborn, imposing, and the center of attention. Characters with low +righteousness will be fearful, indecisive, and meek.

Common Move: Overcome

You can persevere though bad conditions.

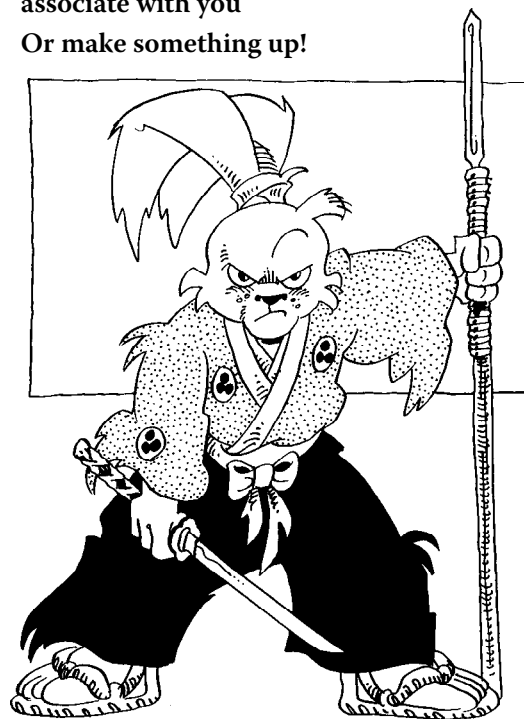
Roll 2d6 +righteousness	Choose one
up to 6	Convince a weak foe to surrender to your superior numbers. Or, resist a weak situation but with a hard bargain in the process.
up to 9	Demand a weak foe's surrender. If they don't, you take +1 forward on all rolls to subdue them. Or, resist being influenced or affected by a weak situation. Or, resist a strong situation but with a hard bargain in the process.
up to 12	Demand a strong foe's surrender. If they don't, you take +1 forward on all rolls to subdue them. Or, resist being influenced or affected by a strong situation. Or, resist a grand situation but with a hard bargain in the process.
13 or more	Demand a grand foe's surrender. If they don't, you take +1 forward on all rolls to subdue them. Resist being influenced or affected by a grand situation

Impaired Righteousness = Discouraging Complication

When you roll doubles on moves, you can trigger complications from impaired attributes. When your righteousness is impaired, you become *discouraged*.

Sample complications:

- Your character suffers panic, fear, terror, or something else that would prevent them from acting in their best interests.
- Your character breaks down and submits to the demands of another's personality.
- You make some blunder, mistake, or other humiliation that makes others not want to associate with you
- Or make something up!



Schooling (knowledge, life experience)

Book learning, vocational training, and life experience are all measured by your schooling attribute. Characters with high +schooling can be literate, well-spoken, and good with tools and trades. Characters with low +schooling might be uneducated, inarticulate, and lacking knowledge in the ways of the world.

Common Move: Know Lore

You can use your knowledge of history and academics to ask the MC questions about the game's setting.

Roll 2d6
+initiative

Choose one

up to 6 The MC tells you about obvious things that your character can observe.

up to 9 Spend five minutes (in story-time) and 1 support point to help a friend, who then removes 1 setback point.

Or, ask one of the following questions of the MC. You get +1 forward on the next roll you make that acts on the answer the MC gives you.

- What happened in history that's relevant to what's going on here?
- How does the law figure into this?
- Who is important to people in this region?
- What is the answer to this math problem?
- How can we repair or craft a specific item?
- What is the history of this local place?

Roll 2d6
+initiative

Choose one

10 or more Spend five minutes (in story-time) and 1 support point to help a friend, who then either removes 1 setback point or removes one impairment.

Or, ask three questions of the (instead of one); see above for a list.

Impaired Schooling = Exhausted Complication

When you roll doubles on moves, you can trigger complications from impaired attributes. When your schooling is impaired, you become *exhausted*. Sample complications:

- An item that you've crafted or repaired is revealed to have a terrible flaw.
- You suffer headaches, dizziness, anxiety, or other symptoms from over-work and strain.
- You say something that's factually correct, but socially inappropriate
- Or make something up!

Fluid Attributes (Points)

You also track three reserves of points: story points (good for you), support points (good for your friends) and setback points (not so good for anyone). These numbers change as the story goes on.

Story Points

You gain story points by advancing the narrative. Story points begin at =0 and increase each time you uncover a story point, to a maximum of +3. After each adventure finishes, your story points reset to =0.

You can spend a point to take +3 back to your last roll and gain 1 support

For example, if your last roll was a 5, you could spend one story point to raise that roll to an 8.

You must make this decision to raise your last roll immediately before making a new roll, or before someone else makes a move. You can't wait and then decide something we did a half-hour ago should have worked. As with everything in the game, work with your fellow players and your MC to make your game the best that it can be.

After spending a story point, you gain one support point

Decrease your story points by one and add one point to your support total. See *support points*, below, for more details. (Each time you spend a story point, you gain a support point. If you really need a support point, you can convert 1, 2, or more of your story points to support points at any time.)

You can't have more than 3 story points; give it to someone else and gain 1 support

If you gain a fourth story point, give that story point to a different player, and you gain 1 support point.

Story points add to your attack move

Each player-character has a unique move for combat: you will roll two dice and add your +story to your attack rolls. (If you don't have any +story points, you will roll two dice and add nothing.)

During play, it will be in your best interests to investigate mysteries, to speak with the locals, and to find out more details before you engage anyone in a strong confrontation. Each step you take towards solving your problems will earn you 1 story point; each adventure will have at least 3 chances to earn story points.

Impaired Story = Fumbling Complication

When you roll doubles on moves, you can trigger complications from impaired attributes. When your story is impaired, you are *fumbling*. (Most rolls that use +story will be during a heated combat.)

Sample complications:

- You drop or break your weapon.
- You trip, stumble, fall, or otherwise fall into a disadvantaged position.
- You overlook something and it becomes a moment for your tragic downfall.
- Or make something up!

Support Points

You begin play with +1 support, and you can gain as many as +3. After each adventure, your support count will reset to +1.

When you spend a story point, you gain a support point. You can also gain support points by rolling high on an impairment roll.

You can spend a support point to give another player +1 back to their last roll. Say something encouraging to your friend. Your character doesn't have to be physically present; your support could take the form of a flash-back or reminiscence.

While you can only spend one point to give a player +1 back to their last roll, another player can spend support to increase this total.

You can't have more than 3 support points;
give it to someone else

If you gain a fourth point, instead give a support point to another player who only has 2 or less. (If every player has 3 support points, you should all start being more helpful to each other!)

When spent, a support point is removed from play. (Reduce your story-point total by 1.)

Some moves that help others may require you to spend story points

For example, there's a +schooling move where you can spend 1 support point to remove a setback point. You and your fellow players should look for ways to spend support points to help other characters in the story (like how you spend story points to help yourself.)

Impaired Story = Fatigued Complication

When you roll doubles on moves, you can trigger complications from impaired attributes. When your support is impaired, you are *fatigued*. (Some characters roll +support when they use their playbook's unique move.) Sample complications:

- You are too tired to adequately work at your job, and you make an embarrassing mistake.
- Your efforts to help someone else only make things worse.
- You have an emotional breakdown because you can't help everyone that you need to help.
- Or make something up!



Setback Points

You gain setback points when bad things happen.

Setback points

When you gain setback points, the MC must tell you what the setback is. (Is it exhaustion from being struck by a weapon? Injury from being struck by a weapon? Humiliation from losing face?) Knowing what the setback will help with the next part, which is finding out what happens to you.

When you gain one setback point, immediately roll two dice minus your setback point total. This is your impairment roll.

Yes, that's two dice *minus* your current setback points. More setback is worse, and so the more setback points you have, the lower your final roll's total will be.

First you get the setback point, then you make the impair roll. (If you had no points, then you get a point, then you make a roll of two dice minus the one point you just received, etc.)

The impairment that you suffer is inspired by what triggered your impairment roll. (If you just gained a setback point from being hit in combat, then an impairment might be to your combat move, or maybe your +initiative as you become injured or your +righteousness as you become afraid. If the setback was because of a social situation, your +negotiation or +schooling might be impaired as you lose confidence or face, etc.) While the MC hands out impairments

Roll	Impairment Roll result
2d6 – setback	
Zero or less	5 Grand Suffering: The MC will tell you to impair five of your attributes. Also, if you have more than 3 setback points, drop your total to 3.
1 to 3	3 Strong Suffering: The MC will tell you to impair three of your attributes. Also, if you have more than 3 setback points, drop your total to 3.
4 to 6	1 Weak Suffering: The MC will tell you to impair one of your attributes. (You and your fellow players can make suggestions.) Also, if you have more than 3 setback points, drop your total to 3.
7 to 9	Overcoming Adversity: No effect.
10 or more	Esprit: The camaraderie of your friends fills you with determination. Gain 1 support.

There's no expressed limit to the number of setback points you can have

Unlike story or support, you can have 4, 5, or more setback points. (Many of the rolls that use setback as a modifier will have results that say "reduce your setback total to 3", however. So it's likely that your setback totals will be capped at 3, but that all depends on how you're rolling.)

Impaired Setback = Tragic Complication

When you roll doubles on moves, you can trigger complications from impaired attributes. When your setback is impaired, you are about to have a *tragedy*. Setback will probably be the last thing you want to impair. Sample complications:

- You suffer a life-threatening injury and collapse.
- You suffer a mental breakdown, unable to continue your struggle.
- You suffer debilitating social anxiety, withdrawing from all social contact.
- Or make something up!

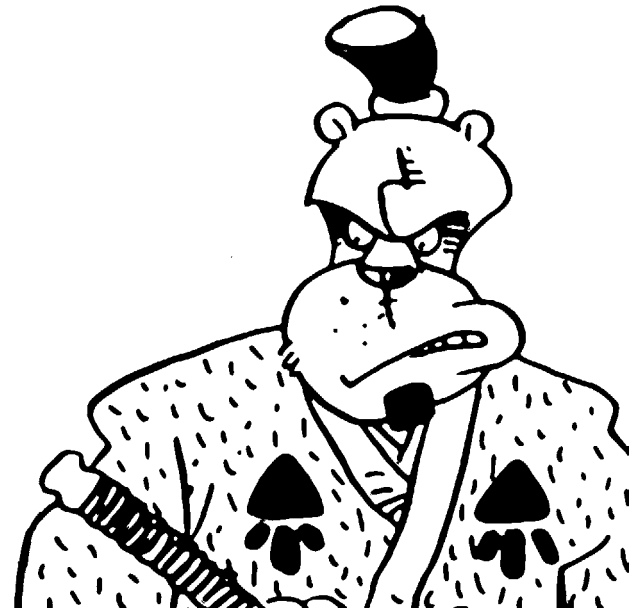


SPECIES

In the *Usagi* stories, Japan is populated by a multitude of intelligent species, all based on real-world animals. There is no real-world logic to appearance of animal species in this setting. Animals that are native to the real-world Japan are not necessarily more common than animals from any other corner of the world. One of the most important characters in the series is a rhinoceros, and lions also make appearances. If one were to ask a sage or scholar about this, one would simply be told that the gods created everyone as they are and placed them according to their whim or divine plan.

While they live in a homogenous culture, each species is typified by different characteristics that make them unique. Some of these are obvious physical traits — bears tend to be much larger and stronger than mice. Others are personality quirks, or tendencies towards certain kinds of behavior. For example, dogs are usually quite loyal, while cats are independently minded. These traits should not be taken as universal, but rather as stereotypical attitudes. There is no reason that a player could not make a loyal and subservient cat, for example, or even a physically weak bear.

You can try making up your own species to play. Before you start play, your four attributes (initiative, negotiation, righteousness, and schooling) must balance at (add up to zero).



Bear

Stereotypically large and slow, bears are often fierce warriors. However, their generally staid outlook on life and enjoyment of simple pleasures means that they are just as likely to crave a life of quiet farming or trade. It is not uncommon to see young bears employed as guards or warriors, though nearly as many may be found serving as priests.

Initiative	=0
Negotiation	-1
Righteousness	+1
Schooling	=0



Canine

Dogs are among the most common of species in Japan. Every real-world breed is represented, ranging from the tiniest of terriers to the largest wolfhound. Though they differ greatly in physical capacities, canines tend to have similar outlooks on life. They enjoy simple pleasures and socialization and tend to have a great deal of loyalty to their superiors. Dogs are often excellent samurai and bodyguards.

Initiative =0

Negotiation =0

Righteousness +1

Schooling -1



Cat

Cats are nearly as diverse in body type as canines and vary in size from petite Sand Cats and house cats to imposing Tigers. Cats are stereotypically reserved and aloof and prefer to socialize in small groups of friends. Smaller cats are famous for their stealthy tread and nimble paws.

Initiative +1

Negotiation -2

Righteousness =0

Schooling +1



Fox

Though like dogs in many ways, foxes tend to be much smaller and lighter. They also tend to have much larger ears, and quick, dexterous movements. They are often loners, although they are noted for their charm and ability to get along well in a group.

Initiative +1

Negotiation +1

Righteousness -1

Schooling -1



Goat

Goats are, more than anything else, survivors. They take the rough with the smooth, and work to make the best of a given situation. This attitude makes them naturally predisposed to some of the more ascetic holy orders. Males of this species have prominent horns, of which they are often inordinately proud.

Initiative +1

Negotiation -2

Righteousness +1

Schooling =0



Monkey

Monkeys are gregarious creatures, who enjoy living in boisterous communities. They have a reputation for being somewhat foolish and high-spirited, but few will question their inventiveness. Monkeys are often artisans or entertainers.

Initiative =0

Negotiation -1

Righteousness -1

Schooling +2



Panda

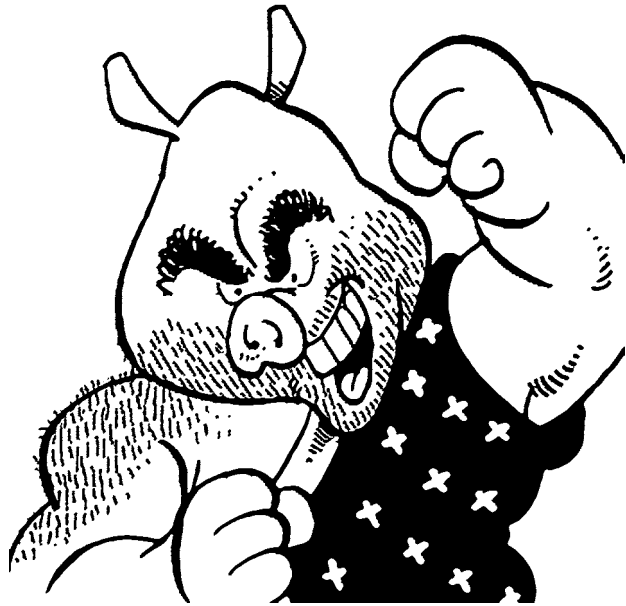
Though physically like bears, pandas are very different creatures. They are somewhat less muscular, and smaller in size. Pandas are often cautious and contemplative creatures. As such, they make fine magistrates and administrators, though they are not as often remembered for their skill in battle.

Initiative -1

Negotiation +1

Righteousness =0

Schooling =0



Pig

Pigs are burly animals, often squat and barrel-like in build. They rarely have more than a thin, bristly coat of fur. They tend to be very tough, with surprising reserves of stamina. The common view is that pigs are often stubborn creatures, with little use for the high ideals and abstract thought of religion. They are also known as very self-indulgent people, prone to eat and drink huge amounts whenever they can. All Pigs have a very keen sense of smell.

Initiative =0

Negotiation -2

Righteousness +2

Schooling =0



Rabbit

Rabbits can be found in every part of Japan. They are often characterized by their strong sense of family and community. They recognize the need for a strong society and work together to achieve this. Physically, they are notable for their keen ears and powerful legs. Few people can run faster or jump higher than a rabbit.

Initiative +2

Negotiation -1

Righteousness -1

Schooling =0



Rhinoceros

Large and muscular, and boasting a prominent horn, rhinos have historically been some of the most famous warriors in Japanese history. If they have a failing, it is that they tend to be driven relentlessly by some goal, often to the short-sighted exclusion of all other considerations.

Initiative +1

Negotiation -1

Righteousness +1

Schooling -1



Rodent

Though nearly identical in body shape, rats and mice differ notably in size, and somewhat in their view of the world. Rats are usually loners, and rarely stay in one place for long. They are not renowned as warriors but have a reputation for fighting viciously if cornered. For their part, mice tend to be somewhat quieter, and more gregarious. Still, individuals of both species tend to be survivors, and have a sense of curiosity that can get them into trouble.

Initiative +1

Negotiation =0

Righteousness =0

Schooling -1



Snake

The most unusual of all the species featured in the *Usagi* stories, only one snake has appeared in the main story. But this is *your* story, so you should play the character that is interesting to you. In the context of the story, snakes haven't had any problem fighting other people, rising in the ranks of society, or with anything else, for that matter.

Initiative =0

Negotiation +1

Righteousness -1

Schooling =0



Unknown

Usagi's Japan is populated by many people who belong to no particular species. These individuals are simply “fuzzy” people, who develop their own affinities and traits based on their upbringing. Their lack of specific species is rarely the subject of commentary. Indeed, it would be impolite to mention it.

Initiative =0

Negotiation =0

Righteousness =0

Schooling =0

PLAYBOOKS

The purpose of a *playbook* is to give every character one basic set of skills and abilities to begin the game. This playbook gives you two unique moves.

In the Tokugawa era, the highest of all castes are the warriors. One must be born a Samurai in order to carry the *katana* (long sword).

Almost all common folk are farmers, growing rice and other crops for their own sustenance as well as for the lords. Since farming isn't really the exciting stuff of adventures, Player-characters will usually be the bolder types.

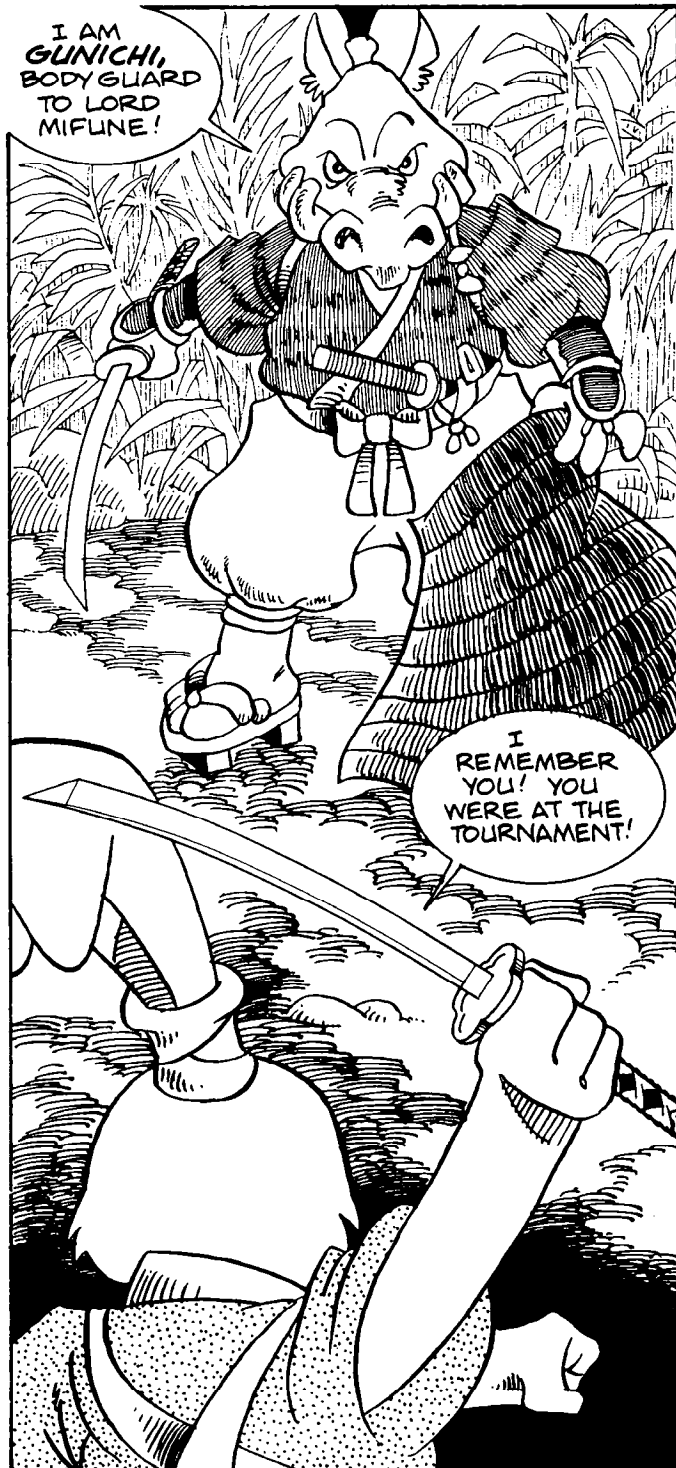


Not everyone in feudal Japan lives a respected life. Many schemers and scoundrels, live hand to mouth, scraping by however they can. While many criminals are brutish louts without morality, Players are encouraged to be romanticized criminals — ones who see themselves as misunderstood heroes.

In the warring-states era, Buddhist warrior-monks known as *sohei* wielded significant influence. Sometimes numbering in the thousands, these monks were a formidable fighting array. Many generals struggled against them, but it was not until Tokugawa Ieyasu's powerful military rose to power that these warrior-monasteries were finally abolished.

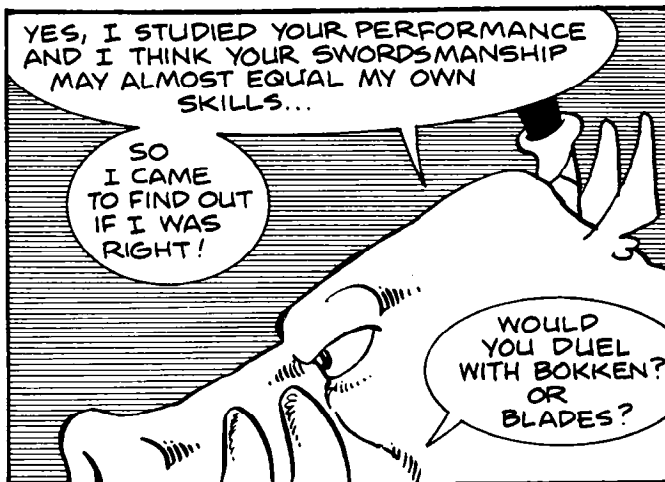
In *Usagi's* world, all samurai player-characters are assumed to be *ronin* — samurai without masters, land, or duty. Perhaps their lord was killed in battle. Perhaps the estate was sold off or otherwise removed, and the samurai were dismissed.





I AM
GUNICHI,
BODY GUARD
TO LORD
MIFUNE!

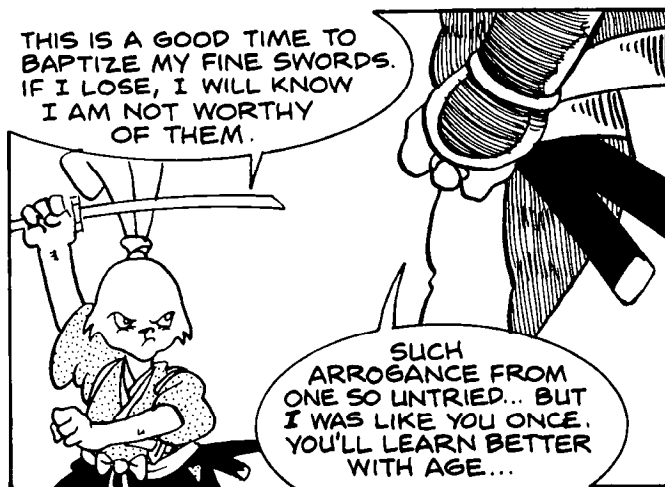
I
REMEMBER
YOU! YOU
WERE AT THE
TOURNAMENT!



YES, I STUDIED YOUR PERFORMANCE
AND I THINK YOUR SWORDSMANSHIP
MAY ALMOST EQUAL MY OWN
SKILLS...

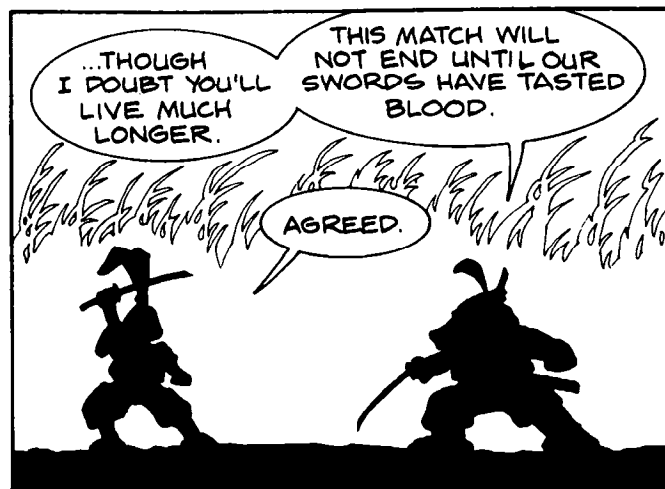
SO
I CAME
TO FIND OUT
IF I WAS
RIGHT!

WOULD
YOU DUEL
WITH BOKKEN?
OR
BLADES?



THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO
BAPTIZE MY FINE SWORDS.
IF I LOSE, I WILL KNOW
I AM NOT WORTHY
OF THEM.

SUCH
ARROGANCE FROM
ONE SO UNTRIED... BUT
I WAS LIKE YOU ONCE.
YOU'LL LEARN BETTER
WITH AGE...



...THOUGH
I DOUBT YOU'LL
LIVE MUCH
LONGER.

THIS MATCH WILL
NOT END UNTIL OUR
SWORDS HAVE TASTED
BLOOD.

AGREED.

Bodyguard (Yojimbo)

Social Class: Samurai

You are a samurai. You have the rights and privileges of the *buke* class. You begin the game with one of the following sets of weapons:

- *katana* (long sword) and *wakizashi* (short sword)
- katana and naginata (pole-arm)
- katana and daikyu (long bow)
- *kusarigama* (sickle and chain) and *tanto* (dagger)
- katana and yari (spear)
- *no-dachi* (great sword) and *tanto*

Commoners are not permitted to carry the larger weapons, and most lack any sort of combat training. Rich merchants often hire *ronin* such as yourself to protect themselves against attack.

Unique Move: Dairokkan

You have a sense for danger.

Roll 2d6

+setback

Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Dairokkan, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Interrupt a friend before they roll to defend against an attack. You become exposed, and that friend gets +3 forward to roll.

up to 12 Interrupt a friend before they roll to defend against an attack. You become exposed, and that friend successfully defends against the attack... but now you are the target; roll to defend yourself.

13 or more Interrupt a friend before they roll to defend against an attack. You become exposed, and both you and your friend avoid the attack.

Attack Move: Bushido

You fight according to the eight principles of the warrior class.

Roll 2d6

+story

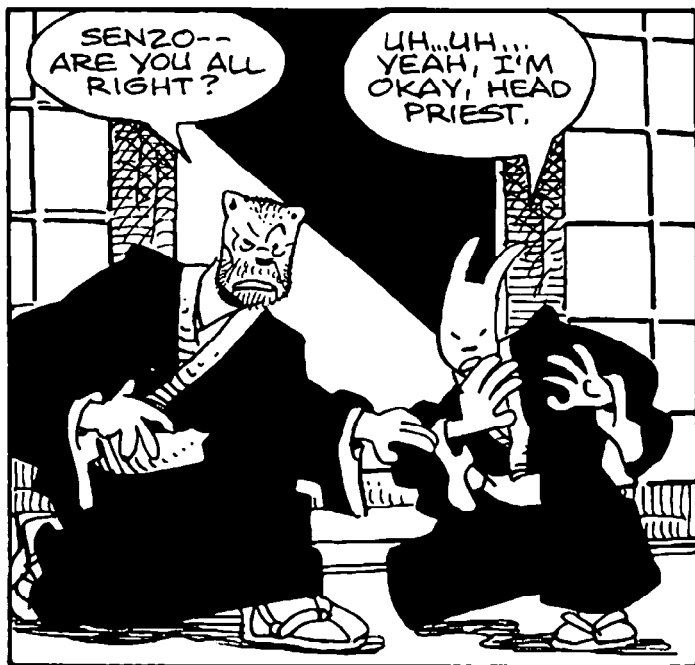
Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Bushido, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Bushido.



Bonze (Bouzou)

Social Class: Priest

You begin the game with a *bo* staff.

The typical Buddhist priest, a *Bonze* is what most people think of when they think of Buddhist monks, with their shaved heads, simple robe, and ascetic lifestyle. Before Tokugawa, Buddhist monasteries had many warriors and had strong political influence; in Usagi's time, their power has been broken and the remaining bonzeries are few and far between, mostly small shrines. More than one bonze is a former samurai or criminal who has given up a life of violence and has taken on a new name.

Unique Move: Buddhism

You have studied the religious doctrines of the Buddha.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Invoke a weak aspect of Buddhism (enough to convince people you're a priest).
Or, take five minutes and spend 1 support to remove 1 setback from a friend.

up to 9 Perform strong doctoring or medicine on a sickly person.
Or, invoke a strong aspect of Buddhism (banish spirits, etc.)
Or, take five minutes and spend 1 support to remove 1 impairment from a friend.
Or, give someone +1 back to a roll they just made.
Or, spend 1 support to give someone +3 back.

10 or more Perform grand doctoring or medicine on a sickly person.
Or, invoke a grand aspect of Buddhism (banish spirits, etc.)
Or, give someone +2 back to a roll they just made.
Or, spend 1 support point to give someone +6 back.

Attack Move: Sohei

You fight according to principles of the priestly class.

Roll 2d6

+story

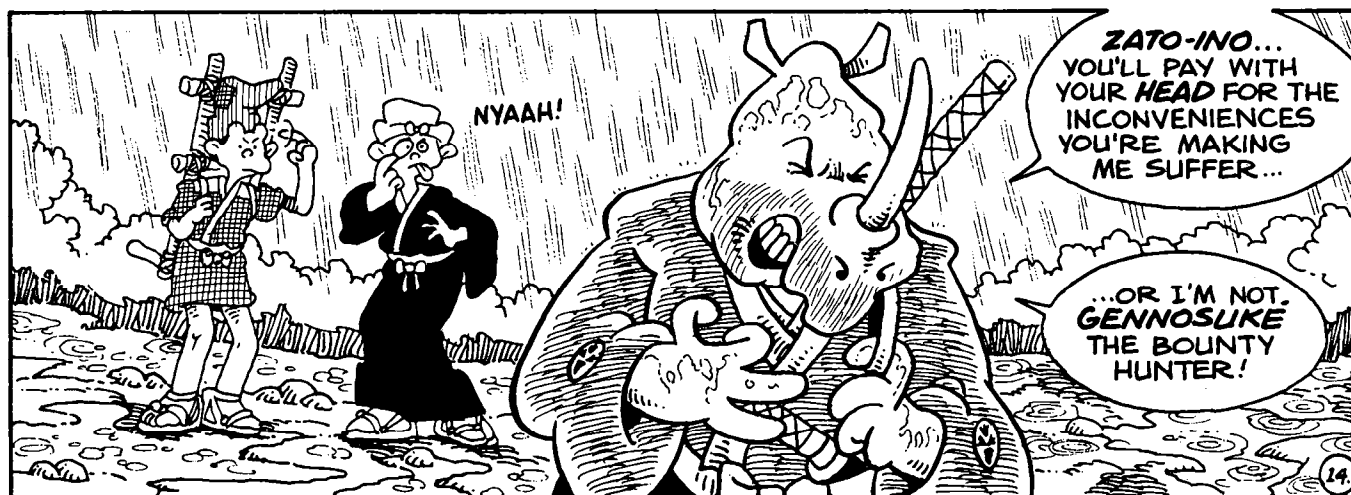
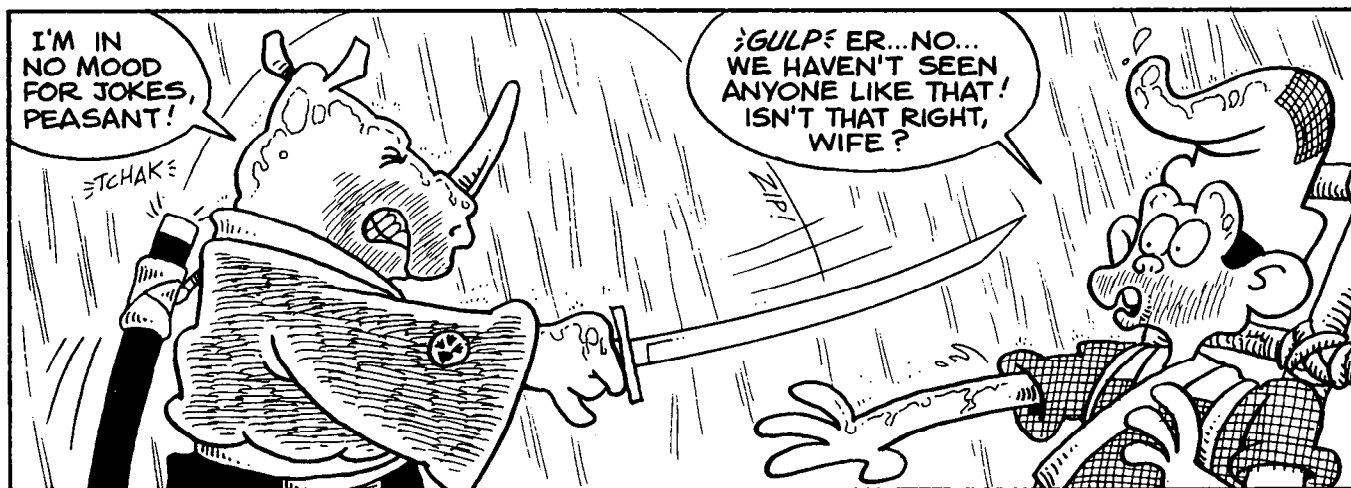
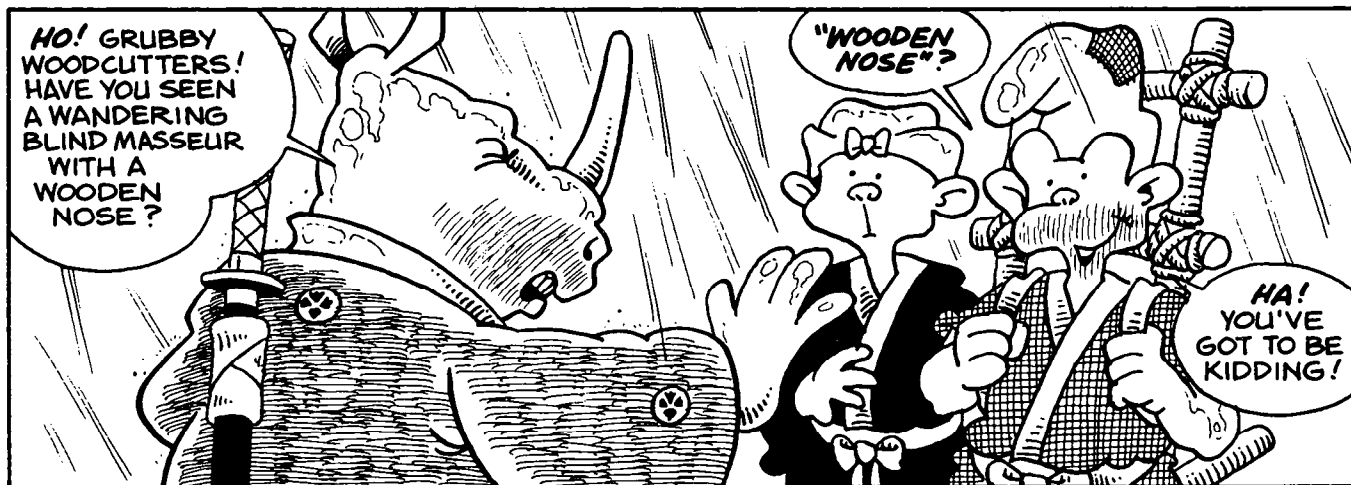
Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Sohei, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit..
Or, if you are using a Sohei weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit.
Or, if you are using a Sohei weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Sohei.



Bounty Hunter

(Shoukin-Kasegi)

Social Class: **Samurai**

You are a samurai. You have the rights and privileges of the *buke* class.

You begin the game with one of the following sets of weapons:

- *katana* (long sword) and *wakizashi* (short sword)
- katana and naginata (pole-arm)
- katana and daikyu (long bow)
- *kusarigama* (sickle and chain) and *tanto* (dagger)
- katana and yari (spear)
- *no-dachi* (great sword) and *tanto*

Despite the peace of the Tokugawa Shogunate, dangerous scofflaws, roustabouts, and assassins continue to exist. The bounty hunter combines a capacity for finding criminals with samurai training and privilege to perform this dangerous duty. Bounty hunter characters bring investigative skills and combat training to any party.

Unique Move: **Stalking**

You're on the hunt.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Get a weak clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a weak target without being seen.
Or, flee or break off from following a strong target, without being discovered.

up to 9 Get a strong clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a strong target without being seen.
Or, flee or break off from following a grand target, without being discovered.

10 or more Get a grand clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a grand target without being seen.

Attack Move: **Bushido**

You fight according to the eight principles of the warrior class.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Bushido, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Bushido.



AFTER YEARS OF
INGESTING SMALL
DAILY DOSES OF THE
TOXIN, CHIZU HAS
BUILT UP A
RESISTANCE TO
THE SHURIKEN'S
POISON.



BUT, WITH THE
WEIGHT OF THE
ENTIRE NEKO
NINJA CLAN
AGAINST HER,
HOW LONG CAN
CHIZU STAY
ALIVE--

--A FUGITIVE
NINJA?



Fugitive Ninja (Nukenin)

Social Class: Ninja

You start the game with a *ninja-to* (sword) and nine *shuriken* (thrown blades).

In the rigid-caste society of the Tokugawa era, the ninja are both despised for acting outside of “normal” channels and seen as a necessary tool for espionage and surveillance. Like the Samurai, Ninjas have a code of honor — *ninpo* — that they observe.

By the Ninja’s code, the worst crime is to leave one’s clan against orders and to not return. The runaway *nukenin* knows no allies. The other ninja of the clan have a duty to bring their wayward ally home — dead or alive. However, the training that allows ninja to blend into their surroundings also lets the *nukenin* hide from their pursuers.

Unique Move: Stalking

You’re on the hunt.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6

Get a weak clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a weak target without being seen.
Or, flee or break off from following a strong target, without being discovered.

up to 9

Get a strong clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a strong target without being seen.
Or, flee or break off from following a grand target, without being discovered.

10 or more

Get a grand clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a grand target without being seen.

Attack Move: Ninjitsu

You strike from surprise.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6

Miss. If your very next move is Ninjitsu, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9

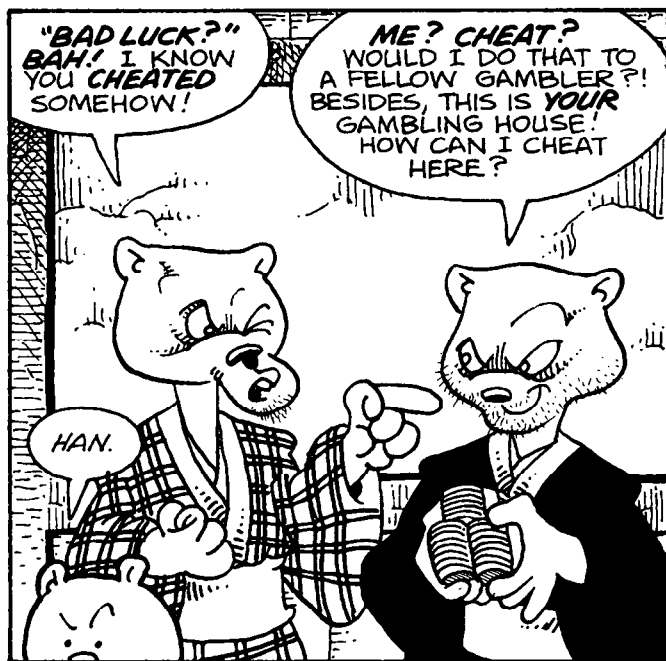
Score a weak hit.

up to 12

Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Ninjitsu weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more

Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Ninjitsu weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Ninjitsu.



Gambler (Bakuto)

Social Class: Criminal

You begin the game with one of the following weapons: *tanto* (dagger), *shakuhachi* (flute), or *kiseru* (iron pipe).

Although gambling is illegal, that doesn't stop some from doing it. When not risking their money at games of chance, Gamblers are incredible gossips, learning more than just where the next game is going to happen. Some gamblers like to think of themselves as heroes who only gamble to support themselves when not righting wrongs. A gambler character can bring conversational skills to a party, as well as a little luck.

Unique Move: Risk

You put your trust in randomness.

Roll 2d6

+setback

Choose one

- | | Choose one |
|----------|--|
| up to 6 | Win a gambling game against weak opponents. Or, ante up one story point. If your very next roll is an event you keep your story point and get another story point! If your roll doesn't, then move the story point to support (as usual) and get +3 back to that roll. |
| up to 9 | Win a gambling game against strong opponents. Or, ante up one story point (as up to 6, above), but this time you win two story points (not 1). |
| up to 12 | Win a gambling game against grand opponents. Or, ante up one story point (as up to 6, above), but this time you win three story points (not 1 or 2). |

Attack Move: Ranto

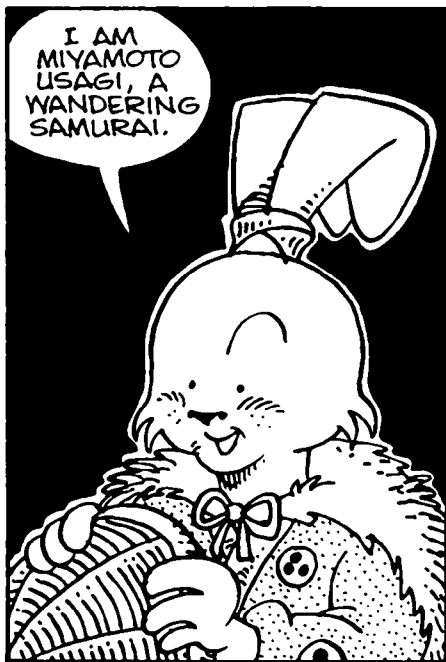
Fighting etiquette is for heroes and for dead people. You are neither.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

- | | Choose one |
|------------|---|
| up to 6 | Miss. If your very next move is Ranto, you may take +3 forward. |
| up to 9 | Score a weak hit. |
| up to 12 | Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Ranto weapon, use one of its specials. |
| 13 or more | Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Ranto weapon, score a strong hit <u>and</u> use its special <u>and</u> you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Ranto. |



Mendicant (Takuhsuzou)

Social Class: Priest

You begin the game with a *bo* (staff). You may also have one of the following: *shakuhachi* (flute), *jo* (short staff), *hankyu* (bow) or *hachiwari* (sword).

Following the example of Hotei, a great monk from centuries ago, the mendicant wanders the countryside to bring cheer and prosperity. Villages too small to support a full-time priest will be happy to receive the Mendicant in return for badly-needed services such as the presiding for a wedding ceremony, the neutral judging of a land dispute, or the banishing of ghosts and the blessing of the crops. Mendicant characters should have a jovial outlook and look on the bright side of things.

Unique Move: Buddhism

You have studied the religious doctrines of the Buddha.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6

Invoke a weak aspect of Buddhism (enough to convince people you're a priest).
Or, take five minutes and spend 1 support to remove 1 setback from a friend.

up to 9

Perform strong doctoring or medicine on a sickly person.
Or, invoke a strong aspect of Buddhism (banish spirits, etc.)
Or, take five minutes and spend 1 support to remove 1 impairment from a friend.
Or, give someone +1 back to a roll they just made.
Or, spend 1 support to give someone +3 back.

10 or more

Perform grand doctoring or medicine on a sickly person.
Or, invoke a grand aspect of Buddhism (banish spirits, etc.)
Or, give someone +2 back to a roll they just made.
Or, spend 1 support point to give someone +6 back.

Attack Move: Kikotsu

You fight according to principles of the common militia.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6

Miss. If your very next move is Kikotsu, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9

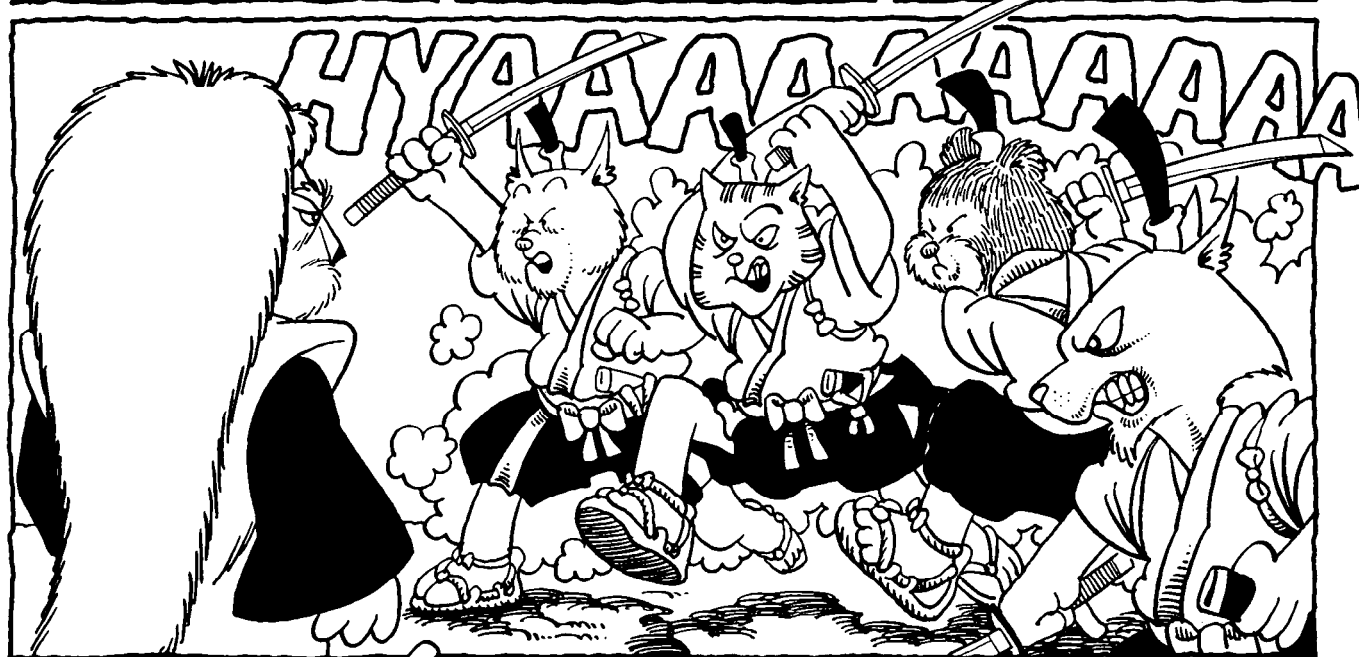
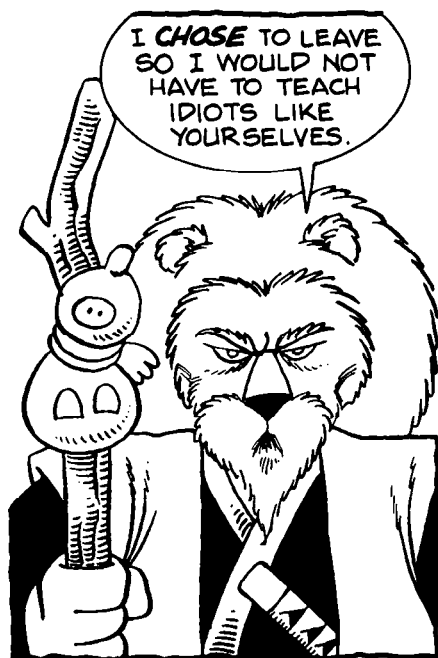
Score a weak hit.

up to 12

Score a strong hit.
Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more

Score a grand hit.
Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Kikotsu.



Mountain Warrior (Yamabushi)

Social Class: Priest

You begin the game with one of the following sets of weapons:

- *katana* (long sword)
- *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute)
- *ono* (heavy axe)
- *tessen* (iron fan)
- *tetsubo* (iron club)
- katana and yari (spear)
- *bokken* (wooden sword)

Living in seclusion, a *yamabushi* (“mountain-warrior”) studies the martial arts as a way to spiritual enlightenment. Some *yamabushi* serve as advisors to generals; a few aid ninjas and other spies. Though a mere shadow of the *sohei* that came before them, *Yamabushi* still train with the *naginata* (long-bladed polearm) or the *bo* (staff). *Yamabushi* characters will be afforded respect out of religious reverence, but they are still not true samurai and best not cause much trouble when they wander into civilized lands.

Unique Move: Buddhism

You have studied the religious doctrines of the Buddha.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Invoke a weak aspect of Buddhism (enough to convince people you’re a priest). Or, take five minutes and spend 1 support to remove 1 setback from a friend.

up to 9 Perform strong doctoring or medicine on a sickly person. Or, invoke a strong aspect of Buddhism (banish spirits, etc.) Or, take five minutes and spend 1 support to remove 1 impairment from a friend. Or, give someone +1 back to a roll they just made. Or, spend 1 support to give someone +3 back.

10 or more Perform grand doctoring or medicine on a sickly person. Or, invoke a grand aspect of Buddhism (banish spirits, etc.) Or, give someone +2 back to a roll they just made. Or, spend 1 support point to give someone +6 back.

Attack Move: Bushido

You fight according to the eight principles of the warrior class.

Roll 2d6

+story

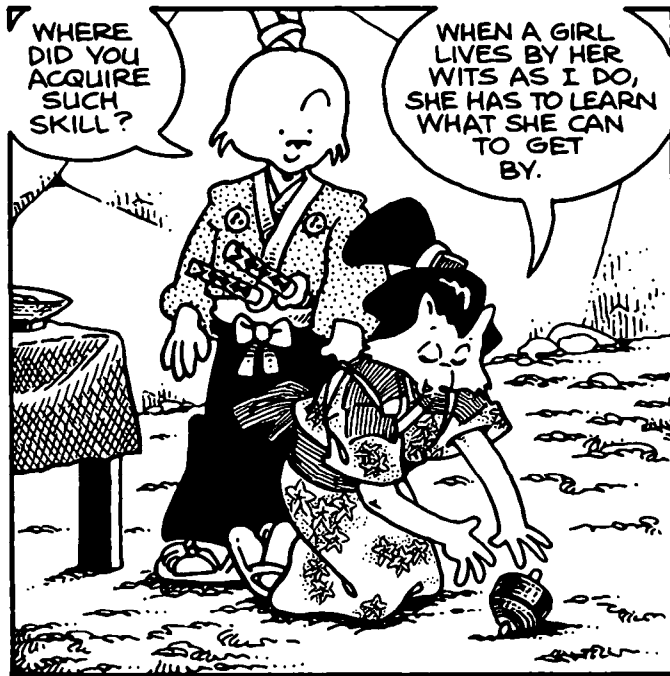
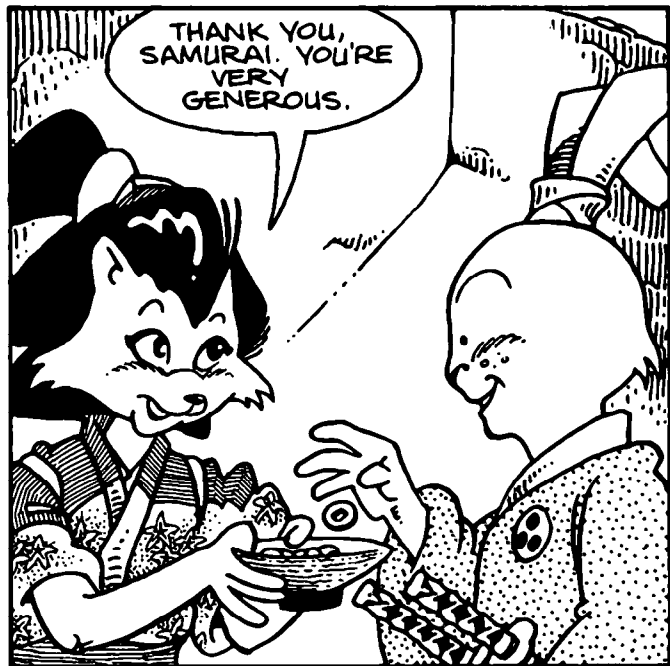
Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Bushido, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Bushido.



Street Entertainer

(Taidou-Geijin)

Social Class: **Commoner**

You begin the game with one of the following weapons: *tanto* (dagger), *shakuhachi* (flute), or *kodachi* (sword).

Puppet shows (*bunraku*), top-spinning (*koma asobi*), and joke-telling (*karukuchi*) are a welcome sight along the busier roads and cities of feudal Japan. By living on the street, Entertainers must be quick to put legal officials at ease, or they'll find themselves run out of town as undesirables. Entertainer characters bring strong people skills and a little improvisation to any party.

Unique Move: **Teamwork**

You work well with groups.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Spend 1 story point to give a friend +3 forward
Or, assist a friend for +1 forward

up to 9 Move 1 of your story points to support, then give a story point to a friend
Or, assist a friend for +2 forward

10 or more Assist a friend for +3 forward

Attack Move: **Ranto**

Fighting etiquette is for heroes and for dead people. You are neither.

Roll 2d6

+story

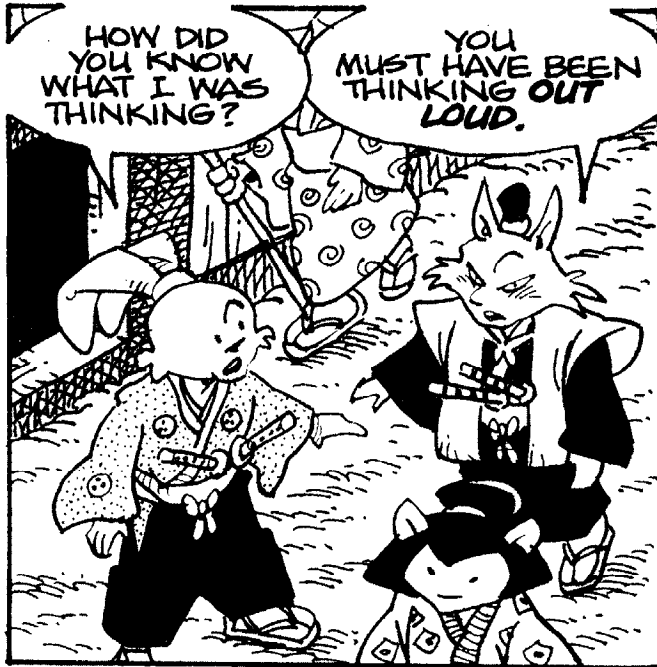
Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Ranto, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Ranto weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Ranto weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Ranto.



Sorcerer (Majutsu-shi)

Social Class: **Commoner**

You begin the game with a *bo* (staff) and a *kodachi* (sword).

You have an innate understanding of the supernatural. This ability is your curse, as you are a target of monsters, demons, and otherworldly forces, who seek to destroy you. (Some may see you as a threat, others may desire to consume your power.) You also lack standing in society, as other people cannot appreciate your struggle, and many find you to be bad luck or just plain creepy.

Unique Move: **Majutsu**

You have a limited ability to practice magic.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6

Cast a spell of weak utility. This effect lasts until the next event.

up to 9

Cast a spell of strong utility. This effect lasts until the next event.
Or, attack with a spell of weak force. You suffer 1 setback point.
Or, summon a weak creature to help you. You suffer 1 setback point.

up to 12

Or, attack with a spell of strong force. You suffer 1 setback point.
Or, summon a strong creature to help you. You suffer 1 setback point.

13 or

more

Attack with a spell of grand force. You suffer 1 setback point.

Attack Move: **Kikotsu**

You fight according to principles of the common militia.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6

Miss. If your very next move is Kikotsu, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9

Score a weak hit.

up to 12

Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or

more

Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Kikotsu.



Thief (Dorobou)

Social Class: Criminal

You begin the game with a *tanto* (dagger) and a *kyoketsu shogi* (rope with bladed hook).

A romantic figure among the commoners, the thief robs from the rich to give to the poor ... while keeping a little something for expenses. Some thieves will wear disguises, so they can walk openly during the day, safe in their “secret identity”. For adventuring parties, Thief characters complement a band of warriors well, by bringing a subtle hand into the mix.

Unique Move: Stalking

You’re on the hunt.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Get a weak clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a weak target without being seen.
Or, flee or break off from following a strong target, without being discovered.

up to 9 Get a strong clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a strong target without being seen.
Or, flee or break off from following a grand target, without being discovered.

10 or more Get a grand clue about a person of interest.
Or, follow a grand target without being seen.

Attack Move: Ranto

Fighting etiquette is for heroes and for dead people. You are neither.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Ranto, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

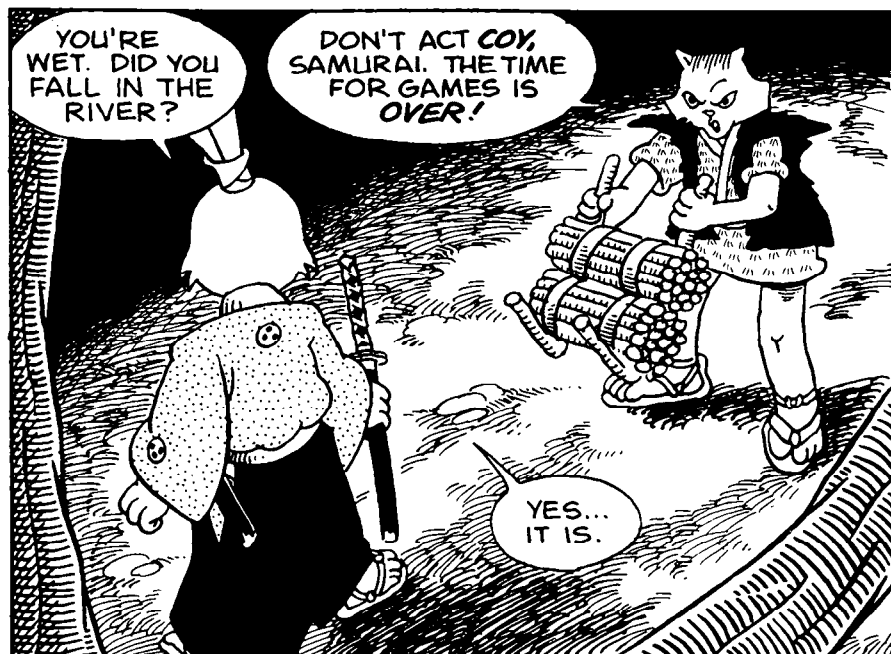
up to 12 Score a strong hit.
Or, if you are using a Ranto weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit.
Or, if you are using a Ranto weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Ranto.



YOU!

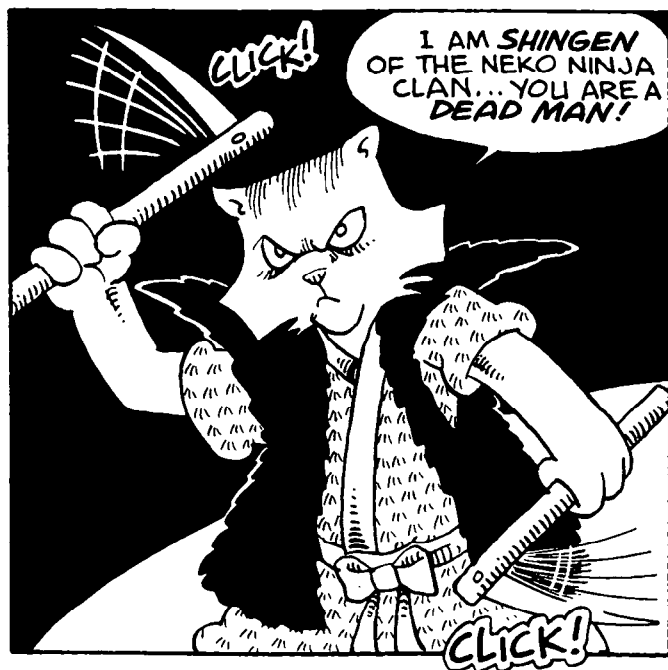
YES, I WAS RESTLESS SO I DECIDED TO LEAVE THE INN EARLY.



YOU'RE WET. DID YOU FALL IN THE RIVER?

DON'T ACT COY, SAMURAI. THE TIME FOR GAMES IS OVER!

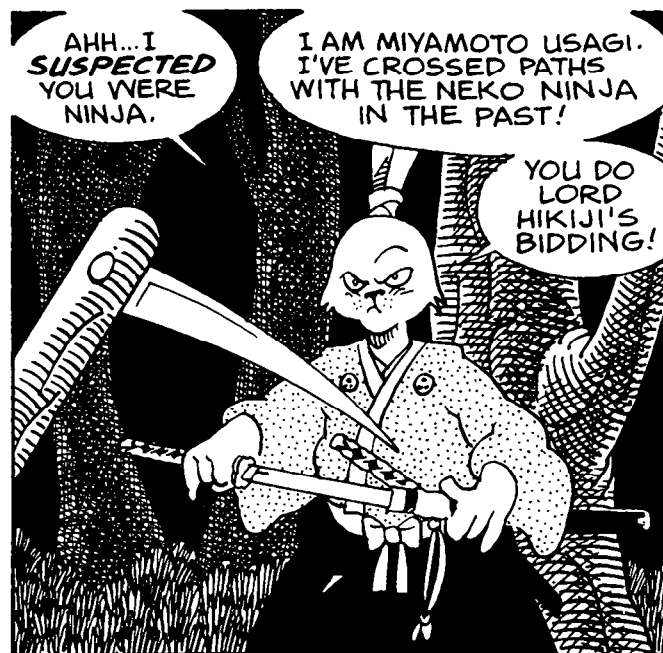
YES... IT IS.



CLICK!

I AM SHINGEN OF THE NEKO NINJA CLAN... YOU ARE A DEAD MAN!

CLICK!



AHH... I SUSPECTED YOU WERE NINJA.

I AM MIYAMOTO USAGI. I'VE CROSSED PATHS WITH THE NEKO NINJA IN THE PAST!

YOU DO LORD HIKIJI'S BIDDING!

Undercover Agent

(Oniwabanshu)

Social Class: **Ninja**

You start the game with nine *shuriken* (thrown blades) and one of the following: *bo* (staff), *kama* (sickle), *kunai* (knife), or *nunchaku* (wooden flail).

In the rigid-caste society of the Tokugawa era, the Ninja are both despised for acting outside of “normal” channels and seen as a necessary tool for espionage and surveillance. Like the Samurai, Ninjas have a code of honor — *ninpo* — that they are expected to observe.

The typical role of a Ninja is that of a secret agent planted within the household. Few would suspect a humble gardener of being trained in the arts of eavesdropping, much less hand-to-hand combat.

Oniwabanshu characters are best when paired up with an important samurai or noble as a secret bodyguard.

Unique Move: **Teamwork**

You work well with groups.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Spend 1 story point to give a friend +3 forward
Or, assist a friend for +1 forward

up to 9 Move 1 of your story points to support, then give a story point to a friend
Or, assist a friend for +2 forward

10 or more Assist a friend for +3 forward

Attack Move: **Ninjitsu**

You strike from surprise.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Ninjitsu, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Ninjitsu weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Ninjitsu weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Ninjitsu.

"IT SEEMS A LIFETIME AGO WHEN I JOINED LORD ARAKI IN HIS ATTEMPT TO USURP LORD MATAICHI'S LEADERSHIP OF THE GEISHU CLAN."



"IT WAS ONLY THROUGH BAD LUCK THAT WE WERE DEFEATED, AND I WENT INTO HIDING AS A MISERABLE PEASANT!"



I HAVE MATAICHI TO BLAME FOR MY LOT... AND NOW I HAVE YOU, HIS WHELP, POWERLESS BEFORE ME!



Veteran (Kohei)

Social Class: **Commoner**

You begin the game with a *yari* (spear) and a *hankyu* (bow).

While the era of warring states is just a memory, there are many who fought as *ashigaru*, the rank-and-file spear carriers. Even though it may have been many years since they have seen a battle, these veterans still have skills honed by the fires of combat. While law forbids commoners from taking up the long sword, there are still those who learn the ways of fighting to protect themselves from bandits and from abusive *ronin*. The best militia have their own code of honor: *kikotsu*, which was very similar to the samurai's code of *bushido* in advocating discipline, loyalty, and spiritual advancement.

Veteran adventurers will most likely be social misfits who cannot return to a peaceful life.

Unique Move: **Teamwork**

You work well with groups.

Roll 2d6

+support

Choose one

up to 6 Spend 1 story point to give a friend +3 forward
Or, assist a friend for +1 forward

up to 9 Move 1 of your story points to support, then give a story point to a friend
Or, assist a friend for +2 forward

10 or more Assist a friend for +3 forward

Attack Move: **Kikotsu**

You fight according to principles of the common militia.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6 Miss. If your very next move is Kikotsu, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9 Score a weak hit.

up to 12 Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Kikotsu.



Vigilante (Otokodate)

Social Class: **Commoner**

You begin the game with one or two of the following: *bo* (staff), *keibo* (club), *nunchaku* (wooden flail), *masakari* (axe), *hachiwari* (sword) or *hankyu* (bow).

In the previous era of warring states, the nobles were powerless, the samurai were fighting each other, and marauders exploited the lawlessness to prey on the weak. A few brave men and women stood up to fight injustice, and they were called *otokodate*, vigilantes.

In early Tokugawa-era, vigilantes are rare and must keep a low profile lest they anger proper samurai. Years later, when abuses by the noble class run rampant, *otokodate* will be romanticized in stories and in *kabuki* theater as Robin Hoods who avenge the commoners. Vigilante characters bring combat strength and pragmatic skills to any party.

Unique Move: **Kiwami**

You are no stranger to hardship. After making a impair roll, roll this move.

Roll 2d6

+setback

Choose one

up to 6

Take +3 back to your last impair roll.

up to 9

Take +1 forward to a roll of your choice... or until you roll an event, in which case you add 1 back to that event's roll and this bonus is gone.

10 or more

Take +one die forward to your very next roll and remove one impairment of your choice. And if you have more than 3 setback points, reduce your setback to 3.

Attack Move: **Kikotsu**

You fight according to principles of the common militia.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6

Miss. If your very next move is Kikotsu, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9

Score a weak hit.

up to 12

Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, use one of its specials.

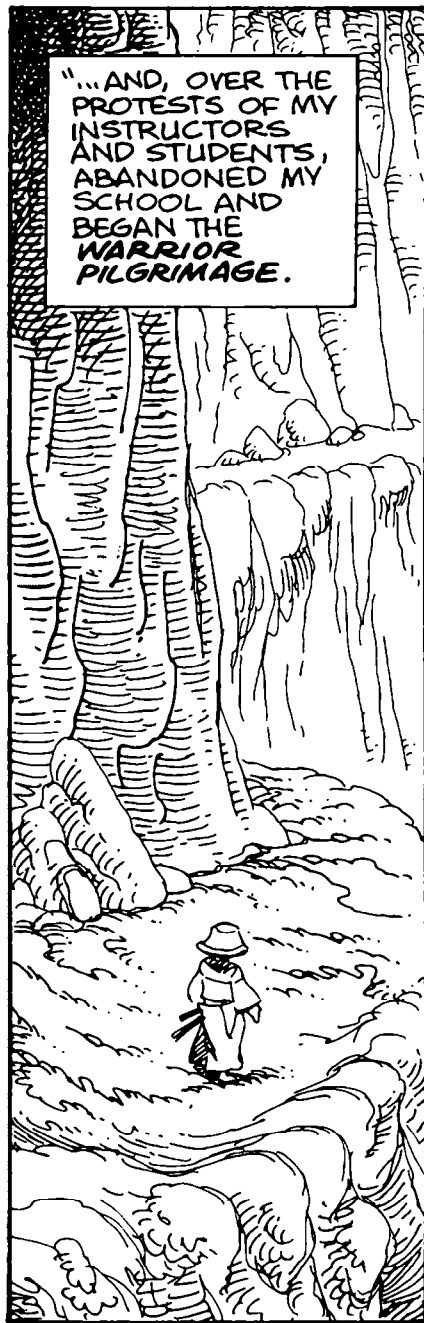
13 or more

Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Kikotsu weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Kikotsu.

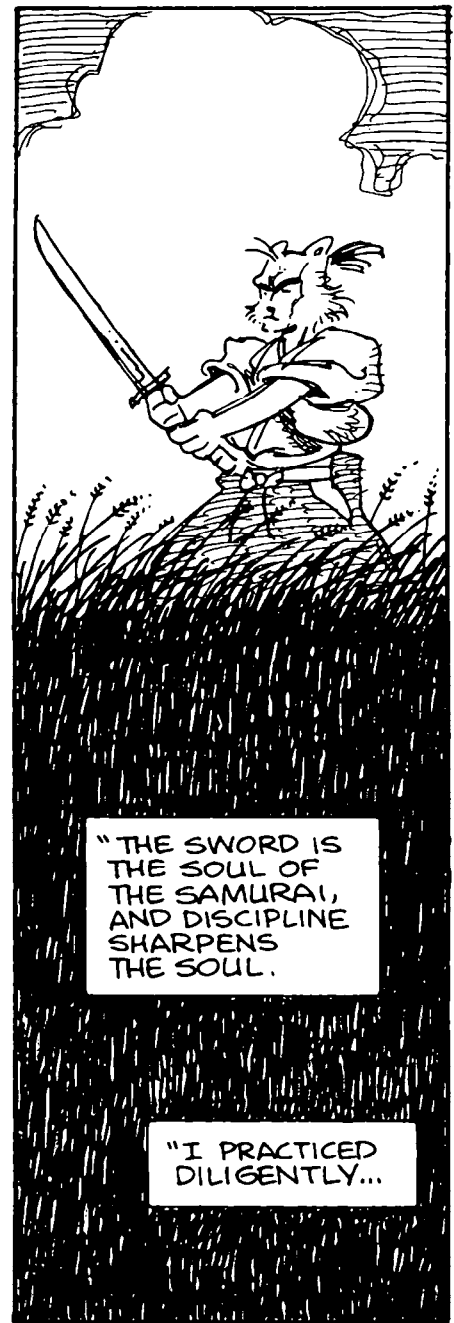


"HOW DARE I PRESUME
TO TEACH OTHERS
WHEN I, MYSELF,
FELL FAR SHORT?"

"I PURGED
MY SPIRIT
IN THE
MOUNTAINS..."



"...AND, OVER THE
PROTESTS OF MY
INSTRUCTORS
AND STUDENTS,
ABANDONED MY
SCHOOL AND
BEGAN THE
**WARRIOR
PILGRIMAGE.**



"THE SWORD IS
THE SOUL OF
THE SAMURAI,
AND DISCIPLINE
SHARPENS
THE SOUL.

"I PRACTICED
DILIGENTLY..."

Wanderer (Roshi)

Social Class: Samurai

You are a samurai. You have the rights and privileges of the *buke* class. You begin the game with one of the following sets of weapons:

- *katana* (long sword) and *wakizashi* (short sword)
- katana and naginata (pole-arm)
- katana and daikyu (long bow)
- *kusarigama* (sickle and chain) and *tanto* (dagger)
- katana and yari (spear)
- *no-dachi* (great sword) and *tanto*

During the Tokugawa era, samurai are not permitted to take employment with a new master without the previous one's permission, nor are they allowed to take up another trade. Some samurai, afflicted with great poverty, choose to endure the lasting shame of leaving their master to make their fortunes elsewhere. Wanderer samurai often suffer humiliation and shame at the hands of other samurai, but they are still permitted to carry the weapons of war and they may still have the strong code of *bushido*.

Unique Move: Kiwami

You are no stranger to hardship. After making a impair roll, roll this move.

Roll 2d6

+setback

Choose one

up to 6

Take +3 back to your last impair roll.

up to 9

Take +1 forward to a roll of your choice... or until you roll an event, in which case you add 1 back to that event's roll and this bonus is gone.

10 or more

Take +one die forward to your very next roll and remove one impairment of your choice. And if you have more than 3 setback points, reduce your setback to 3.

Attack Move: Bushido

You fight according to the eight principles of the warrior class.

Roll 2d6

+story

Choose one

up to 6

Miss. If your very next move is Bushido, you may take +3 forward.

up to 9

Score a weak hit.

up to 12

Score a strong hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, use one of its specials.

13 or more

Score a grand hit. Or, if you are using a Bushido weapon, score a strong hit and use its special and you may take +3 forward if your very next move is Bushido.

QUIRKS

A quirk adds a positive effect and a negative effect to your character. You can choose only one.

None

Your character doesn't have to have a quirk at all. You gain no advantage, but you also have no disadvantage, either. Quirks add new rules and make the game more complex to play, so they're not for everyone.

If you change your mind, you can use the debriefing period of the game to change your quirk. See page 171 for more details.

Companion

You have a non-player-character who is your friend or associate. They could be a young ward that you must keep from harm. They might be your love interest or your spouse. Or they could be your sidekick.

The companion can help with lots of errands and they generally work in your best interests.

The companion can also be a plot point, as they can be threatened or manipulated by your enemies.

Difficulty

Your character has something that hinders their progress for getting things done. Choose one:

- **Physical disability:** You could be missing a hand or a foot or an eye. You might even be mute, deaf, or blind. Maybe you have epilepsy. Make something up.



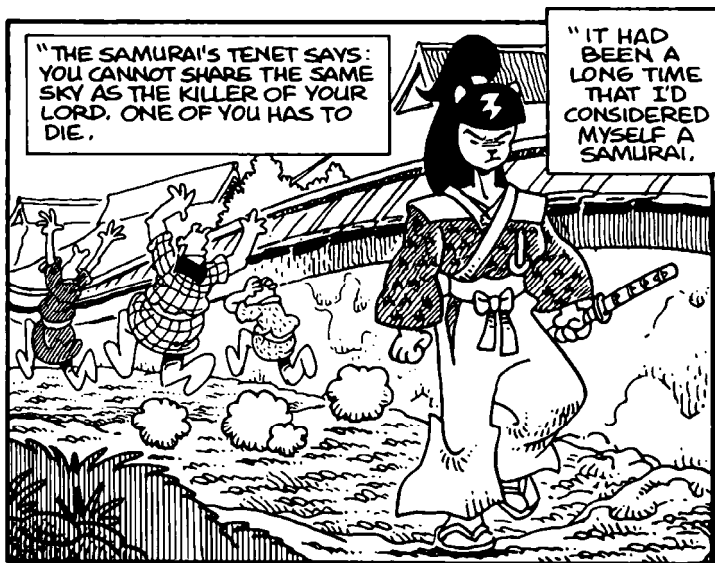
- **Secret:** there's something buried deep in your past, something you can't let anyone know about. Make something up, but only tell the MC what it is.
- **Enemy:** Some important person or organization hates you. Maybe they want to kill you, or to jail you for some offense, or maybe they just want to make life harder for you. Make something up... or ask the MC to make up a mysterious malefactor.
- Or make up some other problem that could make your life harder.

At any time during the game, the MC can take one of your successes and totally ruin it, because of your difficulty. (You stumble, you forget, you were given false information, you must run and hide from embarrassment, etc.)

Or, the MC can add a complication into your story, when something you took for granted no longer works for you. (Your gear is ruined; your enemy appears to attack you; you can't read an important document because you can't see; etc.)

Whenever the MC uses your difficulty against you in some way, you immediately earn one story point.

You may politely remind the MC about your difficulty. The MC is busy running the entire universe, so they might not always remember to use your difficulty and to give you the story point.



Former Life

The Era of Warring States was a tumultuous time. Many people were uprooted from their homes. Some fled the violence; others took up new identities to make a new life.

Replace your combat move (Bushido, Kikotsu, Ninjitsu, Ranto, or Sohei) with a different style. You can swap out some or all your weapons, too. Others who see you fighting in your different style may become very curious about you.

Honorable

Others may claim to follow their personal codes, but you're the real deal. Once per game session, you may swear to perform some task. You take +1 forward on all rolls to perform that task.

If you ever act dishonorably, you suffer 1 setback from the anguish and humiliation.

Imposing

You lack for manners and for social graces, but you can still be feared or respected. Whenever you must make a righteous roll, subtract 3 but roll an extra die.

Jumpy

You lack discipline and restraint, but sometimes that makes you quick to react. Whenever you must make an initiative roll, subtract 3 but roll an extra die.

Noncombatant

When you make a Combat move, if you roll an event, you suffer 1 setback point. (You are disgusted with yourself that you would resort to violence.)

If you never use your Combat move, you get +1 forward to all rolls made while in the Combat mood. (You can support others, tell them what to do, draw fire for other people, etc. As long as you never use your combat move, you get this bonus.)

Once you use a Combat move, your +1 bonus goes away and you can't get it back until the next session.

Selfless

You can give your story points to other players. Each time you give someone a point, you can gain 1 support point (as usual). Characters without this quirk can't give away story points unless they already have three and have just gotten a fourth.

At any time, a player who has fewer story points than you may demand that you give them a story point. (You still get the 1 support point for giving your story point away, as usual, but you must comply with the demand.)

Smooth

You have little patience for ceremony, obsequiousness, and putting on airs. You get straight to the point. Sometimes, that works better. Whenever you make a negotiation roll, subtract 3 but roll an extra die.

Spirited

Sometimes, you push past your limits. Other times, you push yourself too far. Whenever you make a impair roll, subtract 3 but roll an extra die.

Unpredictable

When you're around, the only certainty is uncertainty. Whenever you make a roll, the following rules apply:

- Whenever you roll a six, roll another die and add that in. If that new die rolls a six, then roll another die and that add in, too. Keep going until we run out of sixes! (Yes, new dice can mean more doubles, which can trigger evens, but you only get one event per roll.)
- Whenever you roll a 1 (even from new dice that showed up because of your sixes), subtract 4 from your total.

So there's no limit to how high you can roll ... but rolling ones makes your total even lower.

Wealthy

You have access to credit, debit, and other usury. You can use your wealth to make hard bargains, but you can't stretch yourself too far on your existing credit. You may be required to defend your wealth in court.

Worldly

You lack life experience, but you're a quick study and you pay attention to lots of details. Whenever you must make a schooling roll, subtract 3 but roll an extra die.

WEAPONS

Weapons and Fighting Styles

Each weapon can be used with one, two, or more *fighting styles* — the combat moves listed in your playbooks. If your weapon can be used with your fighting styles, you have a chance to use *special techniques* (hit several targets, or hit and fall back to cover, etc.)

侍 *Bushido* weapons are for samurai, nobles, and the warrior caste. Some of these weapons are exclusive to warriors, such as a *katana*.

兵 *Kikotsu* weapons are permitted to commoners to provide for the common defense. Some of these weapons are work tools repurposed for fighting.

忍 *Ninjitsu* weapons are used by spies and by assassins. Carrying a weapon that is exclusively used for ninjutsu, such as a *ninja-to*, will be evidence that one is clearly an assassin.

罪 *Ranto* weapons are notorious for being used by criminals for their street-fights and for their racketeering.

僧 *Sohei* weapons are permitted to warrior monks, for use in their religious practice.

Use of Weapons

Weapons have limitations on how many targets you can use them on.

Melee is only for hand-to-hand combat

You can only use a melee weapon on foes that are nearby. Some weapons may have a special Reach ability that lets you strike at targets a few meters away, but for the most part, they must be in close quarters.

Melee weapons are fast and easy to use, not needing to be reloaded... though if you throw one, you'll have to go pick it back up.

Ranged weapons must be reloaded after use

You can use a ranged weapon on foes who are quite some distance away (a dozen paces or more).

Measuring exact ranges, compensating for wind, bullet drop, air pressure, etc. is left as an exercise for the reader.



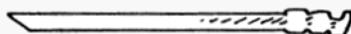


Ranged weapons will need to be reloaded after use. A “1/move” weapon means that you use your next move in combat to reload the weapon (and thus you can't attack or do some other move). The “1/scene” weapons take a minute or longer to reload, which is longer than most combats will last.



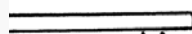


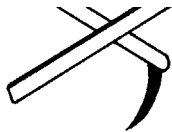


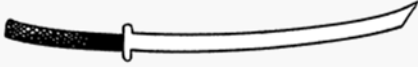


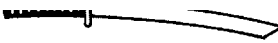
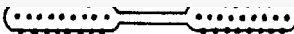


Weapons

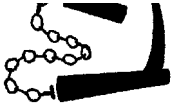



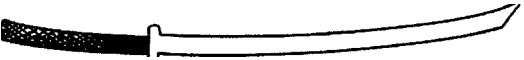
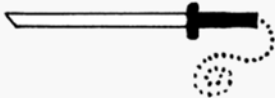
Each weapon is listed with its *name*, a description, and an example picture. (Individual weapons may look different, depending on expense, wear, style, etc.) The use column lists whether the weapon is for *melee* (close combat) or *ranged* (and how the weapon must be reloaded, either with a single move in a combat situation or too long for any one fight.)

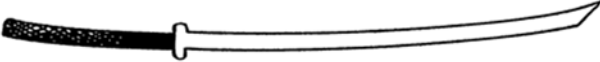

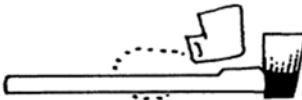



The last five columns list the five combat moves: *Bushido* (warriors), *Kikotsu* (commoners), *Ninjitsu* (ninjas), *Ranto* (criminals), and *Sohei* (priests). If there is a *hiragana* ideogram in the move's column, that move can score *specials* when you use that move. (If you are using a weapon with the same combat move, you can use a weapon's special ability if you roll 10 or better on your attack. (If you are using the Bushido move, and you fight with a katana, then you can use the katana's special moves because the katana is a Bushido weapon, etc.)


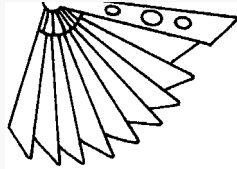


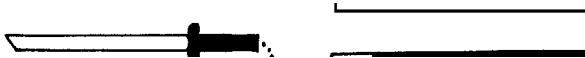
Name	Use	Specials	Bushido	Kikotsu	Ninjitsu	Ranto	Sohei
 <p>Bo: A wooden staff. Also called a <u>roku-shakubo</u> (181 cm staff). A popular weapon, easy to find and readily explained away as a “walking stick”.</p>	Melee	Retreat		兵	忍	罪	僧
 <p>Bokken: Wooden sword, about the size and shape of a katana. While used for training, many are quite worthy for combat — some masters claim they are deadlier than katanas.</p>	Melee	Riposte	侍				
 <p>Buke-zukuri: A katana’s scabbard made of lacquered wood, worthy for fighting. A sheathed katana may be used to subdue those one does not want to grievously harm. The buke-zukuri is tucked into the <u>obi</u> (belt-sash).</p>	Melee	Bind	侍				
 <p>Daikyu: Long bow, about 200 cm long. Notoriously difficult to draw.</p>	Ranged, 1/move	Aim	侍				
<p>Empty Hand: Bare-knuckle punching, kicking, and grabbing. Always good in a pinch.</p>	Melee	Grapple, Trip	侍	兵	忍	罪	僧
 <p>Gansen: The war fan. Originally a signaling device on the battlefield, it could be used as a blocking weapon, or thrown in someone’s face. Popular because it folds up nicely and can be taken anywhere since it’s not technically a weapon.</p>	Melee	Bind, Throw	侍			罪	

Name	Use	Specials	Bushido	Kikotsu	Ninjitsu	Ranto	Sohei
 <p>Hachiwari: Literally, “helmet-splitter”; a curved short sword about 50 cm long. A popular off-hand weapon with commoners who are not permitted to carry the katana & wakizashi at the same time.</p>	Melee	Bind		兵			
 <p>Hankyu:: Short bow, no longer than 100 cm.</p>	Ranged, 1/move	Retreat, Volley, Yatsugae	侍	兵			
 <p>Jitte: Forked iron rod, popular with police. With proper twisting motion, can disarm a target.</p>	Melee	Bind, Disarm	侍		忍		
 <p>Jo: Long, one-handed staff.</p>	Melee	Riposte		兵	忍		
 <p>Kaginawa: Rope with grappling hook, used to scale walls. Popular with ninja.</p>	Melee	Snare, Sweep, Trip			忍	罪	
 <p>Kama: Peasant’s sickle, used for cutting weeds and reaping crops. A popular weapon among the warrior class; a fighting-quality version can be called a <u>natagama</u>. Ninjas prefer the <u>kama-yari</u>, where the blade folds into the haft, locked in place with an iron ring.</p>	Melee	Bind, Finish	侍	兵	忍		

Name	Use	Specials	Bushido	Kikotsu	Ninjitsu	Ranto	Sohei
 Katana: Curved long sword about 70 cm long. The signature weapon of the samurai warrior.	Melee	Aim, Riposte, Sweep	侍				
 Keibo: Short club, like a baton. Simple and effective. The typical weapon wielded by an angry mob of peasants.	Melee	Bind		兵		罪	
 Kiseru: Literally, a pipe for smoking. This one is about one meter long and fitted with a blade guard. Popular with the lower class, since technically it's not a weapon (and thus it's not a crime to carry it around).	Melee	Bind				罪	
 Kodachi: Short sword, just a bit longer than a wakizashi. Popular among wealthy commoners to carry for personal protection.	Melee	Aim, Bind		兵		罪	
 Konaibo: A <u>bo</u> (staff) shod with iron on both ends, making it heavier and deadlier.	Melee	Retreat, Smash	侍				僧
 Kunai: The typical throwing knife. Usually flat, edged metal (such as a nail hammered flat), with no hilt but a rope or bag tied to the end.	Melee	Backstab, Finish, Throw			忍	罪	
 Kusari-fundo: A chain of variable length (usually about 100 cm) with weights on both ends.	Melee	Snare	侍	兵	忍		

Name	Use	Specials	Bushido	Kikotsu	Ninjitsu	Ranto	Sohei
 <p>Kusarigama: A combination weapon of a <u>kama</u> (sickle) with a <u>kusari</u> (long chain) attached. Popular with both ninja and samurai.</p>	Melee	Bind, Finish, Retreat, Snare	侍		忍		
 <p>Kyoketsu Shogi: A combination weapon of a forked blade with an attached rope, ending in a heavy metal ring. An excellent climbing tool.</p>	Melee	Aim, Retreat	侍		忍	罪	
 <p>Manrikigusari: Chain that's bigger and heavier than a <u>kusari</u>.</p>	Melee	Bind, Finish, Riposte, Snare	侍		忍		
 <p>Masakari: A woodchopper's axe.</p>	Melee	Aim		兵			
 <p>Naginata: Spear with long, sword-like blade. The signature weapon of the female samurai.</p>	Melee	Retreat, Riposte, Sweep	侍				僧
 <p>Ninja-to: a straight-bladed sword with a chisel-point for digging, and a long string for garroting. Popular with ninja.</p>	Melee	Aim, Backstab, Riposte			忍		

Name	Use	Specials	Bushido	Kikotsu	Ninjitsu	Ranto	Sohei
 No-Dachi: Very long, very heavy sword, also called <u>daikatana</u> (long katana) or <u>zambatou</u> (horse-cutting sword). Popular with many samurai.	Melee	Riposte, Smash, Sweep	侍				
 Nunchaku: Two wooden sticks tied together with rope, used to thresh rice.	Melee	Bind, Retreat		兵	忍		
 Ono: Giant axe with blade cover attached by a long rope. Associated with the <u>sohei</u> (organized warrior monks).	Melee	Smash, Sweep	侍	兵			僧
 Shakuhachi: Bamboo flute, heavy and worthy for battle.	Melee	Bind		兵	忍	罪	僧
 Shuriken: small blade, either star-shaped (<u>hira</u>) or slender and pointed (<u>bo</u>). Used by samurai as a diversion and by ninjas for assassination.	Ranged, 1/move	Backstab, Retreat	侍		忍		
 Tanto: Dagger carried by many samurai. Sometimes called the “head-viewing dagger”, for its use in presenting a severed head as a trophy from battle.	Melee	Backstab	侍	兵		罪	

Name	Use	Specials	Bushido	Kikotsu	Ninjitsu	Ranto	Sohei
 Teppo: matchlock gun, whose manufacture is a closely-guarded secret. In the Tokugawa era, player-characters will have a very hard time finding one of these.	Ranged, 1/scene	Aim, Deadshot		兵			
 Tessen: Folding fan made of iron. Too heavy to throw but packs quite a punch. Small and concealable.	Melee	Bind, Retreat	侍		忍	罪	
 Tetsubo: A staff with one heavy, unbalanced end, studded with iron.	Melee	Bind, Smash	侍				僧
 Wakizashi: Short sword (about 70 cm), sometimes called the “companion sword.” This weapon and the katana together are called the <u>daisho</u> (“the long and the short”) — a pairing permitted only to male samurai.	Melee	Bind, Riposte	侍				
 Yari: Long spear. The staple of the <u>ashigaru</u> (rank-and-file spear carriers) during wartime. The bladed ends vary widely in size and shape but are still smaller than a naginata’s.	Melee	Finish, Retreat	侍	兵			

When you roll 10 or better: Weapon Specials

If you are using the right weapon with the right combat move, you may get a result that says, “choose one of your weapon’s specials”. The game effects of these specials are listed below. Note that some of these specials may have even more requirements. (For example, *Backstab* requires you to be covered before you make your attack.) You don’t have to choose a special if you don’t want to, but they are generally better than a non-special hit.

Aim

You do not score a hit at all, but instead you may take +6 forward on your very next move with this weapon.

Backstab

If you were *covered*, hidden, or otherwise concealed before you made this attack, you may choose this special.

If your target is weak, you instantly kill the target and you remain covered.

If your target is strong, you instantly kill the target, but you are no longer covered.

If your target is grand, you score a grand hit against the target, and you become exposed.

(You might not know if your target is weak, strong, or grand before you use this move. Have your escape route handy.)

Bind

You score a weak hit on your target *and* you push your weapon up against theirs, binding them until your next move.

If your target is strong, they may not engage anyone else but you, until your next move. If your target is grand, they may engage other targets, but those targets gain +3 to rolls to resist your bound target.

Deadshot

Your shot inflicts a grand hit on the target.

Disarm

If your target is weak, you may choose to simply disarm the target or you may break their weapon, rendering it useless.

If your target is strong, you disarm them.

If your target is grand, there is a chance that your disarm will fail (because of circumstances, because the MC rules that the target can only be disarmed on rolls of 13 or better and you didn’t roll high enough, etc.) Even if your disarm does fail, your target is still left open; you and all your allies may take +1 forward to act against this target.

Finish

If your target is disadvantaged in some way (grappled, snared, tripped, etc.), you score a grand hit on them.

Grapple

You score a weak hit on the foe. You may then grab them with one or both hands. While grappled, the target is *exposed* but you must stay next to them, holding on to them. Weak targets will be rendered helpless, but strong and grand targets may attempt to break free.

You may move your grappled target somewhere else on the battlefield. This new location may leave them exposed, it may make them suffer an environmental hazard (falling off a cliff, impaled on spikes, etc.) Weak targets will be rendered helpless.

Riposte

You score a strong hit on a foe *and* if your very next move is a combat move using this weapon, you may take +1 forward.

Retreat

You score a strong hit on a foe of your choice. Then your character falls back to a *covered* position.

Covered characters cannot be targeted by some enemies, especially when there are exposed characters on the field.

Smash

You over-extend yourself and make a powerful strike with your weapon. You inflict a grand hit on a single target. However, you are now exposed, and you can't use your weapon again until you make this special move: "Recover the weapon and take +3 forward to your next Combat move"

Snare

Your weapon entangles the target. If the target is weak, you may choose to render them helpless and then free your weapon for use again, on your next move. If the target is strong, they are now *exposed* but you can only use this weapon to attack that same target until they become free of the snare. You can only have one target snared at a time.

Sweep

You score weak hits against an entire group of targets. A group is any hostiles standing in a line, arc, or otherwise in reach of your mighty weapon. (Your MC will describe enemies in a group.)

When you are counter-attacking a group of weak attackers, if your sweep eliminates the entire group, they are defeated before they have a chance to hit you.

Throw

You score a strong hit on a target at range.

Your weapon is now over there and needs to be retrieved before you can use it again. After this move, you may choose to re-position yourself to covered, as you retreat to a safe distance.

Trip

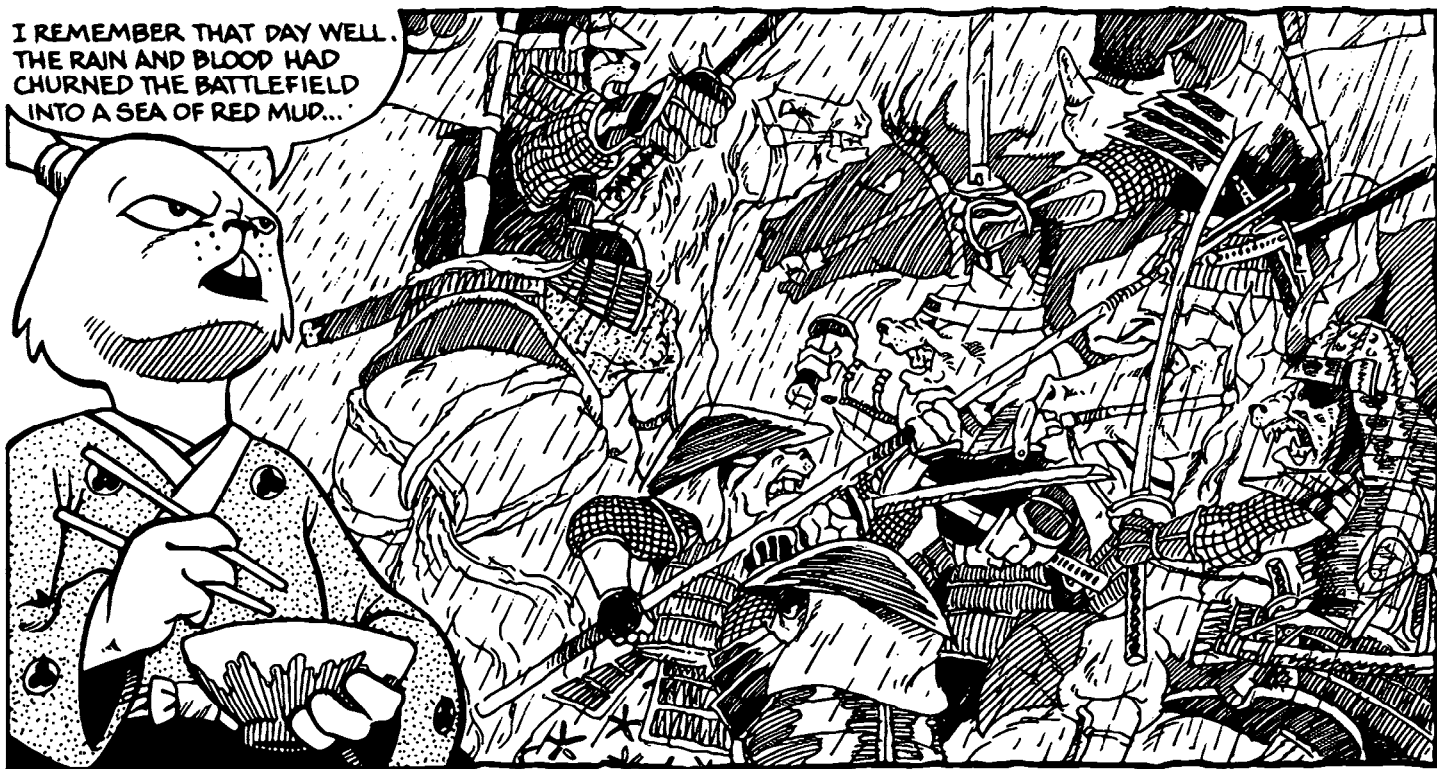
You score a weak hit on the target *and* they fall over, becoming *exposed*. Weak targets will be rendered helpless, but strong and grand targets may choose to get back up as their next move. Until then, all your friends get +1 forward to attack this target.

Volley

You score weak hits against a group of targets, at range.

Yatsugae

You shoot the target with a strong hit, and then you reload your bow automatically. (Without this special, you would have to use your next move to reload the bow before you could shoot again.)



HISTORY

While certain elements of the *Usagi Yojimbo* setting obviously diverge from that of the real world, the general shape of history remains the same.

The default period for the game is 1605, two years after the foundation of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Japan has been ruled by a divine Emperor since the days of prehistory. For eight hundred years, he has ruled from the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, a constant and stable link with the world of the gods. However, it has been more than four centuries since the Emperor has held any real power.

CE 794-1158

Twilight of the Heian Period

In the closing years of the *Heian* period in Japan, the noble class was paying the price for their failure to properly attend to administration. For years, they had focused on petty intrigues and pleasures at the expense of their government duties. The ministers of the Imperial Court had become so incompetent that by the year CE 1000, they no longer had the knowledge needed to issue new currency. The existing supply of coins gradually shrank, and much of Japan turned to barter economics.

At the same time, the security and prosperity of the Empire was suffering. Bandits wandered the countryside, making travel between settlements hazardous. Leaving home at night was considered a foolhardy act. Crops failed or were simply not distributed to the hungry cities. Waves of famine and disease struck the Empire.

The nobles focused instead on the details of succession and upon their own privileged lifestyles. As peasants starved, their rulers invented new forms of poetry and perfected elaborate social rituals. Others schemed to gain power over the Chrysanthemum Throne.

By the year 1000, the Imperial succession was effectively controlled by the *Fukiwara* clan. As the noble clans schemed for political power or spent their cloistered lives in dreaming, the ability of the court to control the country weakened further.

CE 1158-1185

Rise of the Martial Lords

The Imperial Court found itself forced to delegate more and more duties to the civilian officers and generals who kept the provinces secure. The warrior class, known as *samurai* (literally, “one who serves [the noble class]”) became responsible for much of the practical administration of the country. Over time, they organized themselves in family clans, patterned somewhat after the noble class.

In CE 1158, an alliance of noble clans attempted to break the Fukiwara’s control over Imperial succession. In the resulting civil war, both sides made use of the clans of samurai. The supporters of Fukiwara’s candidate for the throne allied with the *Taira* clan, while their rivals won the support of clan *Minamoto*. In the end, Taira’s claimant to the Imperial throne

won, though the conflict planted the seeds for future unrest. The victory also established the warrior clans as prominent political powers. The noble class needed the support of the samurai to govern, and it became apparent that their very existence depended on the sufferance of their generals.

The Minamoto clan did not readily forget their defeat at the hands of the Taira. In 1160, the clan launched a surprise attack on Kyoto. They burned the palace and abducted the Emperor. The person of the Divine Emperor was no longer considered inviolate.

However, their victory was short-lived. Within weeks, the forces of clan Taira had freed the Emperor and driven the Minamoto army into the wilderness. The Taira were not merciful victors — they exiled or executed many of the Minamoto, seizing their lands and wealth. Clan Taira, under the leadership of Taira no Kiyomori had quickly become the most political force in Japan.

In 1167, in appreciation for his martial skill and support of the Emperor, *Taira no Kiyomori* was elevated to the rank of chief government minister. Kiyomori quickly abandoned any pretense of obedience to the Emperor. He ordered the Emperor Takakura to marry his daughter. Once a son had been delivered, Kiyomori forced the Emperor to abdicate in favor of the infant. The child, *Emperor Antoku*, was barely a year old; naturally, Kiyomori himself acted as regent.

This act, combined with the sudden banishment of any rivals who held government positions, caused an uproar among the samurai and noble clans. *Prince Mochihito*, the brother of the former Emperor, called upon *Minamoto no Yoritomo*, leader of the weakened Minamoto clan, to make war upon the tyrannical Kiyomori. Yoritomo was eager to avenge his father and the injuries suffered by the clan, and he readily agreed.

However, as his armies gathered, Kiyomori died of a sudden illness. Kiyomori's sons were left to reap the whirlwind sown by their father — they waged war for five years against the Minamoto clan. They were finally destroyed in the naval *Battle of Dan-no-ura*, in the Straits of Shimonoseki. The six-year old Emperor Antoku was cast overboard and drowned, along with his grandmother. It is said that the sword *Grasscutter*, one of the three great items of Imperial Regalia, was also lost that day. Those who believe this tale think that the sword currently claimed by the Emperor is a fake.

CE 1185-1467

The First Shogunates

With the fall of the Taira clan, Minamoto ruled without contest. Yoritomo placed his own candidate for Emperor on the throne and took on the title of *Sei Taishogun* (“generalissimo who overcomes the barbarians”), the highest-ranking military lord in Japan. (This title is often abbreviated as *Shogun*, “general”.)

Though the Emperor ruled in name, Yoritomo was the true master. He established a system of military government known as *bakufu* (“tent government”, implying that the army governs from their encampments), and ruled from the town of *Kamakura*. Under this system, the Shogun and his generals were responsible for the direct rule of various fiefdoms, and they were able to pass their titles and powers on to their sons. The old noble class remained but ceased to have any real influence.

As generations passed, power over the Shogunate fell into the hands of the *Hojo* samurai clan. Political battles and scheming were common, as various factions challenged the Hojo domination of the Shogunate. In

the background, the Emperor and his court dreamed of the old days of power. On occasion, attempts were made to restore Imperial rule, but they rarely presented a serious threat to the new military government.

Things came to a head in 1331, when the *Emperor Go-Daigo* hatched a plan to overthrow the *bakufu*. After being discovered and banished, he worked in exile to raise an army. He received a powerful ally when *Ashikaga Takauji*, the general sent by the Shogun to hunt him down, changed his allegiance and supported the Emperor. Together, they were able to make war on the Shogun's forces and destroy clan Hojo.

Emperor Go-Daigo returned to the throne, and the Shogunate dissolved... but not for long. In CE 1333, rebellion broke out, and *General Takauji* was dispatched to stamp it out. He succeeded, but to ease the anger of the samurai class, he granted fiefdoms to the rebels — and took the title of Shogun for himself! Though Takauji still swore his allegiance to the Emperor, the action outraged Go-Daigo — he marshaled his army and attacked Takauji. After three years of war, Takauji captured Kyoto and installed a new puppet Emperor. The *bakufu* had returned.

Takauji's descendants ruled over a dynasty known as the *Ashikaga Shogunate*. However, this new Shogunate was weaker than the one that had come before, and almost all power lay in the hands of the *daimyo* (literally, “great name”; a powerful ruler of a feudal state) who ruled in the Shogun's name. The central government was unable to control the local lords, and they often warred with each other in defiance of the Shogun's will.



CE 1467-1560

Sengoku: The Era of Warring States

As time passed, conflicts between lords became more frequent and more violent. In 1467, widespread civil war erupted. Invading armies damaged the Imperial capital of Kyoto — the center of government ceased to function. The Shogun no longer had even the pretense of control over his *daimyo*, many of whom openly renounced their vows of loyalty.

For generations, civil war dragged on as local *daimyo* declared war on their neighbors or formed patchwork alliances in a grim struggle for supremacy.

Each fiefdom acted as an independent kingdom. In some territories, rebelling commoners overthrew their *daimyo*, naming their own leaders. Leagues of Buddhist monks and peasants formed leagues called *ikko-ikki*, overthrew their lords, and made their own domains. (The *ikko-ikki* in Kaga province lasted over a hundred years!)

No one knows how many died in this age of war, though it is certain that millions perished not only in the battles but also from starvation and disease spread by the breakdown of society.

CE 1560-1582

Nobunaga's Ambition

After more than two centuries of war, Japan slowly worked its way back to unity. A powerful general named *Oda Nobunaga* achieved victory after victory, forcing the lords to either swear allegiance to him or have their fiefdoms seized by his military might. He became notorious for his brutality and personal eccentricities.

Nobunaga was a canny general and great strategist. He made great use of the innovations brought by Europeans, such as their iron-clad sailing ships, their matchlock guns (*teppo*), and the military tactics that went with them. By 1560, Nobunaga was powerful enough to openly declare his intention to conquer all of Japan. He adopted a bold motto: *Tenka Fubu*, "cover that which is under the sky with the sword."

In 1568, Nobunaga's armies marched into Kyoto at the request of the last Ashikaga Shogun, who had been deposed by a rival clan. Nobunaga returned the Shogun to power but with restricted authority. When the Shogun began to plot with others to destroy Nobunaga, he was driven from the capital. Nobunaga allied with two other powerful generals, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu (whose roles in the later affairs are detailed below). They made sweeping alterations to the *bakufu* system of government and consolidated their power.

Even though Japan once again had strong central authority, the nation was still very much a loose mosaic of weak alliances and warring provinces. Nobunaga and his allies waged a slow, brutal, but gradually successful campaign to reunify the country.

Alas, Nobunaga did not live to see his dream realized. In 1582, Nobunaga led a failed defense of Takamatsu Castle in Bitchuu Province. Surrounded and defeated, he chose to commit suicide.

CE 1582-1598

The Regency of Toyotomi Hideyoshi

The vacuum left by Nobunaga's death was largely filled by his close ally, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. It is said that he was born a commoner and earned his way into the samurai class with his courage. At least one European visitor claimed that Hideyoshi had two thumbs on his right hand, a curious deformity that would normally have been amputated at birth in Japan. While serving as a general under Nobunaga, some claim he was able to inspire his men to build a castle in a single night.

Hideyoshi continued the work started by Nobunaga, inheriting his ambition. He wished to become Shogun, but the Emperor refused to grant this request considering Hideyoshi's ancestry as a commoner. Instead he took the title of *kampuku*, or Imperial Regent. In 1590, his armies destroyed the last remaining resistance to his regime. For the first time in two hundred years, Japan was at peace.

His lands secured, Hideyoshi retired from the official regency and turned the title over to his underage nephew, whom he had adopted as a son. He appointed a council of five regents to rule until his son came of age, and maintained considerable control from behind the scenes.

Hideyoshi convinced this council to order two massive (and ultimately unsuccessful) invasions of Korea. Although they did manage to capture and burn Seoul, the capital of Korea, almost a third of the Japanese army

had died in first year of the invasion alone. The Koreans also inflicted terrible casualties on the Japanese navy, using iron-clad, cannon-armed “turtle ships”.

The war continued fitfully until 1598, when Hideyoshi died. When the news of his death reached Korea, the Japanese forces rapidly withdrew as the *daimyo* back in Japan feared the start of a new civil war. Their fears were not unfounded. One of the regents, *Tokugawa Ieyasu*, demanded to be made the new Shogun. The other members of the council refused and armed for war. The actual conflict was short, but intense. It ended in a massive paroxysm of violence, one of the largest battles in Japanese history.

September 15, 1600

The Battle of Sekigahara

The armies of almost fifty lords met near the tiny village of *Sekigahara*. More than 150,000 men took part in the battle, which was marked by breath-taking acts of treachery on the part of some of the generals. As the tide of battle turned, some generals threw their lot in with Tokugawa, hastening the destruction of their former allies. After the Battle of Sekigahara, Tokugawa Ieyasu was unquestionably the pre-eminent warlord in Japan. There was no one left to contest his claim to the Shogunate — the official title granted to him by Emperor Go-Yozei in 1603.

CE 1600-1605

The Setting of Usagi Yojimbo

In the fictional story presented in *Usagi Yojimbo*, a similar drama was playing out, far to the north, on *Adachigahara Plain*, almost at the same time of the Battle of Sekigahara. The ambitious Lord Hikiji of

Mutsu province put his army to battle against his neighbor Lord Mifune, who had sworn vengeance against Hikiji for the slaying of his family.

Unfortunately, Mifune’s allies betrayed him as the tide of the battle turned towards Hikiji’s favor. Lord Mifune was slain, and his most loyal vassal, *Miyamoto Usagi*, was left a masterless, wandering *ronin*, like so many other unfortunate samurai.

In early 1605, Tokugawa Ieyasu turned his title and position over to his adopted son, Hidetada. However, the elder samurai continues to hold true power over the nation. Japan is at the dawn of a new era. For the first time in generations, a strong leadership has arisen, one that promises to maintain the peace for years to come. The troubles experienced by previous generations are disappearing — more and more conflicts are resolved by diplomacy than by violence.

This new era of samurai is not without its own problems. Many samurai were left without masters or estates from the previous wars, forced to wander as *ronin* (literally, “wave men”, as if cast into the ocean). Many turn to banditry; others become mercenaries, selling the services of the sword to both lords needing extra muscle and to commoners forbidden by law to take up such arms.

The era of prosperity is by no means without serious change. Commoners and artisans, emboldened by their rising wealth, scheme for power in a system that denies advancement to those not of proper birth.

As the future is bright with opportunity, it is also fraught with peril and uncertainty. This is the beginning of the *Tokugawa* era.

CE 1606-??

The future

The *Usagi* role-playing game is set in 1605. Historically, Japan was about to have some serious changes with how they dealt with the outside world ...

In 1609, the Satsuma clan invades what is now Okinawa, creating an independent nation, the *Ryukyu Kingdom*. As Japan slowly closes off relations with the rest of the world, Okinawa remains a separate, open nation until 1879.

Japanese sailors experienced a brief golden age of exploration. In 1614, a Japanese galleon built to European specifications (the *San Juan Bautista*) reaches the Spanish colonies in Mexico and establishes an embassy in North America. The same vessel sails to Europe in 1617, bearing an ambassador to Rome to

meet with Pope Paul V. Later, trade and international travel will be restricted to a few specially-licensed vessels, known as *the Red Seal Ships*.

After the Shimbara Rebellion in 1637, the *bakufu* government progressively closes off trade with the rest of the world, restricting all trade to Dejima port in Nagasaki, and only with China and with the Dutch East India Company. Landing on Japanese shores without authorization becomes punishable by death!

In the fictional setting of *Usagi's* stories, the *Sensho* arc describes a future set sometime after 1620, where our heroes must repel alien invaders (!). This story is a bridge to the far, far future of the *Space Usagi* arc and its science-fiction adventure, when the Tokugawa era is lost to myth and legend.



USAGI'S JAPAN

At the start of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan is in a period of transition. The *daimyo* waged civil war against each other for centuries and are only now being forced to adopt the habits of peace. While Japan is more stable than it has been in many years, the new Shogunate has yet to fully develop its administrative functions. Many are understandably wary of the new Shogun, and they are fearful that a new age of civil war could erupt at any time.

Even so, the Japanese people enjoy a level of peace and security almost unheard of in the rest of the world. They confidently feel themselves to be the inhabitants of the greatest empire on Earth, blessed by the gods with wise and enlightened leaders — well, mostly blessed, anyway. Their society may not be perfect, but most believe it to be the best of all possible worlds.

Government

The Shogun has put in place a system of feudal military rule known as *bakuhau taisei*. Under this system, the Shogun exercises supreme executive authority in the name of the Emperor. The Emperor is still considered the true leader of Japan, even if his actual powers are limited. The country is divided into several fiefdoms, known as *han*. Each *han* is ruled by a local lord, known as a *daimyo*, who has sworn allegiance to the Shogun. These lords are in turn required to provide service and supplies to the Shogun whenever requested and must hand over a portion of the taxes they collect from their peasantry. However, they are also given a great deal of freedom, and each fiefdom maintains its own internal laws and economic policies. The Shogun is

responsible for matters of national security and foreign relations, though he may also take direct action in local affairs if the policies of a given *daimyo* displease him.

At first glance, a feudal system based upon the loyalty of heavily armed generals, who have the freedom to make their own laws, seems inherently unstable. Certainly, the constant conflict of the Sengoku Era and inability of the earlier Shoguns to retain control would seem to prove that the *daimyo* have no reason to swear allegiance to a single, remote leader.

To cement control over his vassals, the new Shogunate has instituted the policy of *sankin kotai*. Under this law, all *daimyo* are required to leave their wives and heirs in Edo, the Shogun's capital. They are also required to personally attend the Shogun's court for the entirety of every second year. Though many grumble against this stringent requirement, all abide by it. If a *daimyo* refuses, he will arouse the suspicion and resentment of his neighbors. They will eagerly help to enact the will of the Shogun, particularly if this allows them to expand their own domains and settle old scores!

The practice of *sankin kotai* provides the Shogun with a pool of highly useful hostages. No *daimyo* would dare breathe a word of rebellion while his wife and eldest son are in the power of the Shogun! And, as a final safeguard, the *daimyo* are expected to maintain a lavish lifestyle while visiting the capital. This expenditure drains much of the funds they could otherwise use to build an army capable of threatening the Shogunate.

Law and Order

While the Shogun maintains the status quo through *sankin kotai*, the common people are under the direct rule of the samurai class. Japan is a highly stratified society, and commoners are forbidden to take on the accoutrements of the noble class. For example, laws forbid anyone but a samurai from carrying certain weapons — in some places, no weapons of any kind are permitted.

The Tokugawa era is notorious for the practice of *kirisutogomen* (literally, “killing and walking away”), the right of a samurai to kill any member of the lower class to avenge an insult. Therefore, the untrained, unarmed underclass do their best to keep from offending members of the warrior caste.

Law and order are upheld by an extensive body of samurai and civilian officials. Every town of reasonable size will have a local magistrate, or *machi-bugyo*. He has the authority to judge criminal cases and sentence commoners and may call upon the services of *doshin*, low-ranking samurai, to apprehend criminals. These *doshin* are in turn assisted by warriors known as *komono*, or by part-time watchmen called *goyikki*. In times of need, it is possible for the magistrate to raise a very large body of armed men, perhaps to apprehend a party of bandits or to hunt for a dangerous criminal.

From time to time, agitators will encourage the local population to rebel. These rebellions are rarely long-lived, but they can be very expensive to put down. The *daimyo* and his magistrates in every fief maintain a network of informants and spies known as *okapikki*. These unsavory individuals earn a living by listening for rumors of unrest or criminal activity and then passing them on to the *daimyo*'s men.

Samurai and nobles are not subject to the justice of a normal magistrate and may not even be detained by watchmen. (However, since there are many landless *ronin* in 1605, some of whom are criminals disturbing the peace, this rule is sometimes ignored.) The *metsuke*, a special class of officials is authorized to detain high-ranking personages and bring for judgment before the *daimyo*.

Social Classes

“There are four ways in which we pass through life: as gentlemen, as farmers, as artisans, and as merchants.”

— Miyamoto Musashi,
The Book of Five Rings

Japanese society can be roughly divided into two categories — commoners and nobles — though each of these classes has several subcategories. A member of a given class can be easily identified. If a person has only one name, he or she is a commoner, no matter how wealthy and respected the person might be. If the person has a family in addition to a personal name, he or she is a member of the noble class — no matter how poor and destitute they might be!

It is important to remember that social standing in Japan is not primarily a function of wealth. A rich farmer who can afford to hire guards and a large household staff is in no way equal to a nobleman, even an impoverished one. His wealth buys him physical comforts and luxuries and the respect of his employees — but he remains a commoner.

It is possible — though very hard — for a commoner to join the noble class. This would require the performance of some great deed, or the acquisition of considerable wealth and influence. Most people consider such a thing to be an impossible dream. It is considerably easier for nobles to fall into the commoner class. Crimes of dishonor or rebellion may be punished by being stripped of name and title. Additionally, if a clan is effectively destroyed in war, the remaining family members may not retain their noble status.

Commoners (Heimin)

As in any feudal land, commoners make up the bulk of the population. They live and die at the sufferance of their traditional masters and are required to pay sometimes harsh taxes to the local lord. Still, with the new stability brought by the Shogunate, many people in this class are finding themselves able to amass wealth for the first time in their lives. Even farmers can purchase luxuries and to set aside money for the betterment of their children.

Unlike some other feudal systems, Japanese commoners were not restricted to the profession they were born into. The son of a farmer does not have to become a farmer himself — though opportunities to pursue a different career are not likely to present themselves.

Farmers

“Using agricultural instruments, he sees springs through to autumns with an eye on the changes of season.”

— Miyamoto Musashi
The Book of Five Rings

The farmer is the single most common occupation in Japan. Farmers rarely have the time, resources, or inclination to study the culture and manners of the higher classes. They can therefore appear crude or poorly mannered.

In the year 1605 CE, rice is the most commonly-grown crop in Japan, and it serves as the staple of nearly everyone’s diet. However, it requires very damp conditions in order to thrive. In drier parts of Japan, fruit and vegetables are grown. Turnips are a favorite for soups and stews. Farmers also raise livestock for meat, although this is rare as fish and rice are more popular.

Artisans

“The Way of the carpenter is to become proficient in the use of his tools, first to lay his plans with a true measure and then perform his work according to plan. Thus he passes through life.”

— Miyamoto Musashi
The Book of Five Rings

The artisan class includes every person who makes a living by creating something for sale. This covers everything from alcoholic beverages to sleeping mats to fine jewelry to swords. Artisans run the gamut from incompetent bunglers who produce barely useable items to skilled master craftsmen whose work is sought out by the Emperor and Shogun. Though they are commoners, skilled artisans can earn the respect of even the noble class.

Merchants

“The Way of the Merchant is to always live by taking profit.”

— Miyamoto Musashi
The Book of Five Rings

Merchants are those members of society who make money by selling the goods of others for a profit. They range from poor wandering peddlers who sell trinkets in the streets, to modest innkeepers and restaurateurs, to immensely-wealthy individuals who own multiple warehouses.

As peace spreads across Japan, landed samurai need increasing storage space to hold the *koku* (bushels of rice) given to them as tribute from the commoners who till their fields. If the samurai want to convert this rice into money, they also need to liquidate their assets with the help of money-changers

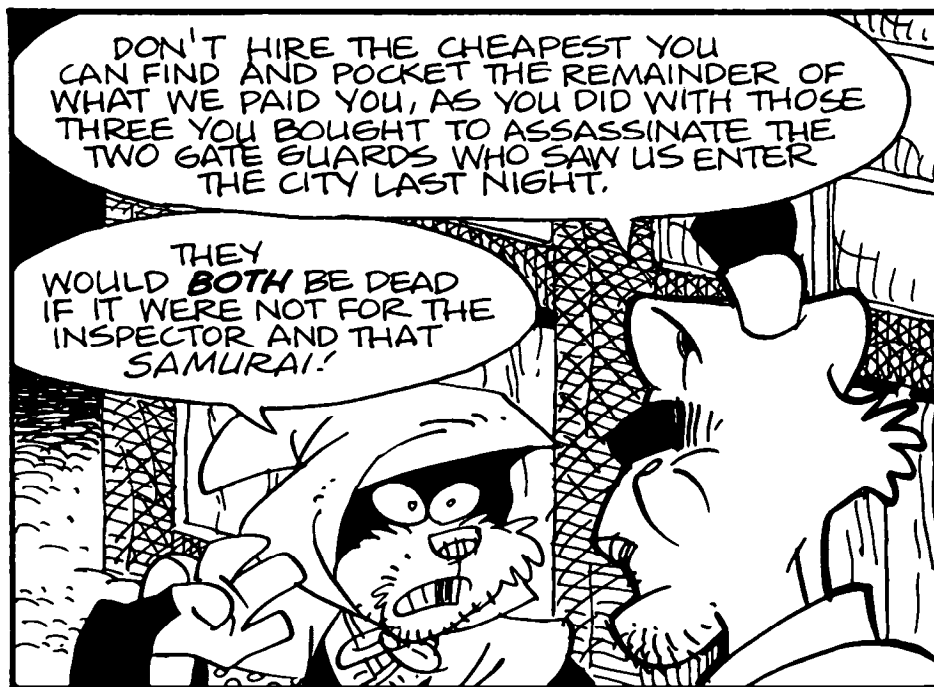
(especially if they must support a lavish lifestyle). Merchants are quickly realizing there is much money in the endeavor of buying and selling rice.

Nobility

“Reading books is the work of the Imperial court, but the work of the House of Nakano is found in military valor.”

— Yamamoto Tsunetomo
In the Shadow of Leaves

There are two orders of nobility in Japan at this time, reflecting the dual-nature of political power. These orders are the *kuge* (or “public house”) and the *buke* (“warrior house”). The *kuge* are the descendants of the great families of the ancient Imperial age, while the *buke* are a newer class of martial lords that has arisen in the last few centuries. There are some similarities



between these two classes. Both are entitled to a family name which is passed on to their descendants — and to the respect this entails. However, the role they play in society is quite different.

Remnants of Imperial Glory: The **Kuge** Class

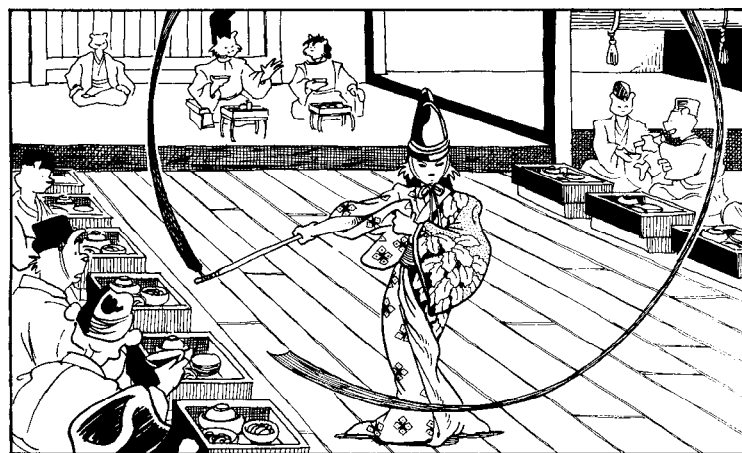
In 1605, there are more than 130 high-ranking *kuge* families left in Japan, and many more families of minor nobility. Many can trace their lineage back eight hundred years; some claim a lineage that springs from ancestors who walked with the gods in the first days of the world.

The *kuge* retain their titles, family names, and social standing, but have lost almost all their real authority. As time passes, their wealth and influence are waning still further, though the cachet attached with possessing a family name prevents them from descending into the commoner class. The Imperial nobles value civility, learning, and proper deportment above all other things. They study the minutiae of courtly ceremony and engage in seemly pursuits such as poetry, art, or music.

The *kuge* class can be divided into two orders. The highest-ranking nobles are *dojo*, while the minor nobility are known as *jige*. The *dojo* nobles fill all the important offices of the Imperial court, while the *jige* serve as functionaries and bureaucrats, if they have a formal role at all. According to traditional law, only nobles of the *dojo* class are permitted to sit with the Emperor while visiting the court. Members of this class generally hold positions akin to that of a government minister; though in reality few of these titles still have real administrative duties attached to them.

Most *kuge* survive on a stipend they receive from the Emperor, or other high-ranking noble, in return for their “duties” to the Empire. Others have learned to supplement their income (if they have one) by sharing the benefits of a gracious education with rich commoners or willing samurai. They take on students and instruct their pupils in manners and deportment, or in courtly skills such as calligraphy and poetry. When these students have learned all that they can, they can purchase a license from their master. This license permits the student to teach the skills they have gained and attests to their competence.

Since they are noble, *kuge* are considered suitable marriage partners for the *buke* class. While some *kuge* disparage this practice, others consider union with a *buke* clan a legitimate way to reclaim past wealth and prestige. A few *kuge* chafe at the traditional restrictions on their lifestyle and have taken on the martial trappings of the samurai, effectively joining the *buke* class. Still others devote themselves to a life of useful service, and become priests, emissaries, messengers, and diplomats in the service of the Shogun.



Martial Lords: The **Buke** Class

“The way of the warrior lies in the resolute acceptance of death.”

— Miyamoto Musashi
The Book of Five Rings

In the old Imperial days, the word *samurai* literally meant “one who serves” — a loyalist to the noble caste. During the long ages of war, the warrior class acquired more and more power, developing durable traditions of martial discipline, called *bushido* (“the way of the warrior”). The samurai became a new class of nobles — a body of men and women who have the skills and experience needed to hold on to their power when it was threatened. They created a new Japan, a military society in which skill-at-arms is supremely important.

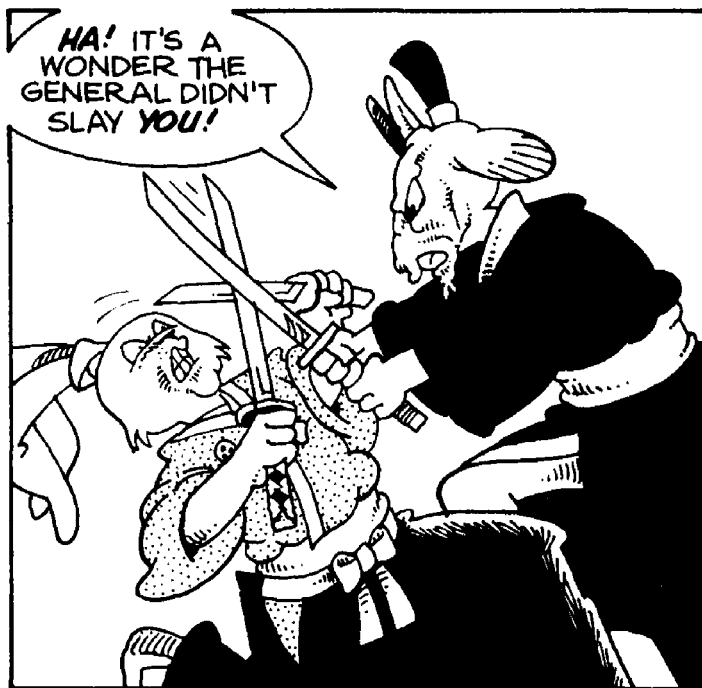
Though all samurai are technically members of a noble class, they vary considerably in terms of the power and respect they command. Sometimes this is obvious — a penniless *ronin* will not be treated with the same deference as *daimyo*. There are also very real differences in the standing of the samurai clans and *daimyo*, differences which stem from their role in the unification of Japan and the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate. A samurai from a clan that supported Ieyasu will be more honored than one from a clan who fought against the Shogun.

Daimyo are divided into three classes based on their support of Ieyasu. The *shinpan* are those clans who are directly related to Ieyasu. They have been given rule of the rich central provinces and positions on the grand councils that decide policy for the country. The *fudai* are clans that supported Ieyasu before the Battle of Sekigahara. Like the *shinpan*, they have been granted administration of the richest territories.

The final class, the *tozama*, are those lords who submitted only in defeat. They have been punished by being given rule of remote or poor fiefdoms.

Most *buke* are ordinary samurai who serve a *daimyo*. They work as senior officers in his army, bodyguards, and general trouble-shooters throughout the fiefdom. Other samurai are given specific roles in the administration of the *han*. For example, some may serve as magistrates, or as the headman of a village. Very young or low-ranking samurai may serve as patrolmen in large towns.

Though martial skill is one of the greatest concerns for a samurai, it is far from the only one. The ideal samurai is a man of letters and learning, as well as a man of honor. No matter what his position or standing, all *buke* from the lowest *ronin* to the Shogun’s elite *hatamoto* (official guard) are expected to live according to a strict warrior code known as *bushido*.





AS A SAMURAI,
YOU MUST STRIVE FOR
PERFECTION
IN BODY
AND SPIRIT!

DUTY
AND HONOR ARE
THE ESSENCE OF
BUSHIDO, THE WAY
OF THE WARRIOR,
AND SHOULD BE
PRESERVED EVEN
AT THE COST
OF YOUR
OWN LIFE.

The Way of the Warrior: Bushido

“It is dangerous to lack even one of the virtues of humanity, righteousness, etiquette and wisdom ... If one is ignorant in the study of literature, he will be unable to govern. Just as Buddha preached the various laws in order to save all living beings, one must rack one's brains and never depart from the Ways of both Warrior and Literary Man”

— *The Regulations of Imagawa Ryoshun*

Bushido simply means “way of the warrior.” Though it seems paradoxical, this code of the samurai class lacked rigid interpretation. While samurai in previous generations adhered to the precepts of *bushido* and adopted ideals of honor and courage unto death, they are rarely presented in a unified form. Instead, they were expressed as a collection of maxims or platitudes, sometimes even riddles worthy of Zen masters.

With the stability the new Shogun had brought to Japan, many old warriors have finally been given the opportunity to reflect on their lives of battle. They wrote down these observations to share them with each other, their descendants, and their subjects.

With each passing year the code of *bushido* became more formalized. However, no matter how it is expressed, *bushido* can be described as seven principles:

- *gi* (righteousness)
- *yu* (courage)
- *jin* (benevolence)
- *rei* (respect)

- *makoto* (honesty)
- *meiyo* (honor)
- *chugi* (loyalty)

A samurai who demonstrates all these characteristics, even in the face of death, is considered a true follower of *bushido* and worthy of respect. Samurai who fail persistently or dramatically may be expected to end their own lives — forced to commit *seppuku*, ritualized suicide with their *wakizashi*, the samurai's short sword.

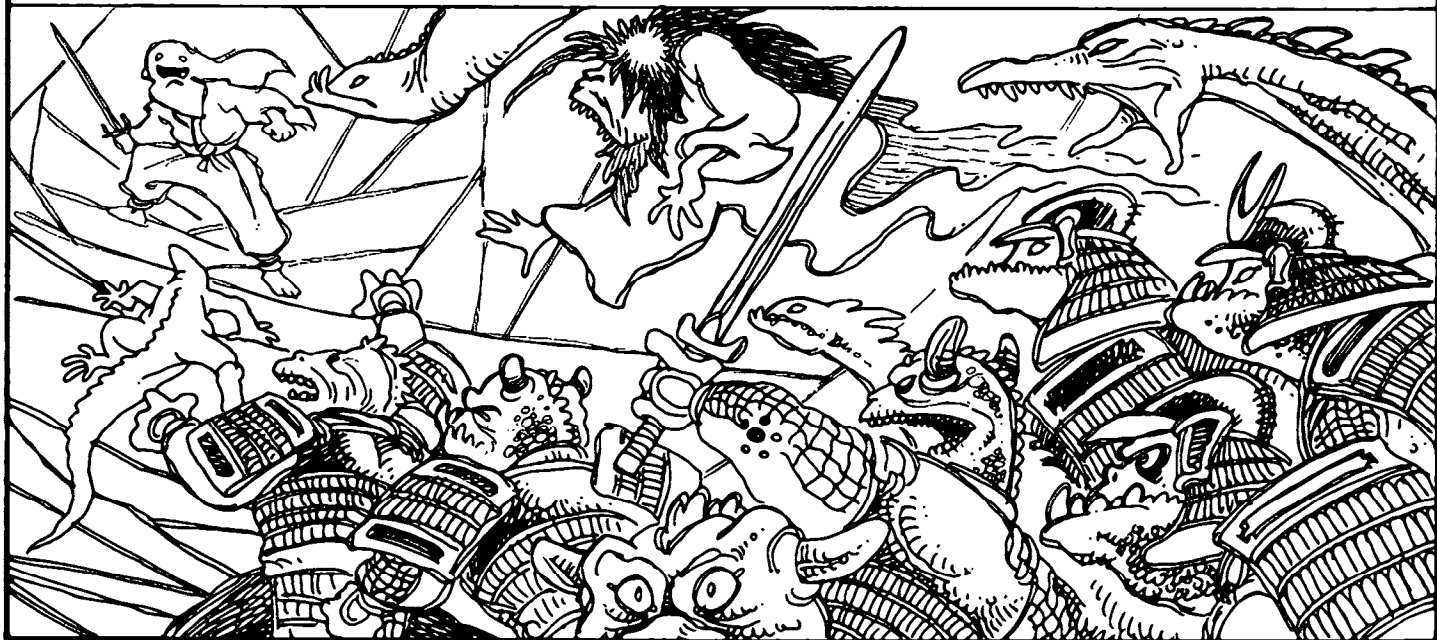
Religion and Philosophy

The Japanese are a highly spiritual people, and shrines and temples can be found in even the smallest village. Rituals intended to please the local spirits are conducted almost daily by every person.

The two most important spiritual philosophies in Japan are *Shintoism* and *Buddhism*, which are heavily entwined with one another. The Japanese do not see any contradiction between the two faiths, as they deal with two entirely different matters. Shinto instructs one on the proper way of dealing with the gods and the world, while Buddhism teaches the proper way of achieving perfection within one's own soul and speaks of the final destination of souls after death.

Another philosophy that has had a great deal of influence on Japanese society is *Confucianism*. This is a code of social rites and wise administration based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Though Confucianism has long been taught in Buddhist monasteries in Japan, the Shogun is now applying its principals to the problems of feudal administration.

ENRAGED BY THE INSULT, IZANAMI SENT THE HAGS OF HELL, THE EIGHT KAMI OF THUNDER, AND FIFTEEN HUNDRED WARRIORS OF HELL TO PURSUE HER HUSBAND.



Shinto

“Even the wishes of an ant reach to Heaven.”

— Traditional Shinto Saying

Shinto is the state religion of Japan, though the practice of this faith is not legally required by law. According to the principles of Shinto, all people are followers of the faith simply by birth, though not all are as well-informed or equally devout. Shinto has its roots in the ancient animist practices of pre-historical Japan. It is based on the belief that gods known as *kami* are everywhere, and that it is possible to learn rituals to please or placate this *kami* in order to win good fortune.

Kami

Kami are the spirits of nature, places, things, and concepts. Additionally, when a person dies their spirit becomes *kami*. They are collectively known as *Yaoyorozu no Kami*, or the eight-million gods. The most powerful and widely revered *kami* are the gods and goddess who created the world, and the ones who personify important concepts such as war, or important parts of the physical world, such as mountains or islands. Much like the gods of ancient Greece, *kami* are far from infallible, omnipotent or omniscient.

Instead, they are rather like very powerful mortals, and are subject to many of the same desires and failings. They are also very real individuals, with physical forms, though they rarely make themselves known in the day-to-day world. The sole exception to this rule is the Emperor. He is considered a personified *kami*, as his family line can be traced back to the goddess Amaterasu. Here is but a tiny sample of Shinto gods and goddesses.

- ***Izanagi*** — Father of the world.
- ***Izanami*** — Mother of the world. She died giving birth to the god of fire and is now the goddess of *Yomi*, the land of death.
- ***Amaterasu*** — The Sun goddess
- ***Tsukiyomi*** — God of the Moon
- ***Sunsanoo*** — God of Winds and Tempests
- ***Kagututi*** — The god of fire. He was slain by his father, *Izanagi*, but upon his death dozens of more gods and goddess came into being.
- ***Ama-no-Uzume*** — The goddess of the dawn and of revelry.
- ***Iwarebiko*** — A descendant of Amaterasu, the first Emperor of Japan.

The early history of Japan is largely a recounting of the exploits of these gods, and of their many battles and struggles. All Japanese are raised with these stories from youth, though the particulars may vary in different regions of the country.

Kami are worshipped at shrines. Most of the time, this worship takes the form of private obeisance or petition. For example, one may visit a shrine to *Yebisu*, god of fishermen, and ask him to bring a specific ship safely home or to bless it with a bountiful catch. Shrines often host festivals, which are public celebrations in honor of a god or goddess.

Most shrines are attended to by at least one Shinto priest, who cares for the upkeep of the structure and performs cleansing or petitioning rituals as required. Large shrines, such as the ones that hold the three Imperial treasures, may have literally hundreds of priests on staff. It is also not uncommon to find small shrines in rural or wild places with no resident priests.

Purity and Impurity

Shintoism has no definite commandments or directives as to the nature of good and evil. Followers are directed to live a balanced life, pay reverence to the *kami*, love nature, be physically clean, and have a proper respect for their family. Central to the faith are the concepts of purity and impurity. Failing to live a balanced life will cause one to become impure. Impurity is not an evil in and of itself, but it does attract bad fortune and unrest. To regain purity, one must conduct rituals of cleansing. These often involve literal washing of one's body, hands, and mouth. More elaborate ceremonies, involving chanting and various other rituals, may require the presence of a priest.

HE HAD WON A HUGE VICTORY AND WAS RETURNING TO HIS LANDS WHEN HE STOPPED AT THE TEMPLE OF THE GOLDEN BUDDHA TO REST FOR THE NIGHT.



Buddhism

"To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things."

— Dogen Zenji, Buddhist Grand Master

Buddhism is an ancient philosophy, first expressed in India around BCE 500. It has since spread throughout Asia and reached Japan around CE 700. In the intervening years, it has become deeply ingrained in Japanese philosophy and thought. It exists alongside Shintoism and Confucianism, even though some aspects of Buddhism (such as the destination of souls after death) seem to contradict Shintoism.

The Four Truths and the Eightfold Path

The essence of Buddhism is contained within a set of precepts known as the *Four Truths*:

- The physical world is imperfect and full of suffering.
- The root of this suffering is desire and attachment.
- The way to end suffering is to eliminate desire.
- Buddhism teaches the path to the elimination of desire.

The route to total enlightenment (known as *Satori*) is comprised of eight paths. Some sects teach that each path must be attained one at a time, while most believe that it is necessary to work towards them all simultaneously.

- Right Understanding
- Right Thought
- Right Speech
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Samadhi

Death and Reincarnation

Buddhists believe that the path to *Satori* is very long indeed for most people and can take many lifetimes. They hold that the soul is reincarnated after death. Before this happens, a person is judged by the Enma, the *kami* of death. If a soul is judged worthy, it spends a time among the *kami* before returning to Earth in a new body. If the soul is judged evil or unworthy, it is sent to *Meifumado*, sometimes called “Buddhist Hell”, where the dead person is subjected to terrible punishments, such as being boiled in oil. However, this punishment is not eternal — rather, it is a process of purification whereby the soul is made ready for a new reincarnation.

The achievement of *Satori* is said to be the realization that one’s identity and soul are false, simply illusions caused by consciousness and desire. Zen Buddhism teaches that all things are transitory — even the enlightenment of *Satori* is only temporary.



Karma

Another central idea in Buddhist teaching is the concept of *karma*. This is the universal law of action and reaction that is said to rule all life. Each person creates his or her own Karma through their own actions, and these have inevitable repercussions. However, the consequences of a good or evil action may not be immediate, or even take place in this lifetime. For example, an evil lord might reap great benefit from his murderous deeds and nefarious conspiracies, yet he may never endure punishment in his lifetime. His victims can take comfort in the fact that the lord’s actions will result in punishment in *Meifumado*, if not in some future incarnation.

Buddhism in Japan

As might be expected of a philosophy that has spread so far and existed for long, Buddhist practice varies considerably from place to place. There are a multitude of Buddhist sects, each teaching variations on the core principles laid down thousands of years ago. Most are founded on the teachings of specific priests or wise men who are said to have discovered new truths about the path to enlightenment.

Zen

The most notable variant of Buddhism in Japan is the *Zen* school. *Zen* teaches that *Satori* is best attained through meditation and direct teaching rather than study. Ordinary people are directed to meditate at least five minutes out of every day, while monks may spend many hours at this task.

These meditative times may be spent with an emptied mind, as part of an effort to overcome the illusion of self. Or, a monk may reflect on one of many puzzles known as *koan*. These are apparently contradictory or nonsensical questions that require a transformation in consciousness to understand. One famous *koan* is, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

In addition to meditation, *Zen* monks — at least those who are in residence at a temple or monastery — are expected to spend their days in common tasks such as cooking, cleaning and gardening. There are several *Zen* schools in Japan, each one with a different emphasis or interpretation of the path to *Satori*.

- **Soto** — The largest branch of *Zen* in Japan. It emphasizes meditation without thought, always in a seated position.

- **Rinzai** — Monks of this school meditate on *koan*, and believe it is possible to achieve sudden enlightenment. They strive to remove the fear of death through meditation, making this a popular school among the samurai.
- **Fuke** — Wandering *Fuke* monks travel the roads of Japan, practicing *sui zen*, meditation through the creation of music on their distinctive *shakuhachi* flutes. Many ronin become *Fuke* Buddhists.
- **Nichiren** — Followers of this school are fragmented into several sub-sects. They believe it is possible to achieve *Satori* within a single lifetime by chanting mantras during meditation. They believe other schools of Buddhism are false, and often attempt to convert others to their view.

Amidism

Amidist Buddhism, also known as “Pure Land” Buddhism, centers around the veneration and emulation of Amitabha, an ancient king said to have abandoned his throne and become a monk. In the course of his meditations, Amitabha resolved to achieve enlightenment by making 48 vows. He then established a new kingdom in the west known as the Pure Land. All those who call on his name can be reborn into this paradise, which is said to be a land of endless happiness.

There are two schools of Amidism in Japan. *Jodo* is the basic form of Amidism, in which monks meditate on Amitabha's name. *Jodo Shin* followers believe that people in this world are too deep in evil to achieve enlightenment on their own. They believe that it is necessary to achieve unity with Amitabha, and with his help gain *Satori*. Before the Tokugawa era, *Jodo Shin* followers were notorious for the *ikko-ikki*, alliances of monks and peasants that overthrew their lords.



Japanese Confucianism

"... [A]lign with virtue, abide by benevolence, and immerse yourself in the arts."

— Confucius

Confucianism is a social philosophy and collection of moral teachings developed almost 2000 years ago in China by Confucius, a philosopher and government justice minister. Though no direct writings of Confucius have survived, many of his oral teachings and anecdotes were written down by his disciples. As these maxims were not recorded in a unified form, Confucians often differ as to the interpretation of reasoning behind these maxims, and different schools of the philosophy have arisen in different countries. In some schools it is little more than a description of an ideal government. In others, it is a full-blown system of religious and metaphysical thought.

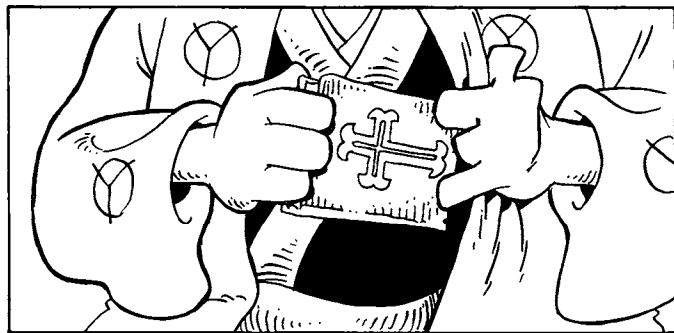
In Japan, Confucian ideas have been blended into Buddhism. Monks are required to study Confucius, and the philosophy is engrained in Japanese thought.

Basic Principles of Confucianism

Confucianism is an essentially conservative philosophy which emphasizes devotion to one's family and ancestors, the pursuit of justice, and the establishment of an orderly and peaceful government. It can be expressed with six general ideals.

- Respect for propriety, ritual and tradition
- Love for family and respect for elders
- Righteousness
- Honesty and reliability
- Kindness to others
- Loyalty to the monarch and state

It is thought that dedication to these principles will bring about the best of all possible worlds, and every educated person is at least aware of them. The former Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu believed that Confucianism provided an excellent basis for government. He began the creation of a large body of bureaucracy founded on Confucian ideals. This work is being continued by his son, the new Shogun.



Christianity (Kirishitan)

*"I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me"*

— Jesus of Nazareth

Catholic missionaries from Europe and the Philippines have been actively spreading the Christian faith throughout Asia and have achieved a great measure of success in Japan. In 1605, Japan is home to about 300,000 Christians, most of them living in the coastal areas of Kyushu or in the city of Yamaguchi. Almost all of them are commoners, though a few members of the noble class have also converted.

Christianity teaches a belief in a transcendent creator God who has three aspects — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The son, Jesus Christ (or *Kirisuto Iesu* as he is called in Japan) was personified in human form and executed. After death, he took punishment for the evils of mankind, then returned to life before ascending into Heaven.

Christians believe their God is infinitely perfect and wise. Failure to worship this God results in the eternal damnation of the soul, while faith is rewarded with immortality in Paradise. There are no other gods in Christianity, and Catholic missionaries often teach that the *kami* worshipped in Japan are demons masquerading as gods. Model Christians operate according to a highly codified set of moral principles that are quite familiar to the Japanese. In particular, the “Golden Rule” of Christianity (that one should act towards others as you would have them do to the self) fits in well with the ideals of Confucianism and Buddhism.

The Japanese attitude towards spirituality means that many new converts have simply added belief in *Kirisuto* to their existing faith in *kami*. Christian missionaries and priests consider this heresy and try very hard to stamp out the idea. The official attitude towards the religion is changing rapidly from one of toleration to open hostility. The Shogun is of the opinion that Catholic missionaries are spies for the European powers. His fears are fanned by many of his councilors and priests, who either resent the intrusion of Christianity, or consider it to be a dangerous false religion. Edicts placing strict limitations on Christianity were issued in 1606, and the faith was entirely outlawed a decade later.



Foreign Relations

“They eat with their fingers instead of with chopsticks such as we use. They show their feelings without any self-control. They cannot understand the meaning of written characters”

— Japanese description of European visitors during the Edo Period

While Japan had a long history of trade with mainland Asia, in recent years the country has been exposed to seafarers from much farther away. Travelers from European colonies in the Pacific and the New World first arrived in Japan in 1543 and are now regular visitors to Japanese ports.

At the time of Usagi’s Japan, the Japanese are an advanced and urbanized people, with an unbroken line of monarchy that stretches back to the European Dark Ages. They consider Europeans to be ill-mannered

and uncivilized and refer to them as *nanban*, or “barbarians.” However, they have still picked up some important innovations from their uncivilized visitors.

When the first Portuguese sailors — a lost, be-draggled trio aboard a Chinese ship — arrived in Japan in the 1540s, they brought with them a form of European musket known as an *arquebus*. Though the Japanese already had a heavy, tubular gun known as *teppo*, the arquebus represented a significant advance over locally-made weapons. The European weapons were far lighter than the *teppo*, and used an innovative matchlock firing mechanism. Within a year, Japanese craftsmen had reproduced the European firearms and produced thousands of copies for the armies of the warring *daimyo*. By 1605, the armies of Japan boasted more guns than any other nation on Earth.

At this time in history, Europeans were undertaking unprecedented explorations of the world. They have developed a high level of skill in shipbuilding and navigation. The Japanese admire these traits and are learning the art of European shipbuilding. At first, they simply hired Portuguese sailors to undertake this construction. Later, Japanese shipwrights incorporated some of the more revolutionary elements of European vessels into traditional Japanese designs.

Scholarly characters may have some knowledge about the customs, religion, and politics of Europe. However, unless they have contacts with the Shogun or Imperial Court (or through those few merchants who deal with Europeans) this information will be extremely dated and second-hand.

MAP

In the time period of *Usagi Yojimbo*, the empire of Japan is comprised of four large islands and thousands of smaller ones. The four main islands are (from north to south) *Ezo*, *Honshu*, *Shikoku*, and *Kyushu*. The largest island by far is Honshu, and it is here that most of the action in *Usagi Yojimbo* takes place.

All four islands are extremely mountainous, a factor which can dramatically slow travel, and one which makes cultivation difficult in many parts of the country. Peasant farmers are often obliged to dig terraces in the hillsides to squeeze more arable acreage from their land. There are few places on any of the islands where one is entirely out of sight of mountains or hills. Many roads wind around, up, and down these hills, which can make land travel difficult and slow.

The main range of mountains on Honshu runs north and south through the middle of the island. As a result of this chain, the coasts on either side of Honshu range experience very different weather. The eastern coast is dry and warm, while the west coast is relatively cool, and often enjoys heavy rainfall. The island of Shikoku is similarly divided, while Ezo and Kyushu are mountainous throughout, except for coastal plains.



Japan is a well-settled and relatively stable land, particularly in the fiefdoms near Kyoto and Edo. Maintained roads connect most provinces, and a traveler can expect to find public lodgings in all but the smallest of communities. Even amenities such as restaurants and bath houses are common. Almost every community will employ armed watchmen to patrol the roads at irregular times, searching for bandits and fugitives. Larger forces can be quickly raised by calling out the local *ashigaru* militia.

The Two Capitals

With the establishment of the new Shogunate in 1603, Japan now has two capitals. Emperor Go-Yozei resides in the city of Kyoto, which has been home to the Imperial court for nearly nine hundred years. However, his rule is largely ceremonial, and he has little real power that is not offered at the sufferance of the Shogunate. The Shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada, holds the real reins of power. He resides in Edo, which is a large and well-fortified city to the northwest of Kyoto. Edo is the military and executive center of power in Japan, and the Shogun is often mistaken for the Emperor by foreign visitors. This time period in Japan's history is sometimes called the Edo era.

Daimyo, high-ranking court officials, and other important personages are often required to travel from the Imperial court to that of the Shogun. They bear messages and gifts from one to the other, or simply travel on private pilgrimages in order to pay obeisance in person to the temporal and spiritual leaders of Japan. The volume of traffic between Edo and Kyoto is such that two highways, known as the Nakasendo Road and the Tokaido Road, are specifically maintained as a connection between the cities. The Tokaido

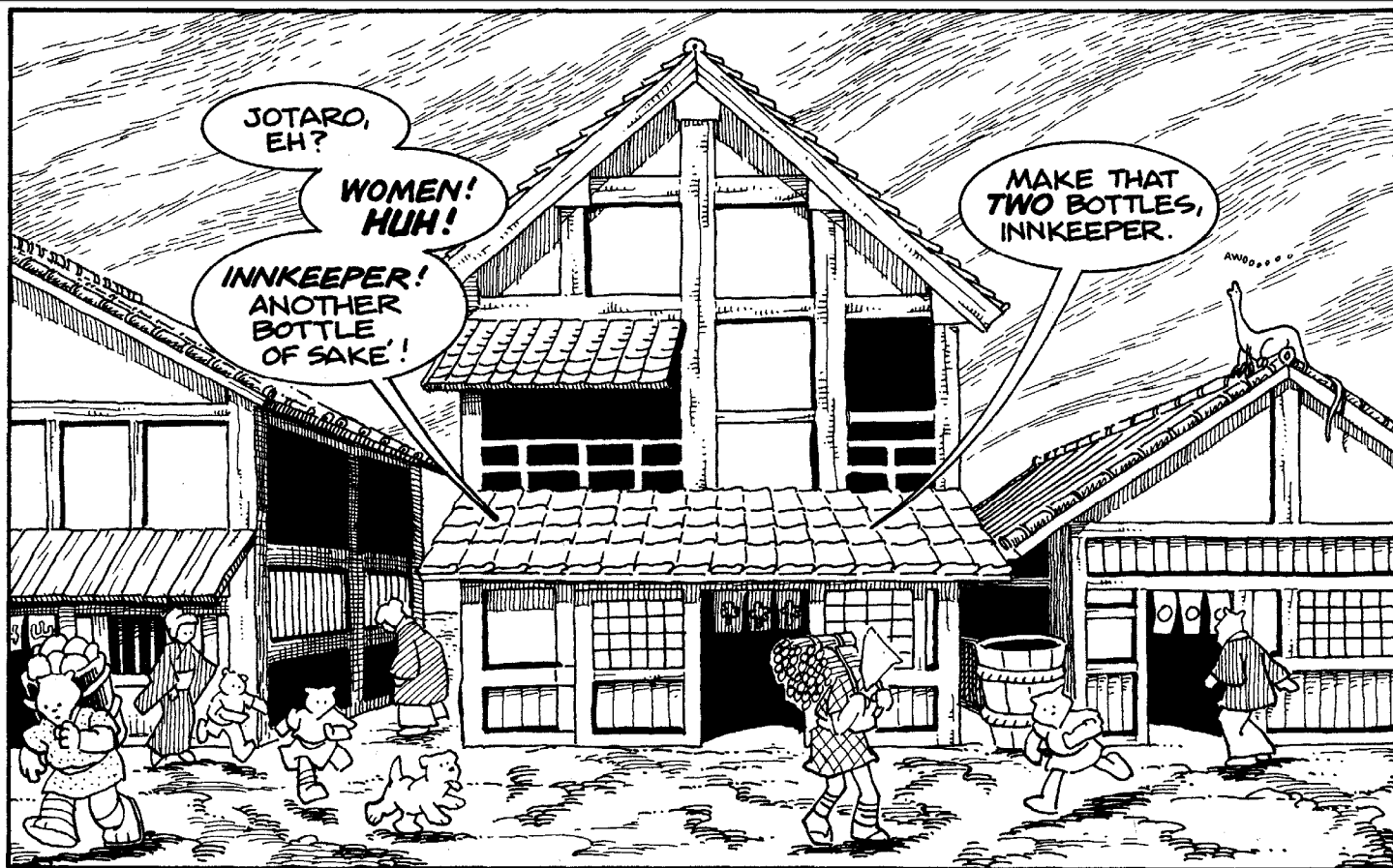
road is much busier, though the Nakasendo road is sometimes favored for its scenic diversions.

Regions & Provinces of Edo-Era Japan

Until the end of the old Imperial era, Japan was formally divided into administrative areas known as *kuni* (provinces). With the establishment of the Kamakura Shogunate in A.D. 1192, these provincial divisions became less important, as the military rulers of Japan took over many of the former administrative functions of the Imperial government.

By the end of the age of war, the old provinces had been splintered and separated into countless smaller holdings by the competing daimyo. Often, the old administrative cities were destroyed, or abandoned following multiple sieges. In other cases, they were eclipsed in importance by the castle towns that had grown around the fortifications built by the daimyo. From their castles, each daimyo ruled an area known as a *han* (fiefdom). The borders of these *han* changed dramatically as the fortunes of their rulers rose and fell.

In the short years since Tokugawa Ieyasu became Shogun, the existing fiefdoms have been recognized as the basic administrative area. Their size and borders are frozen, except in the case of clan alliances through marriage, or open warfare — which grows less common as the Shogun solidifies his hold on the country. In 1605, A *han* is defined as an area which can produce at least 10,000 *koku* of rice per year. One *koku* of rice (about five bushels) is required to feed one man per year. There are exceptions to this number, and some very large fiefdoms have an annual assessment in excess of 1,000,000 *koku*. These regions are ruled by very senior and powerful lords, while the smallest are ruled by low-ranking daimyo.



Some daimyos may have more than one *han* under their rule — they may appoint a civilian administrator or samurai to oversee their additional fiefs. Most provinces are home to several samurai clans. Each clan rules their fiefdom from a fortified castle town, though despite the name this settlement may be little more than a village with a small keep. The new Shogun has decreed that there should be only one castle per province. It is not certain how this decree will be enforced in provinces with more than one existing castle. Although the provinces no longer have any administrative function, they are still recognized as geographic areas. In addition to long tradition, the provincial divisions are simply easier to remember

than the *han*. There are more than 300 fiefdoms, and their borders still change periodically. If you ask a peasant to identify his place of residence, he will likely mention his province before mentioning his *han*.

During the Edo Period, the provinces were further grouped into eight regions, known as “routes”: Kinai, Tosando, Tokaido, Hokurikudo, San’indo, San’yodo, Nankaido, and Saikaido. Each grouping of provinces (with the exception of Kinai) indicated a route into the capital region.

The Capital Region: Kinai



Kinai is perhaps the most important area of Japan, as it contains the Imperial capital of Kyoto and many large cities. Kinai is comprised of five small provinces — Yamashiro (the seat of imperial power), Yamato, Kawachi, Izumi, and Settsu. Many large settlements can be found in Kinai, and the region has a significant urban population. Notable cities include Kyoto (home to the Emperor), the merchant city of Osaka, the holy city of Nara, and the port of Sakai.

Kinai is a hub of activity and attention. Visitors from every province of Japan can be found here, as well as diplomats and merchants from foreign lands. Exotic characters from barbarian lands, such as Jesuit missionaries from distant Rome or merchants from India, may be encountered in the busy marketplaces and byways of Sakai.

People from this area have a peculiar accent that often causes them to sound rather brusque and fierce, even in casual conversation. This trait is the subject of many jokes in other areas of Japan and makes it very easy to spot visitors from the capital region.

Yamashiro

Though small, Yamashiro province holds considerable importance. Kyoto and the Imperial court are located here. It is the very heart and soul of Japan. The entire province exists to serve the city of Kyoto. The local peasantry till rich soil, proudly producing the vegetables that feed the Emperor and his household.

Kyoto itself lies in a valley, surrounded by green mountains. These hills are beautiful, but also create a local pocket of extremely still air. Kyoto is notoriously humid, particularly in midsummer. It is a large city with many thousands of inhabitants, and the rarefied manners and odd customs of the locals can overwhelm country visitors as much as the sight of the grand shrines and palaces. Travelers from all over Japan (and occasionally from much farther abroad) walk these streets, along with puppeteers, dancers, top-spinners, priests, pedagogues, warriors, lords, and rogues of every class and stripe.

The city is home to literally hundreds of remarkable buildings, shrines, and temples. Here may be seen the grand temple of Toji, with a pagoda that towers 180 feet into the air, and the brilliant shrine of Kinkaku-ji, the walls of which are painted with real gold. Visitors seeking a vision of peace can regard the serene rock gardens of Ryoanji, which are said to provide insight into the very shape of the universe. of course, the grandest sight of all is the Kokyo, the Imperial Palace. It is said that gardens of serene beauty lie behind its walls, as well as glorious buildings. Few can confirm these reports — almost no one is allowed to enter.

Though Kyoto is a magnificent city, it has not yet fully recovered from the age of war. Here and there the scars of past sieges can be seen, both in the architecture and in the faces of the maimed peasants and veterans who beg for coins in the street. Keen-eyed travelers may also notice that the city seems smaller than it once was — the suburbs around the city are filled with overgrown lots, some with abandoned buildings or burned out homes, the relics of past invasions.

Yamato

Yamato is located just south of Yamashiro. It is a rich area of fertile farmland and busy villages. The residents feel their province is the heartland of Japan, and that their customs and lifestyles typify all that it is to be Japanese. This attitude is not limited to this province — many Japanese refer to the whole of the empire as “Great Yamato.”

There are several important towns in Yamato, perhaps the most notable of which is Okayama, home to a magnificent black castle.

Kawachi

Kawachi is a small province, with few large settlements. The entire area is ruled from Osaka castle in nearby Settsu province. Travelers will find mostly well-tended farmland, tidy villages, and neat shrines. of course, bandits and more unearthly threats are rumored to lie on the lonely mountain tracks. Before the capital moved to Kyoto in A.D. 784, the city of Nara was home to the Imperial family, where they built many temples in honor of the new state religion, Buddhism. In the Edo era, the Emperor may have moved on, but Nara still has the oldest and most influential Buddhist temples.

Izumi

Izumi is a tiny province, though important for the sheltered bays offered by its coastline. The port of Sakai is by far the most prominent settlement in Izumi. Sakai was a center for international trade for several hundred years and was unique among Japanese cities in that it was ruled by an independent merchant class.

The city was famed for the freedoms enjoyed by the inhabitants. During the Sengoku period of warring states, the merchant rulers enriched themselves by selling guns to anyone with the cash to pay for them. Sakai’s unique status ended when the daimyo Oda Nobunaga decided to seize the city for his own. The residents took up arms against his forces, but the city was quickly overrun and burned.

Today, Sakai is well on the way to recovering from the desolation wrought by Nobunaga’s army. However, it is still a ghost of its former self, and it is unlikely to regain the freedoms once enjoyed by the citizenry.

Settsu

Settsu is located northwest of Kyoto. The province is an important corridor for travel to the cities and farms of southern Honshu. It is ruled by relatives of Tokugawa Hidetada, from the castle town of Osaka. They also count the provinces of Izumi and Kawachi as part of their fiefdom.

Osaka Castle was built on the ruins of a fortified Buddhist temple of the Jodo Shinsu sect. Oda Nobunaga razed the temple after a four-year siege and ordered the construction of the castle. Some whisper that the ghosts of the dead priests still linger in the basements of the castle, a series of dungeons that descend three levels into the depths.

The East Mountain Route: Tosando

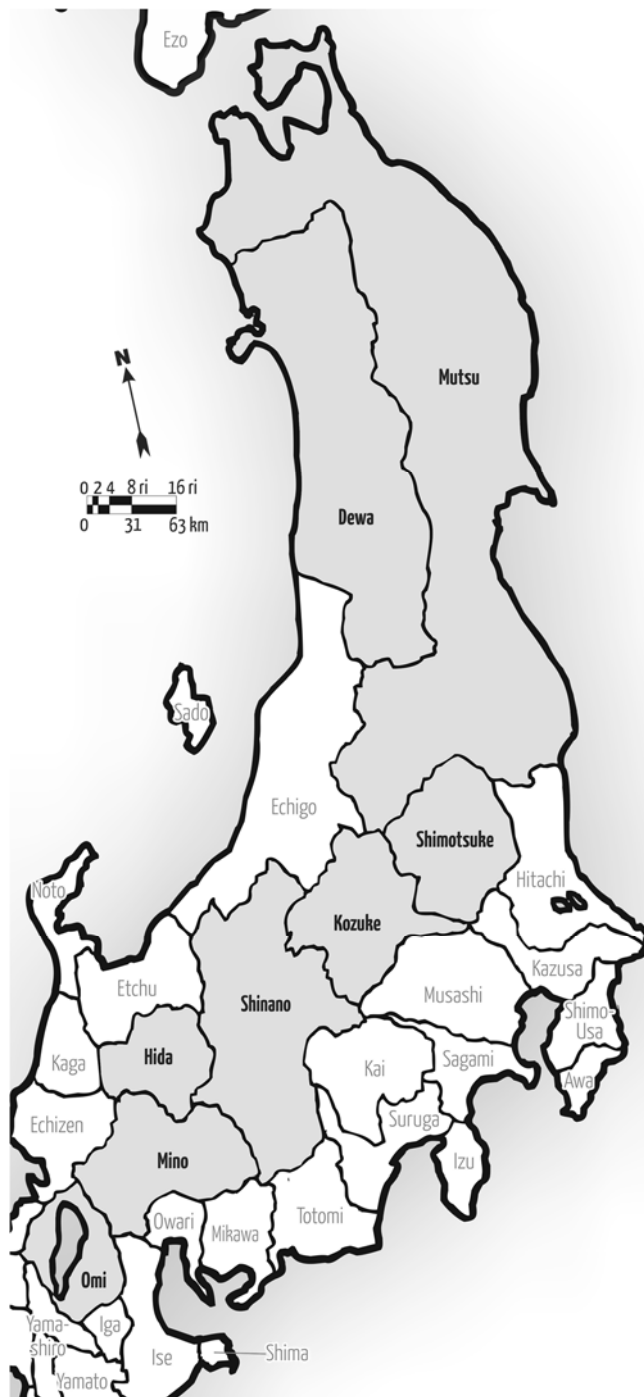
Tosando is the east mountain route. From Kinai, one travels east to Omi, and then north via the mountains through Mino, Hida, Shinano, Kozuke, Shimotsuke, finally coming to Mutsu and Dewa in the far north of Honshu. The terrain varies greatly as one proceeds northward, becoming progressively rougher and less settled.

Omi

Omi is home to Lake Biwa, which is by far Japan's largest lake. The shores of Lake Biwa are home to many fishing communities, and its waters are rumored to be the home of many legendary creatures. Omi is also an important stop on the Tokaido road, and there are several impressive castles here.

Mino

Mino was one of the original provinces ruled by Oda Nobunaga and served as an important base in his drive for power. It is also the site of Castle Gifu, a major fortification. In 1600, the west edge of this province was the site of the Battle of Sekigahara, a major clash between the daimyo loyal to Tokugawa, and those who supported the other regents. Farmers from the tiny village of Sekigahara still find bones and rusted weaponry, leftovers of the battle. The area has an unusually dense population of fireflies — these are often said to be the souls of the dead soldiers, lingering on at the site of their doom.



Hida

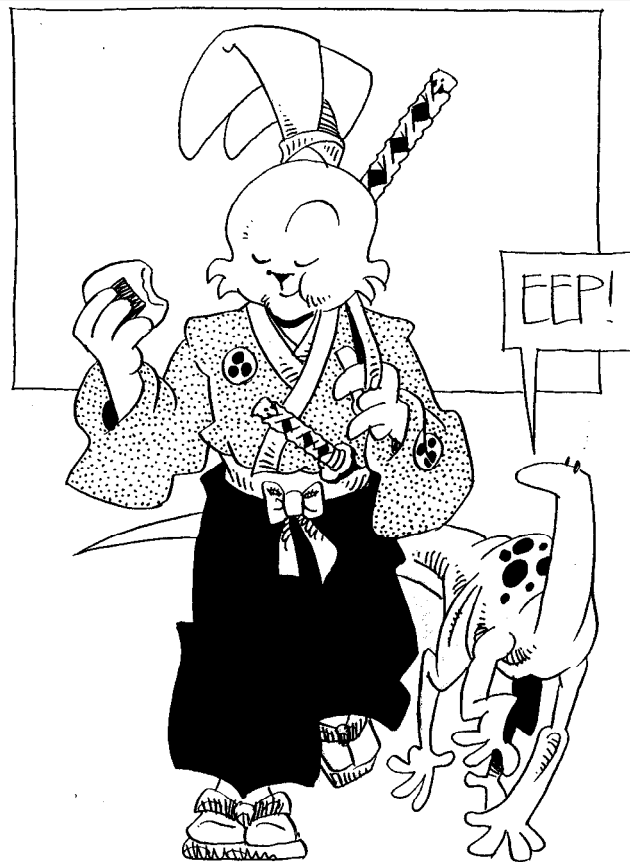
Hida is a heavily forested province, and heavily traveled. Banditry is common as brigands can easily retreat into the security of the forests. It is said that many kami dwell in the depths of the woods, both good and evil.

Shinano

Shinano province is extremely mountainous and is famous for its picturesque views. Perhaps the most important town in this area is Matsumoto, home to the famous Crow Castle. This castle is so named because of its black-painted walls, and the spreading “wings” that extend from the main structure. The city is also famous for its *onsen* (hot springs) which draw many rich and noble visitors. Other important castle towns in Shinano include Ina, Ueda, and Komoro.

Kozuke

The main town in mountainous Kozuke province is Takasaki. This settlement is known as the home of the daruma doll. These curious wooden dolls represent the Indian sage Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism. According to tradition, the dolls are capable of granting wishes. When they are made, their eyes have no pupils. The owner makes a wish, and then colors in one of the eyes. When the wish comes true, the second eye may be colored in. These dolls may be purchased in a variety of sizes and degrees of ornamentation from Buddhist temples in this region. It is considered improper to own more than one daruma at a time. When a given wish is fulfilled, another daruma may be bought.



Shimotsuke

Shimotsuke is located just north of the Shogun's seat of power in Edo. As such, this province has been the site of many battles, and until living memory it was divided into many small territories, each the domain of a different daimyo. The province is noted for its many beautiful waterfalls and shrines. The small town of Nikko is home to a particularly ancient Shinto shrine, Futarasan, which was built nearly a thousand years ago. The current Shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada, has commissioned the construction of many shrines throughout Japan, and some of the most elaborate are being built in Shimotsuke.



IT WAS KEPT AT
ISE TEMPLE WITH TWO
OTHER TREASURES
UNTIL IT WAS GIVEN
TO ME BY MY AUNT,
THE HIGH PRIESTESS,
WHEN I DEPARTED
TO BATTLE THE
YEMISHI*.

*ANCESTORS
OF PRESENT
DAY AINU

Mutsu

Mutsu is by far the largest province in all of Japan. It was one of the last to be formed as Japanese settlers displaced the native Ainu people over several years. The northern limits of the province still have the character of a frontier territory very much. The climate of the province varies dramatically as one travels inland. It is temperate and warm at the eastern shore, and the narrow central plains are extremely fertile, home to many farming communities. The western side of the province is dominated by craggy mountains where many beautiful lakes can be found. The mountain regions and the north coasts are notable for their harsh winter weather.

Several different clans occupy this province, existing in a state of watchful peace. They rule from several prominent castle towns, most notably Aizuwakamatsu, Kozukata, and Sendai. A short journey from Sendai, a traveler may view the legendary beauty of Matsushima Bay, wherein lie more than 250 tiny islands, dotted with graceful pines. The bay is considered one of the three most beautiful places in Japan.

In our fictional story, Miyamoto Usagi was born in an unnamed village in Mutsu province, and this region is still the home of many supporting characters such as Kenichi, Mariko, Jotaro, and Katsuichi.

Dewa

Like Mutsu, Dewa was settled gradually as Japanese colonists displaced the native peoples. In the years since, it has been relatively well-settled, and is noted for its silk production. Important towns include Akita in the north, and Yamagata in the south. The southern part of the province is also home to the Ryushaku-ji Temple, which was carved out of the side of a stone mountain hundreds of years ago. The priests continue to dig new tunnels into the mountain to this day. Dewa is also home to three mountains sacred to Shintoism — Mount Haguro, Mount Gassan, and Mount Yuduno.

The East Sea Route: Tokaido



The region of Tokaido should not be confused with the Tokaido road, which runs between the imperial capital of Kyoto and the military capital of Edo. The region extends northward from Kinai along the warm eastern coast of Japan. It is mountainous and forested along the western half, with stretches of flat land along the eastern coast. The largest of these, the Kanto Plain, spreads across several provinces. In many other places the mountains run almost to the ocean. The Tokaido region incorporates many small (though important) provinces. In approximate order from north to south, they are Iga, Shima, Ise, Owari, Mikawa, Totomi, Suruga, Izu, Kai, Sagami, Musashi, Awa, Kazusa, Shimo-Usa, and Hitachi. Much of Tokaido is ruled directly by the Shogun, or by clans closely allied to him.

Iga

Although it is close to the bustling Kansai region, Iga is a tiny and rather inaccessible province. Most of the residents dwell in a flat basin, surrounded by mountains. The settled region is linked to the outside world by poorly maintained roads through the mountain passes. Iga is said to be the birthplace of the art of ninjutsu and home to the first and oldest ninja clan.

Shima

Tiny Shima province is located on a peninsula that extends outward into the ocean. It is a major center for fishing and pearl collection. The most important town in Shima is Ise, which is home to both a famous castle and an extensive Shinto shrine. The shrine, which is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu, consists of over 100 individual shrines. Each shrine is demolished and rebuilt once every 20 years. The shrines are not accessible to commoners, and are said to house the sacred mirror, *Yata no kagami*. The mirror is one of the three imperial treasures and is said to grant wisdom to the Emperor.

Ise

Ise (not to be confused with the castle town of Ise in Shima province) is dominated by forested mountains, with most residents living along the coast. Castle towns include Tsu (a popular stopping point for pilgrims to the Ise Shrine), Kuwana, and Matusaka.

Owari

Owari was the home of the warlords Oba Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and it continues to be an important base of power for the current Shogun. However, the province is perhaps best known as the home of the famous sword *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi* (“Grasscutter”), which is one of the three imperial treasures. The sword is kept at the Atsuta shrine in the castle town of Nagoya.

Mikawa

Mikawa was the original fief of the current Shogun. The principal castle towns are located at Okazaki and Yoshida. The province is famous for its production of fireworks, and it is currently the only province in Japan in which gunpowder can legally be manufactured.

Totomi

Like much of the Tokaido region, this province is dominated by large mountains. Until a few decades ago, it was ruled by the Imagawa clan, but the clan lost their holdings and currently serves as the masters of ceremony to Tokugawa. Hamamatsu is the province’s most notable castle town.

Suruga

Suruga’s geography varies from mountains in the south to smaller hills in the north. Suruga is one of the provinces directly administered by the Shogun, by his representatives in the castle town of Shizuoka.

Izu

The province of Izu is composed of a relatively small peninsula that juts southward from the mainland into the ocean. The most dramatic and famous landmark in Izu is sacred Mount Fuji, the tallest mountain in Japan. It is easily visible for many miles around and can even be seen from Edo on a clear day. Mount Fuji is the goal of many pilgrims, though women are forbidden to climb to the peak. The most notable town in Izu is Mishima, which is home to three important shrines.

Kai

The province of Kai is entirely land-locked and is home to many dramatic peaks and lush valleys. The capital of the province is the castle town of Kofu, which is also the site of the Kai-Zenkou Buddhist temple.

Sagami

Sagami is an important leg of the Tokaido road from Edo to Kyoto and has long held a strategic importance. Control of Sagami is an important part of maintaining the connection between the two capitals. The province is dotted with major fortifications and castle towns. Odawara Castle watches over the Tokaido road.

Sagami is mountainous in the west and south, but much of the rest of the province is a flat and fertile plain dominated by rice farms and crisscrossed by rivers. Near the mountain town of Hakone, travelers may encounter a strange area known as the Great Boiling Valley, a starkly beautiful place of bare stone and boiling geysers.

The important city of Kamakura is found on the coast of Sagami. This city is surrounded on three sides by mountains, and on the fourth side by water, making it an impressive natural fortress. The city is home to several shrines and temples, including the warrior shrine of Tsurugaoka Hachiman. Pilgrims from all over Japan are also drawn to an enormous bronze Buddha.



Musashi

Musashi, seat of the Shogunate, has long been an important province. It lies on the fertile Kanto Plain, and is dominated by rich farmland and rice fields. Numerous villages and towns can be found, rarely separated by more than a few hours travel. of course, the most important settlement is Edo, which lies on the coast. It is here that the Shogun holds court, in Edo Castle. Edo is the largest city in Tokugawa-era Japan. Most of the citizens dwell in small wooden houses called *machiya*, which are heated by charcoal ovens.

Almost anything can be found in Edo, even strange and wonderful artifacts from distant Europe or the depths of Asia. In addition to countless shrines and temples of all sizes, courtesans offer discreet services to the citizenry in the streets of Yoshiwaru, the red-light district. Ronin are forbidden to enter this part of the city, and the prostitutes are forbidden to leave, except once a year to view cherry blossoms in the countryside. The city also boasts a regular police force, as well as fire-fighters. These last are kept busy, as fires are common, and flames spread quickly through the close-set wooden residences. The inhabitants of Edo are known as Eddoko and are famed throughout Japan for their abrupt manner and capacity for creating inventive curses.

Awa (安)

Tiny Awa province lies at the southern tip of the Boso Peninsula, and it is surrounded on three sides by the ocean. Although close to the bustling towns of Musashi, Awa is thinly populated, and has few settlements larger than a village. Fishing and rice farming are the principal occupations. More than one adventurer has retired to sleepy Awa ... or hidden there while avoiding their enemies.

Kazusa

Kazusa occupies the majority of the Boso Peninsula, a hilly region with a relatively small population. The only settlement of importance to visitors is the castle town of Otaki. Though Kazusa is a relatively quiet area, the locals can spin terrifying tales about monsters and spirits that dwell in the windy hills.

Shimo-Usa

Shimo-Usa is geographically dominated by the Kanto Plain, and ruled by the Shogun in Edo. The province has been the site of many battles and has changed hands from clan to clan many times in its history. The principal settlement is the castle town of Sakura.

Hitachi

Located at the northern edge of the Tokaido region, Hitachi also represents the northern limits of the Kanto Plain. While the southern half of the province is dominated by grasslands dotted with lakes, the north turns once again into mountains.

Hitachi was ruled by several competing daimyo until recently, most ruling from the castle town of Mito. A day's journey from Mito, one may find sacred Mount Tsubuka, on which is built an ancient Shinto shrine in the shape of a toad.



The North Land Route: Hokurikudo



Hokurikudo follows the western coast of Japan northward, creeping along the spine of the country until it reaches Dewa. Hokurikudo is composed of the provinces of Wakasa, Echizen, Kaga, Noto, Etchu, Echigo, and Sado. The inhabitants of these provinces are often considered unsophisticated rustics by residents of more central areas. However, they are also recognized throughout Japan as skilled artisans.

Wakasa

Wakasa is little more than a narrow plain between the mountains in the east, and the Sea of Japan in the west. The provincial capital is in the castle town of Obama. The province is thinly settled otherwise.

Echizen

Echizen is like Wakasa in many respects but boasts a much broader and more fertile area of plains. The main town of Fukui is famed for its artisans, who produce very high-quality paper and unique ceramics. The inhabitants speak in a curiously accented “sing-song” variation of standard Japanese known as Fukui-ben. This accent (along with several local colloquialisms) may mark the speaker as a country bumpkin elsewhere in Japan, particularly in Kansai.

Kaga

Most of Kaga is heavily mountainous, and most inhabitants live on the northern coastal plain. The most important city is Kanazawa, a large settlement that is as a haunt for secretive ninja and was seat of power for the Maeda clan that ruled this province. About ten years ago, workers completed construction of Oyama-jinja, a beautiful Shinto shrine west of the city. Craftsmen from this area are famed for their pottery glazes, silk printing, and talents at making gold leaf and metal inlays. Denizens of the province are even known to drink tea salted with gold leaf!

Noto

This province is dominated by a large coastal plain. For much of recent history, Noto was ruled by whichever daimyo held sway in Kanazawa. The provincial capital is Nanao, home to many pleasant hot springs.



Etchu

Bounded on three sides by mountains and by the sea on a fourth, Etchu is an enormous natural basin. The mountains are home to many mining operations, and the province is a major source of bronze and items made from it. The principal town of Takaoka is dotted with structures and statues made from bronze, including an enormous statue of Buddha.

Etchu's northern shore leads into Toyama Bay, a body of water of marked beauty. The bay is also famous for the strange sights that may be seen on and under the waves. Travelers report seeing sunken

forests and strange mirages. A more reliable spectacle is the annual arrival of vast schools of glowing squid, which eerily illuminate the waters on spring nights.

Echigo

Niigata, the largest city and port on the western coast of Japan, is in Echigo. This long, thin province stretches a great distance north and south. The eastern edge is mountainous, and the remainder of the province consists of fertile coastal plain. The province is the home of the koi, or ornamental carp, which can be found in the decorative ponds throughout the region. Echigo is also famed for the quality (if not quantity) of the rice grown there.

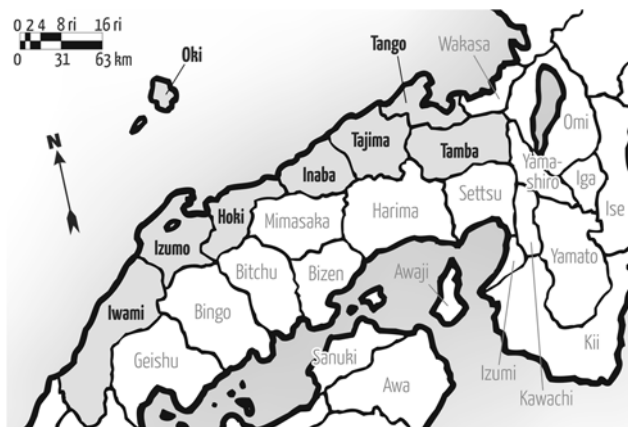
Sado

Although Sado is considered part of the Hokurikudo route, this province is an island separated from Honshu by miles of open ocean. It is a green and pleasant place of rolling hills in summer, but the winters are very harsh.

Sado has a grim reputation as a place where political exiles are sent to die. The leaders of failed rebellions, criminal nobles, difficult priests, and even a former emperor have all called Sado their final home.

One of the more famous residents was the monk Nichiren, who founded a particularly militant school of Buddhism that remains popular to this day among samurai. Sado is home to many shrines to his memory. Recently, gold was discovered in Sado's green hills. Though this news has yet to make its way back to the Shogun or Emperor, it seems likely that the province's status as an island of exiles will soon change.

The Mountain Back Route: San'indo



The San'indo route follows the west coast of Japan southward from the Kinai region towards Nagato province. It is a thinly settled area for much of its length. San'indo is a cool and dry region, quite pleasant in summer, but known for sometimes severe winter weather. Though the temperature rarely drops much below freezing, heavy snowfalls are common. During the early Edo period, this region often suffered through famines and peasant uprisings.

Tamba

The eastern-most portions of Tamba border on the Yamashiro and Settsu provinces of Kinai and share many of the cultural and geographic characteristics of the Japanese heartland. As one travels west, Tamba becomes much more rural, and there are few settlements. The highlands in the southern portion of the province are almost entirely uninhabited.

Tango

Tango is a small province, nothing more than a narrow, U-shaped strip of land that follows the coastline. It is a very mountainous area, but quite fertile. Unfortunately, the coastal plain is almost non-existent in Tango and farmers must grow their crops on the sides of hills. The province has a couple of important fishing ports, notably Maizuru and Miyazu.

Maizuru lies on the shore of Maizuru Bay, an extremely well-sheltered body of water that is connected to ocean via a relatively narrow channel. The bay is noted for its extreme beauty. However, even Maizuru Bay fades in comparison to Miyazu's *Amanohashidate*, or "Bridge of Heaven." This a narrow sandbar, covered with graceful pine trees, that crosses Miyazu Bay. According to tradition, visitors should turn their back on the sandbar and view it upside down by putting their head between their legs — and thus see it as a bridge in the heavens. The sandbar, along with Matsushima Bay and the shrine at Itsukushima, is considered one of the three most beautiful sights in Japan.

Tajima

Tajima, like much of the San'indo region, is a thinly-settled and mountainous area. Izushi is the provincial capital and main castle town, though Hidaka is also an important local center. Tajima is known for its numerous hot springs and snow-capped peaks. Forestry is an important industry.

Inaba

Inaba is an important agricultural region, noted for its pears, scallions, and watermelons. The local capital is the city of Tottori. Every year, the city hosts the Shan-shan umbrella festival, during which teams of colorfully-dressed performers dance and march with large umbrellas, which are decorated with bits of tinkling metal. The city is also known for the many sand dunes found nearby.

Hoki

Fruit and rice farming are important trades in Hoki, and significant logging takes place in the southern part of the province. Kurayoshi and Yonago (the provincial capital) are the major population centers. Yonago is a thriving port, and the only place in Japan that offers ferry service to the remote ocean province of Oki.

Izumo

In ancient times, Izumo was a powerful and independent kingdom, and it is dotted with the sites of ancient battles and ruined castles. According to legend, the gods themselves battled here in the first days of the world. As such, the province holds an important place in Shinto beliefs and folklore. It is colloquially known as the “Home of the Gods.”

Centuries ago, the province boasted a tremendous wooden shrine. According to ancient writings, the great shrine stood neatly 300 feet in height. No man has laid eyes on this shrine in nearly 400 years, and some suspect that it never existed. Others say it remains hidden in a secret grove of pines in some lost valley, or that perhaps the gods took it away from this world.

Though Izumo has declined in importance, it is said that the land still remembers its golden age. Shrines to the memory of old warriors and powerful kami can be found in the most unexpected places. Izumo is an independent fief ruled from the castle town of Matsue. A new castle is being built in the town, made from black-painted timbers that have already given the structure the nickname “Plover Castle.”

Iwami

The mountains of Iwami run straight to the coast and are home to many silver mines. These unpleasant tunnels descend hundreds of feet into the ground and are worked by the most desperate of peasants. As the mines tend to be in remote areas, there is a constant need for caravan guards who help bring the silver safely back to civilization.

Iwami has few settlements, and none larger than the small towns of Yanotsu and Masuda. Yanotsu is home to a famous hot spring, which is said to have healing powers.

Oki

Oki province is a collection of several tiny islands, about 80 kilometers from the coast of Honshu. The three largest islands are home to most of the inhabitants. Oki is directly ruled by the Shogun and governed on his behalf by the Matsue clan. Like Sado to the north, Oki is known as a traditional destination for political exiles, including two Emperors.

Notable for their scenic cliffs and rocks, the small islands of Oki produce a substantial crop of rice for their size — though not enough to technically qualify as a *han*.

The Mountain Front Route: San'yodo



The San'yodo region is comprised of those provinces that follow the eastern coastal plain southward from Kinai, down to the very tip of Honshu. San'yodo is separated from the island of Shikoku by a narrow body of water known as the Seto Sea. This sea is almost entirely inland, as it is connected to the ocean by only three straits. As such, it is an extremely sheltered and peaceful sea and an excellent fishing ground. There are more than three thousand islands in this sea, but only a very few are inhabited. Most are simply specks of land, home to seabirds and a few trees. Fishermen will occasionally spin tales about the strange spirits and creatures that dwell on the more remote of these islands.

The Seto Sea has a moderating effect on weather, and San'yodo is a region of bright sunshine and blue skies. Though little rain falls here, the area is rarely stricken with drought. This is thanks to the many rivers that flow down from the mountains.

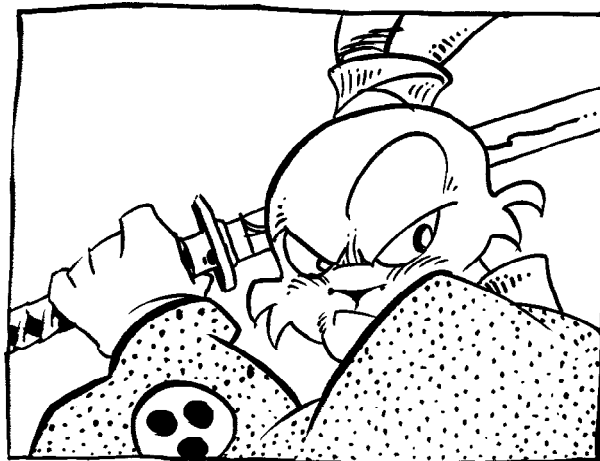
Harima

Harima is hot and humid throughout much of the year and receives relatively little rain even in winter. The northern part of the province is entirely mountainous, gradually turning into a broad coastal plain as one heads southward. The capital is Himeji, home to the magnificent Himeji Castle, which is one of the largest and oldest in Japan. This enormous fortress is often known as the Hakurojo ("Snowy Heron" or "White Heron") because of its brilliant white walls. The new Shogun has ordered a major expansion to the current structure.

Mimasaka

Mimasaka is a place of mountains, tiny lakes, and many rivers. The mountains conceal at least one plateau, where isolated villages may be found. The important settlements include Tsuyama, Yubara, and Yunogo. These last two are home to several hot springs.

Although much of the province is landlocked, with no coastline, the island of Shodoshima in the Seto Sea is considered a part of Mimasaka. The island is thinly populated.



Bizen

Bizen has been famous since time immemorial for the skill of its swordsmiths, and the quality of their wares. It is also famous for the many battles that have been fought here, and for the number of times the province has switched hands from one clan to another!

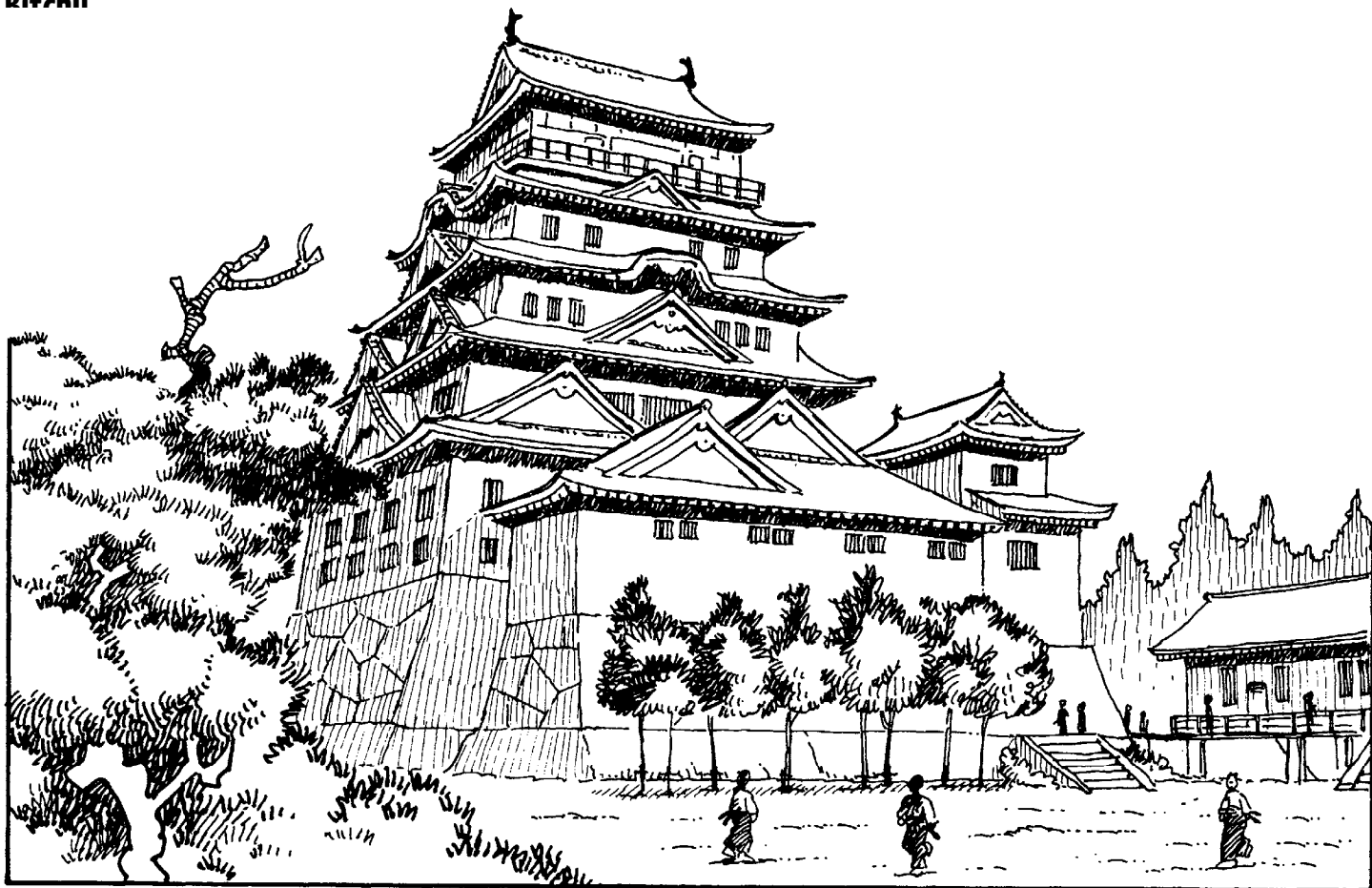
The provincial capital is Okayama. The town is dominated by the menacing black walls of Okayama Castle. Visitors from many parts of Japan also come here to view the famous Korakuen gardens, considered one of the three finest gardens in Japan.

Bizen

The former capital of Soja is home to many shrines and ancient structures but has recently been eclipsed in importance by the port city of Kurashiki. This picturesque city is lined with canals and is the best place to find passage to the island province of Awaji, as well as the Nankaido region.

Bingo

Bingo lies directly across from the island of Shikoku, with its coastline situated at the widest part of the Seto Sea. The province is blessed with fertile coastal plains and abundant fisheries. The ancient capital of Fuchu remains an important center.



Just off the coast of is the holy island of Itsukushima, sacred to the Shinto religion. No one may be born on this island, and no one may die. Not even trees may be felled. Those who do perish from sudden injury or illness must be taken to the mainland — there are no cemeteries here. The island is home to one of the three holiest shrines in Japan, though the gates and buildings of the shrine are constructed just offshore. At high tide they appear to float on the waves. So remarkable is this effect that the shrine is also considered on the three most beautiful views in Japan.

In our fictional story, Geisu province is the home of Lord Noriyuki and his loyal retainer Tomoe Ame.

Suo

Suo is noted for its beautiful coral trees and peach orchards. It is divided by the Saba, a wide river that flows down from the mountains through the coastal plains and into the Seto Sea.

The most important cities are Hofu, and the provincial capital of Yamaguchi. Hofu is noted for the Hofu Tenmangu shrine, said to be one of the oldest in Japan. Yamaguchi is an important center for commerce and politics and is sometimes referred to as the Kyoto of the west. The sobriquet is well-earned — Yamaguchi was founded in the 14th

century by a samurai lord who admired Kyoto and wished to create a new town in its image.

The city is home to numerous shrines and temples, most notably the Rurikoji temple, which boasts a five-story pagoda. In 1550, the city was visited by Saint Frances Xavier, one of the founders of the Catholic Jesuit order. He spent several months in the area and established several Christian congregations.

Nagato

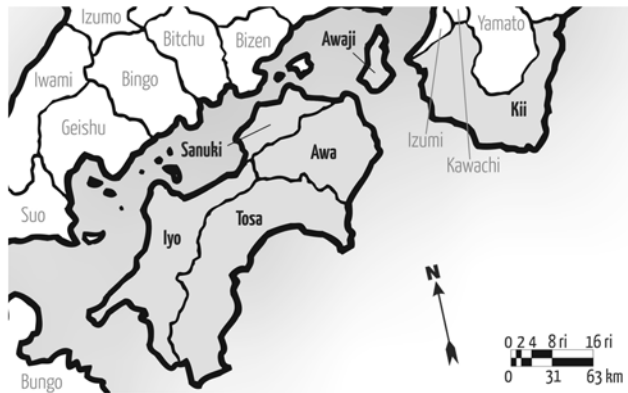
Nagato lies at the extreme south-western tip of Honshu and is surrounded on three sides by open ocean. The center of the province is dominated by mountains and is thinly populated. One peak, Mount Togano, is home to the Kozanji temple, site of the first tea garden in Japan.

The castle town of Hagi lies on the north coast, while the old city of Shimonoseki lies to the south. Shimonoseki is the closest settlement to the island of Kyushu, which it faces across the Kanmon Straits. In 1185, this coast was the site of a mighty naval battle between the Taira and Minamoto samurai clans. Thousands of sailors died here, and their spirits are said to inhabit a species of crab that lives in the area. These crabs have patterns on their shells that strongly

resemble the faces of warriors. They are never eaten, for fearing of angering the kami of the sea.



The South Sea Route: Nankaido



Nankaido is the smallest region of Japan. It encompasses most of the Kii Peninsula on Honshu, and the entirety of Shikoku. The provinces of Shikoku are separated into north and south by low, forested mountains. None are tall enough to have permanent snow caps, but the terrain is very rough, and the center of the island is nearly uninhabited.

The southern half of Shikoku is exposed to the sometimes-fierce weather that blows in from the Pacific Ocean and has very little flat land. As such, the majority of residents live on the north coastal plain, in the provinces of Iyo and Sanuki.

Kii

Kii is the only part of Nankaido that is on the main island of Japan. It is situated on a wide peninsula that dips southward from Kinai into the ocean. The province is covered with low, forested mountains. Many say these mist-shrouded peaks are homes of the gods, and certainly any number of ancient shrines may be found here. The valleys are extensively cultivated, and the province is a major producer of peaches, Mandarin oranges, and rice.

The peninsula is home to a number of bustling towns and fishing ports. Kii is ruled by a branch of the Tokugawa clan, from their castle in the northern city of Wakayama. Other major centers include Shirohama and Shigu.

Mount Koya in the north of the province is topped with a small plateau that is home to the most important Shingon Buddhist temple in all of Japan. The temple was founded by Kukai, an ancient Buddhist priest who founded the Shingon sect. His tomb is also on the mountaintop, and it is surrounded by the countless graves of his followers.

For much of the 14th century, the mountainous Yoshino area of Kii was home to the southern imperial court. However, this area has since been reclaimed by the wilderness, and is said to be inhabited only by bandits, mad hermits, and the ghosts of ancient nobles and courtiers.

Awaji

Awaji is a small island province; whose name simply means “Road to Awa.” It is separated from Honshu and Shikoku by two extremely narrow straits. The western coast lies on the tranquil Seto Sea, while the east faces the open ocean. It has been inhabited for many thousands of years, and the wild places of the island are marked with burial mounds and crumbling ruins of unknown origin. These mysterious remains support the belief that the island was the first-born son of the creator goddess Izanami and her husband Izanagi.

Awaji is a mostly rural province, and it is ruled from the castle town in Awa. Like Oki and Sado Islands, Awaji is often the final destination of political exiles, and it has been for nearly a thousand years.

Awa (阿)

Awa lies in the western third of Shikoku and serves as the main route to the mainland. Awa, and nearby Awaji, are ruled from the castle town of Tokushima. The town is notable for its thriving indigo dye industry and its distinctive dances. Once a year, almost every resident takes part in a day-long festival of highly-choreographed dance, the likes of which cannot be seen elsewhere in Japan. If stuffy visitors refuse to take part, the locals chide them with a traditional expression — "The dancing fool and the watching fool are both fools, so why not dance?"

Sanuki

Though small in size, Sanuki is divided amongst the *han* of no less than five daimyos. This odd situation is a remnant of the age of war, when the province was often a battle ground.

The most important towns are Takamatsu, Sakaide (the old capital), Marugame, and Tadotsu. Marugame Castle is surrounded by the highest stone walls in all of Japan. The slopes of nearby Mount Inoyama are home to many images of the Buddha, and lucky travelers may see an enormous stone that is said to be the footprint of a legendary giant.

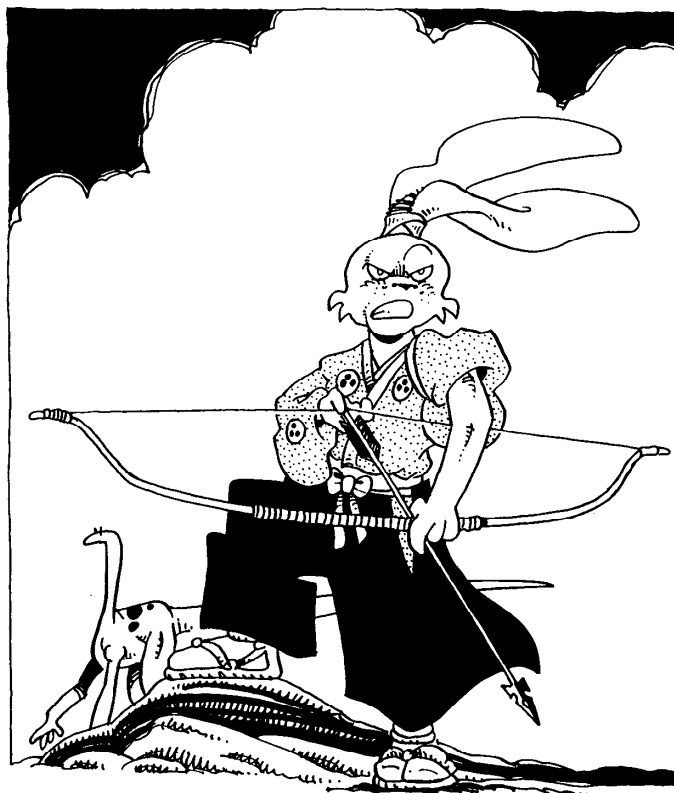
Iyo

Like Sanuki, Iyo was once divided into several tiny fiefdoms. However, shortly before the establishment of the new Shogunate, the province was unified under a single clan. Iyo is a pleasant land of gentle rains and warm breezes. A fertile plain follows the coast, and many busy port cities can be found along its length.

Matsuyama is the biggest settlement by far, and home to Dogo Onsen, the oldest known hot spring in Japan. The daimyo in charge of the city has recently begin construction of a magnificent multi-winged castle, which will be the largest on Shikoku.

Tosa

Tosa is a poor province and lacks any well-populated center or strong castle town. It is most notable for its many rivers, and rugged mountains. Pilgrims often come to the province to visit its fifteen shrines. This pilgrimage is considered an act of self-imposed hardship, because of the difficulty in traveling to the remote shrine locations. Recently, the Shogun has ordered the foundation of a new castle in the village of Kochi.



The West Sea Route: Saikaido



Saikaido encompasses the entire island of Kyushu and tiny islands of the Tsushima and Iki provinces. Kyushu is dominated by mountains, some of which are active volcanoes. The most notable of these is Mount Aso in Higo province. Much of Kyushu is subtropical, and the pines of Honshu here give way to palms and ferns in many of the lowland forests. The Tsushima islands lie off the coast of Kyushu. Iki island is located about halfway between Kyushu and Tsushima and serves as a waypoint for travelers. These islands have few inhabitants and have historically been a base for Korean and Japanese pirates.

Chikuzen

Chikuzen is located on the northwest coast of Kyushu. It is remembered as the site of a massive Mongol invasion in the late 13th century. The rocky coast is the site of many sea caves and bizarre rock formations.

The province holds a curious pair of towns: Hakata and Fukuoka. Hakata is home to many important merchants, while Fukuoka is the residence of several noble families. The two towns are very close together, but residence in each is traditionally limited to members of the appropriate class. Near Hakata Bay, travelers can still see the miles-long stone wall constructed to guard against the Mongol invasion.

Chikugo

This small province is nestled between Hizen and Higo and is nearly landlocked. The entirety of its coastline lies along the sheltered Ariake Inland sea. Chikugo is divided into two fiefs. The Tachibana clan rule from the castle town of Yanagawa, and the Arima dwell in Kurume. The province is known for its dyed cloths and its bone soup.

Buzen

Buzen is located on the northeast tip of Kyushu. It enjoys a close connection to the mainland and is separated from Nagato province by the Straits of Shimonoseki. This ocean passage is watched by the castle town of Kokura, which also serves as the seat of power for the local daimyo.

Bungo

Bungo lies on the eastern coast of Kyushu, across from the island of Shikoku. The province is famed for its countless hot springs. Bungo is ruled from the castle town of Kitakyushu, in the north part of the province. Fairly close to Kitakyushu, a traveler can find the town of Beppo, home to thousands of hot springs.

Nine of those springs have peculiar aspects and are known as the Nine Hells, or *jigoku*. Some have an extraordinary color, like the bright blue Sea Hell and the scarlet waters of the Blood Hell. Others simply boil intensely or shoot out enormous geysers at regular intervals. One of the more unusual springs is pool of bubbling hot gray mud, named the Oniishibozu Jigoku because the bubbles resemble the shaven heads of monks.

Hizen

Hizen, on the extreme western edge of Kyushu, has a reputation as a very cosmopolitan province. It has several castles, and its ports act as the gateway to Japan for European and Indian traders. Hizen also served as a major base of operations during the seven-year war with Korea.

Nagoya, Karatsu and Saga are the principal castle towns, though the new port of Nagasaki is becoming the principal trading port. Visitors may well meet Portuguese and Dutch traders in Nagasaki, as well as missionaries from distant Rome.

Higo

Higo lies on the western coast of Kyushu. It is dominated by mountains, which descend to an alluvial plain that follows the coastline. The majority of the inhabitants dwell on this plain. The coast of Higo lies along the Ariake Sea, a small body of water that is almost entirely enclosed by the Hizen Peninsula and the Amakusa Archipelago. The Amakusa islands are considered part of the province.

The old provincial capital of Kumamoto continues to be an important center for trade and administration. The city is dominated by the enormous bulk of Kumamoto Castle, one of the largest in Japan. This magnificent fortification has 49 towers and 29 gates and covers several square miles.

The Amakusa Archipelago lies a few miles offshore and consists of numerous small islands. The largest of these, Amakusa Island, is extremely hilly. The natives are forced to build artificial terraces in the sides of the hills in order to grow rice.

Higo is also home to Japan's largest active volcano, Mount Aso. The broad and tall peak covers an enormous area, and almost daily belches forth smoke and flame. Aso is regarded with a mixture of awe and reverence by the people of Higo.

Hyuga

Hyuga is an important province, in terms of history and legend. It is said to have been the original home of the gods, and that almost every landmark in the region is connected to a famous legend. Ancient burial mounds and ruins add to veracity to these old tales.

Physically, the province is dominated by an area of volcanic peaks known as the Kirishima. As in most of Japan, most of the inhabitants live on the coastal plains that lie at the base of these mountains.

Until recently, the province was divided into two fiefs, and the two castle towns remain influential centers. In the north is Agata Castle, and in the south lies Obi. Hyuga is home to numerous shrines, some of them located at the very places the gods are said to have lived.

Osumi

The southernmost tip of Kyushu is found in Osumi, and the entire province has a nearly tropical environment. Winters are extremely mild, while the summers are long and humid. Osumi is dotted with mountains, but also with a large number of gray volcanic plateaus. This is one of the most volcanically active regions in the world, though forceful eruptions are thankfully quite rare.

Osumi is ruled from nearby Satsuma and does not have a castle town or administrative center. Consequently, the old capital of Kokubu is the most important town.

Satsuma

Satsuma lies far from Kyoto and Edo, yet it is a surprisingly cosmopolitan province, with brisk trade with the outside world. Japan's very first gun arrived here, washed ashore with a Portuguese sailor.

The province is administered from Kagoshima, a port located at the southern tip of the province. Kagoshima lies in the shadow of Mount Sakurajima, the most active volcano in Japan. It continually emits ash and smoke, and on many days the inhabitants of Kagoshima must carry umbrellas to protect themselves from the constant rain of volcanic dust. Scholars claim that the volcanic ash has gifted the soil with unusual fertility. Certainly, local farmers are proud of their radishes, which are known to grow up to a foot in diameter.

Far to the south of Satsuma's coast is Yakushima Island. This island simply consists of forty large mountains, the tallest of which are the highest peaks by far in the Sokaido Region. The mountains are covered almost to their peaks by dense forests of Yakusugi pines.

Iki

Tiny Iki province lies several miles to the north of Kyushu, almost exactly halfway to Tsushima. The inhabitants are mostly poor farmers and fishermen, though large numbers of pirates are suspect to have bases in hidden coves. Iki has no castle town, nor any large settlements to speak of.



Tsushima

The province of Tsushima lies at the extreme south-western edge of Japanese power. Tsushima consists of two small islands, separated by a narrow and deep channel, yet linked by an impressive natural stone causeway.

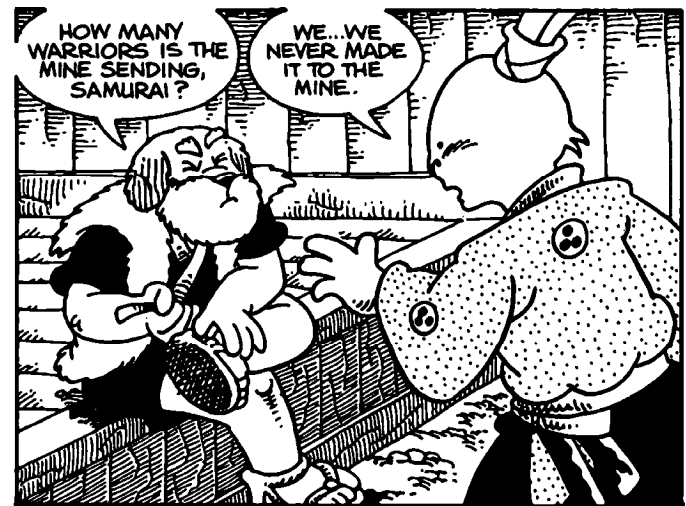
Tsushima has a curious history. While it has been a province of Japan for nearly a thousand years, in A.D. 1400 inhabitants sought aid from the King Taejong of Korea. They were being oppressed by a large force of pirates who had made a base on the islands. King Taejong sent thousands of soldiers to Tsushima, and began formally colonizing the islands soon after, in defiance of a Japanese claim. In the 1590s, the great Toyotomi Hideyoshi started a seven-year war with Korea and invaded the peninsula on two occasions. In the course of this war, Tsushima fell once again into Japanese hands. Currently, the island is being used as a major naval base and shipyard in preparation of a planned invasion of China.

THE CHARACTERS OF USAGI YOJIMBO

The following is a list of some of the more important characters who have appeared in the Usagi Yojimbo comic book. Most can be easily incorporated into any game. This list is by no means exhaustive — over the years, dozens of characters have appeared. You should use these characters as models for your own ... or perhaps tell new stories with them.

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(For those of you taking on the role of the Master of Ceremonies, we've included some advice about how to play out your own stories in the world of *Usagi*. The stories blend lots of styles, characters, plots, and ideas, in ways that are always accessible and fun. Read through the stories and see what inspires you!)



Ando

(Male Dog Peasant)

Ando is the headman of a small village, who lost his son in a ninja siege. With the assistance of Miyamoto Usagi, Ando was able to rally his villagers against the attackers. Ando may well require wandering adventurers for similar tasks in the future.



Councilor Arimura

(Male Bear Minister of Protocol, Clan Geishu)

The treacherous Councillor Arimura was once Minister of Protocol to young Lord Noriyuki of Clan Geishu. Arimura was swayed by promises of wealth from Lord Hikiji. In an effort to slay his own lord, he assigned incompetent fighters to Lord Noriyuki's entourage, in the full knowledge that Noriyuki's party would be ambushed. Luckily for Lord Noriyuki, his bodyguard Tomoé Ame was able to fight off the attackers long enough for the two to join forces with Miyamoto Usagi, the famous ronin. Arimura's villainy did not go unpunished. He was slain by an arrow during a second ambush.

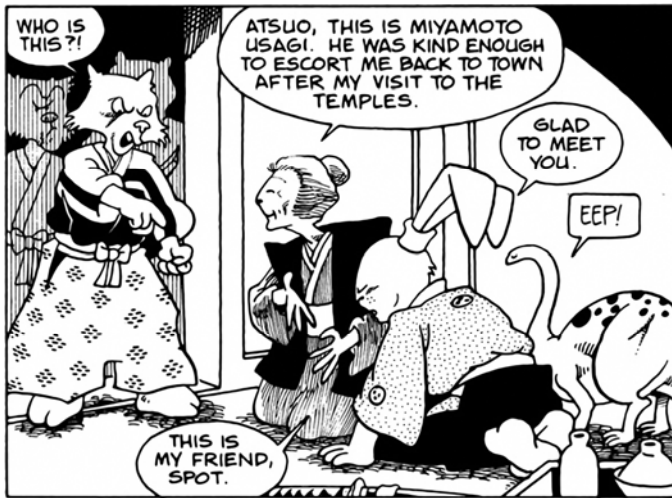


Lady Asano

(Female Cat Noble)

Lady Asano was once the wife of the powerful Lord Asano. She was left a widow when a treacherous servant named Oda killed her husband and spent the rest of her life and wealth in pursuit of the cowardly vassal. She turned her back on her noble lifestyle and wandered the countryside with a lone retainer, forced to beg for food and shelter.

After many years, she found Oda serving as a town magistrate. At the same time, she crossed paths with the ronin Miyamoto Usagi, and his bounty hunter friend Gennosuké. Lady Asano mistook Gen for his father, the famous general Murakami who had served her clan loyally. While he initially refused to help her, both he and Usagi came to her aid when Oda unjustly imprisoned her. Upon her rescue Lady Asano immediately attacked Oda and was slain. However, she was able to kill the corrupt magistrate with her dying breath.



Atsuo

(Male Cat Merchant)

The son of a respected money-lender, Atsuo has quickly squandered the good reputation of his family by charging outrageous interest rates. Those who cannot pay are beaten (or worse) by hired thugs.

(Your players will react to stories that are recognizable. It's always best to put a face on the problem. In the *Usagi* story, "A Mother's Love", Atsuo is clearly shown to be an antagonistic figure to the audience. As the Master of Ceremonies, look for ways to attach a villain to the story. Remember that you're "playing to lose", so that the boasts, bravado, and insults of the non-player-characters will most likely be turned around in the end.)



Chizu

(Female Cat Rogue Ninja)

The sister to the esteemed Shingen, Chizu inherited the title of *kashira* from her brother after his demise at Castle Tamakuro. After many misadventures (no thanks in part to the meddling of Usagi and his friends), factionalism tore apart the Neko clan. Kagemaru used these failures to his advantage; he declared Chizu a traitor to the Neko and ordered her to be slain. But Chizu was as crafty as her brother and escaped, even with the entire clan after her. With no home and no allies, Chizu walks the earth as a *nukenin*, a rogue ninja.

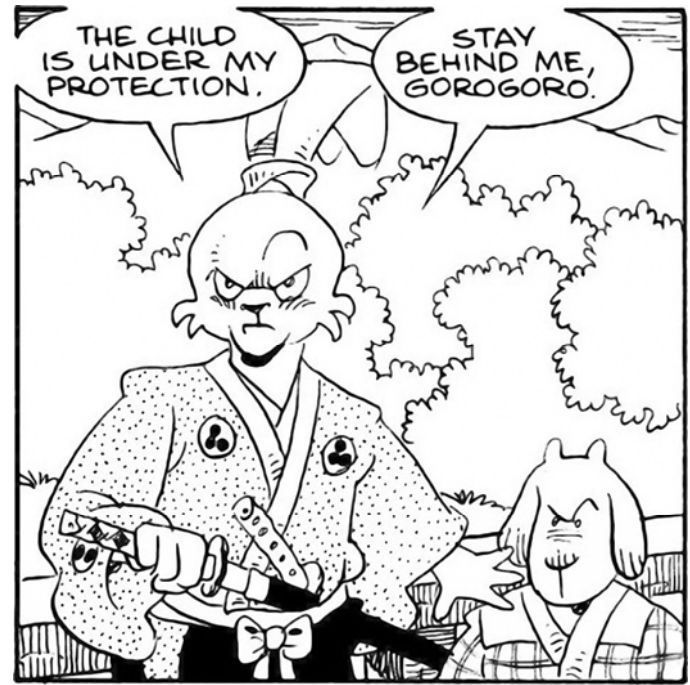


“General” Fujii

(Male Cat Bandit Leader)

A bandit leader who styles himself a general, Fujii is a cruel and driven man. He is also extremely cunning. He convinced a village to hire him as his men as “protectors” from bandits, when in fact Fujii’s men were the bandits themselves!

General Fujii crossed swords with the ronin Miyamoto Usagi and his bounty-hunter companion Gennosuké, and defeated them both. He tortured Usagi for several days, and stole the rabbit’s swords, but could not break the ronin. Fujii was eventually slain by Usagi.



Gorogoro

(Male Goat Bounty-Hunter in Training)

Gorogoro is a young goat, the toddler son of the famous bounty hunter Yagi. His father has trained Gorogoro to assist in his trade with certain tricks and traps that take advantage of his son’s age to add an element of surprise.



Gunichi

(Male Pig Retainer)

An apparently brave and loyal retainer to the now-dead Lord Mifune, Gunichi was a firm friend of Miyamoto Usagi, who was also in service to Mifune. The two friends fought valiantly together at the Battle of Adachigahara. However, when the tide of battle turned, Gunichi revealed his true colors and fled from the field, deserting his lord. Years later, he encountered Usagi, and paid for his cowardice.



Hanako

(Female Cat Peasant)

Hanako is a simple peasant girl, who had the misfortune to live in the village chosen by General Fujii for his predations. She helped Usagi and the bounty hunters Gennosuké and Inukai by leading them to Fujii's lair. She was later taken hostage by the canine bounty hunter, Inukai, but was swiftly released.

(An important element of story-telling is *conflict* — when a character wants something at cross-purposes to other characters, their environment, etc. *Combat* — when characters try to harm each other — is a basic conflict, common to RPGs.

Many *Usagi* stories include combat as a central conflict, but there's always a reason for it, some more complex than others. If your game is about nothing but combat, players of non-combat characters may become frustrated and bored, because there's little for them to do. Hanako's story is an excellent example of how all characters can be an engaging part of a story's conflict.)



fellow gamblers. He is currently on the run from the law, angry gamblers, and those he has fleeced. His resourcefulness and his resilience are not to be under-estimated.

Lord Hebi (Male Serpent Lord)

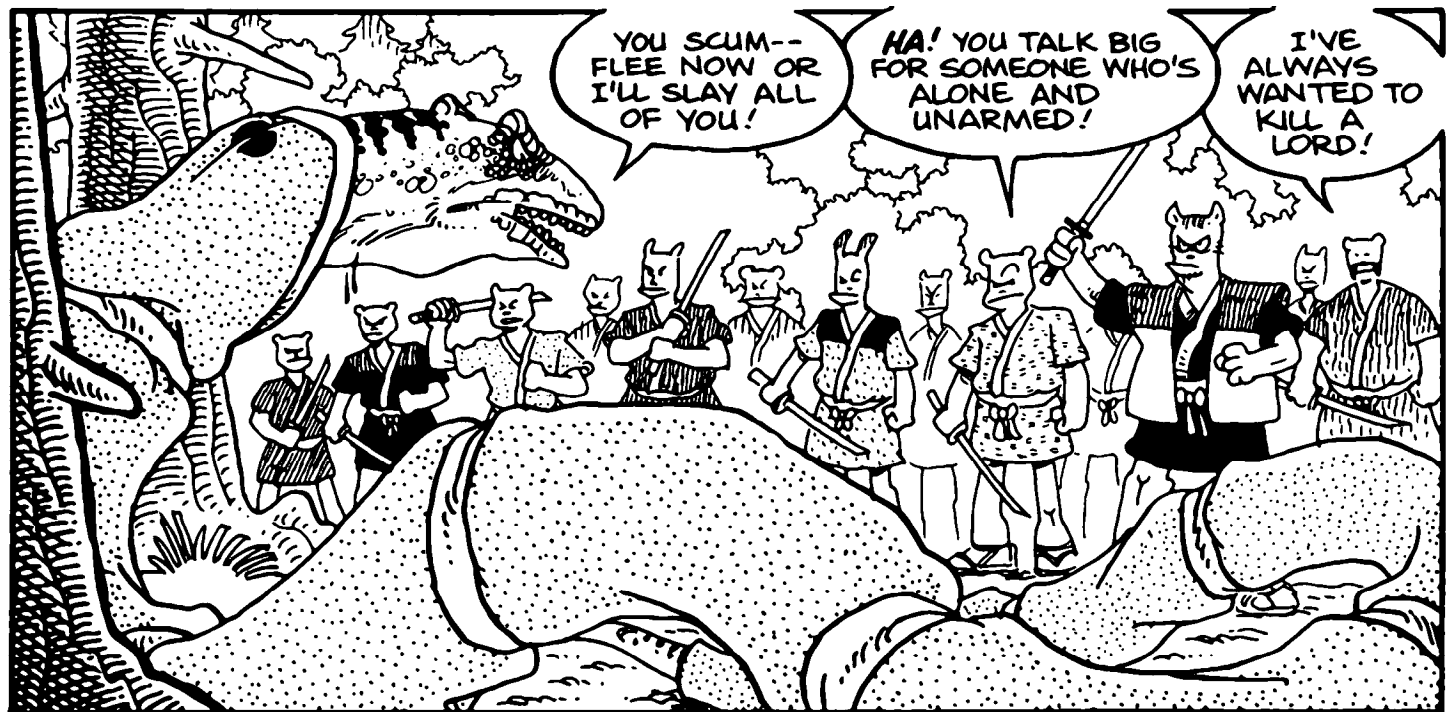
Lord Hikiji's most trusted servant, the imposing Lord Hebi is one of the few serpent folk found in Usagi's Japan, and the only one featured in the stories. It is hard to say which is greater — his ruthlessness for power or his fighting prowess from his unusual size.

As Lord Hikiji remains “The Shadow Lord”, reclusive and hidden away, it is Lord Hebi who acts as the direct liaison between the servants, the spies, and the other agents of the dark and sinister plans.

Hatsu

(Male Cat Gambler)

Hatsu is a dishonest gambler, who almost invariably cheats. He often runs afoul of the law and his





Lord Hikiji

(Male Unknown Daimyo)

The wicked and power-hungry Lord Hikiji rules an expansive fiefdom in the northern half of Honshu. He aspires to much more. He wishes to become the undisputed master of all Japan. He has enacted many plans and fought many battles to achieve this goal.

Hikiji's ambition was directed first at his neighbor, Lord Mifune. He hired ninja assassins to slay Mifune's wife and young son in the knowledge that this would surely spur Mifune to war. En route to battle, Hikiji's men raided villages, plundering food and killing all who stood in their way. One man who stood up to him was Usagi's father, Miyamoto, the headman of a village. Miyamoto coldly told Hikiji that there was no food to be spared for his army. Incensed, Hikiji beheaded Miyamoto and appointed Kenichi as the new headman before riding on to challenge Mifune in Battle of Adachigahara Plain.

The battle would surely have been won by Lord Mifune, were it not for the treachery of Toda, one of his generals. Toda switched allegiance to Hikiji during the battle in the hopes of being rewarded with a position of power in Hikiji's expanded regime. His change of allegiance tipped the battle in favor of Lord Hikiji, and Mifune was slain.

Higashimori

(Male Cat Sensei)

This arrogant fencing instructor believed that his Dogora Fencing School was the greatest of all. He hated and feared his chief rival, the old lion fencing master Katsuichi. His bitterness became uncontrollable when Katsuichi's star pupil, Miyamoto Usagi, defeated the best Dogoro students easily. Higashimori collected a small army of his pupils and attacked Katsuichi, forcing the old teacher off a cliff. Higashimori was later slain by Usagi.

(Role-playing has a lot of improvised story-telling. When the *Usagi* story first introduces Katsuichi, the audience doesn't know his backstory, so it could be almost anything. When the story becomes relevant, the author can make something up that adds to the character. Players are encouraged to improvise details of their own characters' backstories, to fill in the gaps as they play the game.)

However, Hikiji had no use for traitors in his service, and Toda's treachery was rewarded with torture and banishment.

Since defeating Mifune, Lord Hikiji has turned his attentions to the young lord of Clan Geishu, Noriyuki. Hikiji is using more cunning methods to defeat Lord Noriyuki, and often employs ninja to undertake shadowy operations against the clan. Hikiji plans his conspiracies so meticulously that there is never any solid evidence to connect him to any misdeeds. As such, the Shogun has yet to take action against him.



Lady Hirano Kinuko

(Female Cat Noble of Clan Hirano)

Born into the Takamatsu clan, as a young princess Lady Kinuko was forced into an arranged marriage with a man of the Hirano clan. Miyamoto Usagi, who at that time was still in the service of Lord Mifune, led her caravan and enormous entourage to the wedding.

En route, the caravan was attacked by ninjas of the Neko clan, seeking to disrupt the alliance that would result from the wedding. Only she and Miyamoto Usagi survived the attack. The rabbit led her to safety on horseback, with the ninja in close pursuit. The two disguised themselves as peasants to evade capture.

While she initially mistrusted Usagi, she soon began to respect him. Indeed, they fell in love, and talked openly of running away together. In the end, a rescue party led by General Gunichi found the couple, and Kinuko resigned herself to a loveless marriage. She has not forgotten Usagi, however.



Ikeda

(Male Bear Farmer)

Ikeda was once a general in the employ of Lord Araki, who started a revolt against Lord Noriyuki's father in an effort to gain control of Clan Geishu. The rebellion failed, and Ikeda's army scattered to the winds. Ikeda, who was seriously wounded, fled and took up life as a simple farmer.

Ikeda intended to make a return to power someday, but over the years he came to appreciate the new life he had forged for himself. Indeed, when the opportunity later arose for him to strike at the son of his old foe, he refused and protected Lord Noriyuki at great risk to his own life. Later, he died fighting ninjas, while Usagi returned the famous blade Grasscutter to its shrine.



Inazuma

(Female Cat Ronin)

Inazuma is something of a mystery. She is a swordswoman with lightning fast reflexes and ambiguous morals. Often on the run from those who would claim the bounty on her head, she has crossed paths with Usagi on more than one occasion. If she appears, trouble is certain to quickly follow. Later in the story, her life becomes a living nightmare for reasons that won't be spoiled, here.



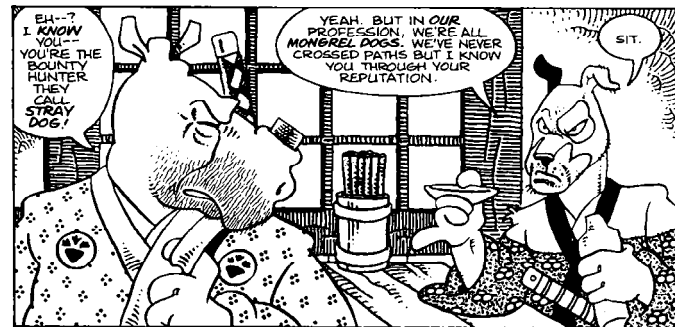
The Informant

(Male Unknown Thief)

He may have no name, no friends, and no proper station, but the Informant doesn't care about any of those things. He wants one thing and one thing only: money. And he's willing to do almost anything to get it, even murder. The only reason he isn't more of a threat is because he is an inveterate coward who will surrender or flee at the slightest hint of danger to himself.

Sometimes called "The Snitch", he is extremely knowledgeable and resourceful. Given enough coin, he can assemble a fighting force of dozens of violent criminals.

(The Informant is a wonderful recurring villain. He puts a face on the faceless mob, as the central figure who hires all of them. He's shown to be powerful enough to subdue weak characters but out of his depth against grand ones, which makes defeating him very satisfying. As the MC, always look for ways to personalize the threats against the heroes.)



Inspector Ishida (Male Bear Magistrate)

Inspector Ishida works with the police in a village often visited by Miyamoto Usagi. With his polite expression, impeccable manners, and keen observations, Ishida is a respected city official and a canny opponent for law-breakers.

Because cultural restrictions do not permit Ishida to inspect corpses directly, he has to rely on his keen investigative skills and insightful inquiry. Recently, Ishida has been vexed by the gentleman-thief known only as “Nezumi”, who is tarnishing his otherwise impeccable record.

Ishida carries the *jitte*, the forked iron rod used to disarm with minimal contact — the signature weapon of his office.

(Player-characters are usually unknown strangers, with above-average abilities... so they may be in a unique position to help an authority figure. Ishida is often denied progress in his investigations by his superiors, for petty or for corrupt reasons. He and others like him may reach out to our random heroes to get things done that they cannot.)

Inukai (Male Dog Bounty Hunter)

Known by his nickname “Stray Dog”, Inukai is a gruff loner who rarely seeks help from any person. While in pursuit of General Fujii, he allied with Usagi and the rhinoceros bounty hunter, Gen. At the conclusion of this quest, Inukai seemed to show his true colors when he took a young girl hostage in order to force Gen and Usagi to allow him to keep the entirety of Fujii’s bounty. However, it later transpired that Inukai used this money for the creation of an orphanage. Inukai continued wandering the highways of Japan in search of criminals.

(Sometimes, it can be hard to convince the players of the urgency of the task at hand. They might be having fun clowning around or dawdling with minor business. As the MC, you can personalize the feeling of time by introducing a non-player-character who is after the same goal. Have our heroes discover that Inukai or another person is pursuing the exact same goal. Now that the players are aware of the competition, they will feel the pressure to finish the task before the rival does.



Jei

(Male Wolf Wanderer)

The terrifying creature known as Jei claims to be a divine emissary. Certainly, he has some magical skills, a frightening competence at arms, and the uncanny ability to escape from apparently certain death. His curious eyes and chilling voice also lend credence to his claims.

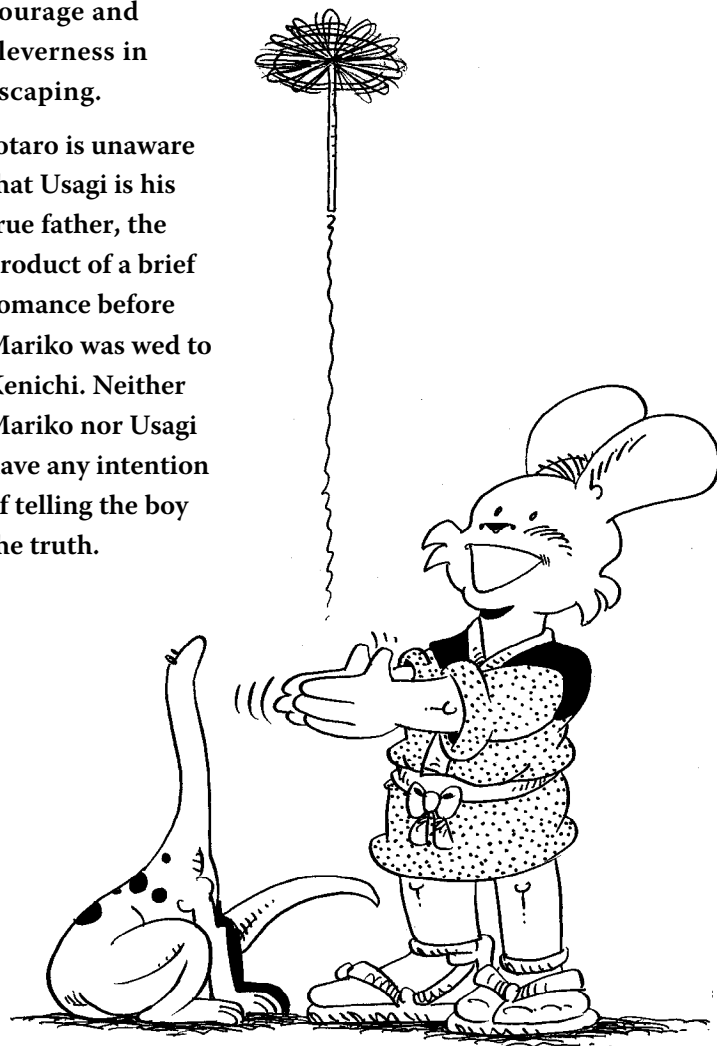
Jei says that he has been sent into the world to destroy all evil, yet he often seems to be the root of evil. He will often judge people he meets and slay them if he feels they have any evil within their souls... but has also been known to employ black-hearted brigands as assistants! Jei is obsessed with the belief that slaying the ronin Usagi will allow him to attain godhood. No deed is too black for him to perform in the pursuit of this goal.

Jotaro

(Male Rabbit Student Warrior)

Jotaro is an earnest and good-hearted young rabbit, with a soul for adventure. He lives in a small village with his mother, Mariko, and father Kenichi. He idolizes Miyamoto Usagi and considers him to be his uncle. Jotaro hopes to become a mighty warrior, just like Usagi. He has already had several brushes with danger and displayed remarkable courage and cleverness in escaping.

Jotaro is unaware that Usagi is his true father, the product of a brief romance before Mariko was wed to Kenichi. Neither Mariko nor Usagi have any intention of telling the boy the truth.



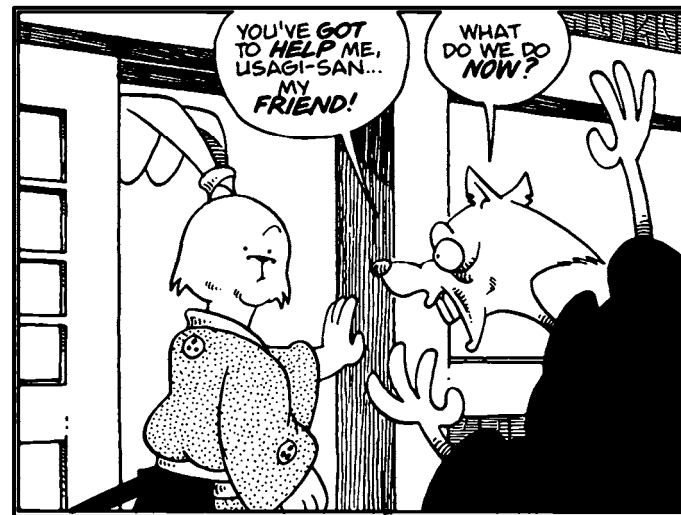


Juzo (Male Cat Samurai)

Juzo was the drunken brother of a corrupt magistrate, Sueoka. The two of them hired a gang of thugs to chase away or kill villagers who had discovered gold in a nearby valley, so that they could claim it for themselves. Juzo also secretly hired them to slay his brother, so that he would not have to share the treasure. In the end, Juzo killed his brother himself, but was slain in turn by his brother's guards.

(Some stories in *Usagi* can be very complex, with multiple villains in the same story. Often, these villains will have goals that overlap... but they are also willing to betray each other. They might lie to each other or sell each other out for their own personal goals.

As the MC, look for ways to portray your non-player-characters as complex individuals, with their own hopes and goals. Your players should actively look for aspects that they can manipulate to turn the story's plot to their advantage.)



Kaiko (Male Unknown Merchant)

Kaiko is an arrogant and greedy silk merchant, who always drives the hardest bargains. He is openly contemptuous of the poor peasants who create the silk he sells but is not an actively evil man.

(A compelling aspect of the *Usagi* stories is that very few characters are “evil” simply for the sake of doing bad things. Some are greedy. Others lust for power. Many can be selfish, short-sighted, or otherwise uninterested in the welfare of other people. If you keep your story grounded in reality, your players will understand how the world of your story works, and they will be able to interact with the characters.)

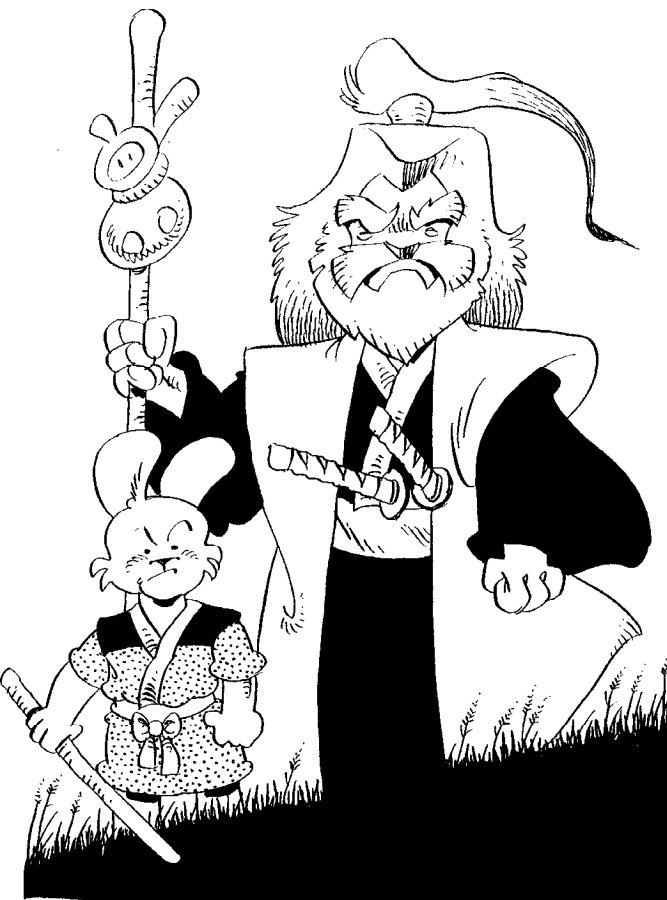


Kakera (Rodent Sorcerer)

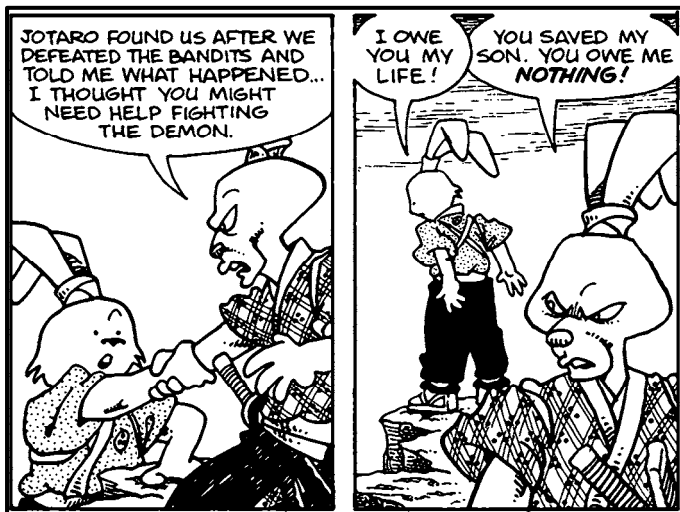
Like many practitioners of the magical arts, Kakera is a mysterious and enigmatic figure. He has dedicated his life to fighting evil, especially of a supernatural nature. A powerful sorcerer, he is able to conjure the spirits of warriors from beyond into the vessels of animals, so that they may fight for his own world.

Sensei Katsuichi (Male Cat Sensei)

Katsuichi is a skilled sword master who felt that the eight common styles of fencing were inadequate. He formed his own school, and took only the most talented students. His standards were so high that the school was forced to close, and Katsuichi became a hermit near a mountain village.



While a hermit, he took a young rabbit named Miyamoto Usagi under his tutelage, and taught him many lessons about life and honor, as well as swordsmanship. Usagi went on to defeat the star pupils from the nearby Dogora fencing school, a fact which infuriated the leader of the academy, Higashimori. A band of students attacked Katsuichi, led by Higashimori, who put out Katsuichi's eye and pushed him over a cliff to his apparent death. It later transpired that Katsuichi survived this fall. Though very old, he continues to train worthy souls who come to him for instruction.



Kenichi

(Male Rabbit Hetman)

Kenichi is the stern but honest headman of a small village in Mutsu. He was thrust suddenly into his position of authority when the previous headman, a rabbit named Miyamoto, was callously slain by Lord Hikiji. While Hikiji had selected Kenichi at random, the young rabbit proved to be an excellent choice. Kenichi takes his responsibilities extremely seriously, in both his personal and professional life. While he is not a genial man, he is a loyal husband, father, and protector of the village.

Kenichi has one failing. He harbors an intense dislike for the ronin Usagi, even though Usagi has saved the village from disaster on more than one occasion. This dislike stems from their childhood rivalry in arms, as well as for the affection of Mariko. However, Kenichi is honorable enough to put this dislike aside long enough to accept Usagi's help when it counts, and even thank him for it.



Kitanamono (Unknown Familiar)

A monstrous figure of speed, strength, and ferocity, this strange person served the mysterious Ryoko. He was able to track ninjas by scent and to travel swiftly by leaping among high tree branches. He stood hunched over, with a feral appearance and a cruel sense of bloodlust.

(The best part about weird monsters is using them sparingly. Kitanamono's appearances are rare, and he is always shown as something of power. However, even as a monster, he remains focused on the task at hand. For example, in the *Grasscutter arc*, he uses his superior mobility to flee with the sword, rather than fight with Usagi. As the MC, you can develop non-player-characters to gain strong reactions in your players if you use them sparingly, instead of as some thoughtless killer that throw their lives away in combat.)



Kitsune

(Female Fox Street Entertainer)

Kitsune is a charming scoundrel who may be found in any village or town. Officially she is a busker and street entertainer, but this income is supplemented from time to time with petty theft.

While she has a casual attitude towards personal property, Kitsune lives by her own code of honor. She will never take from those less fortunate than herself, nor from someone who would be badly hurt by the loss of what she takes. In the past, she served as a kind of guardian to a mute noodle seller, and she may take on this role for any person she feels needs a hand.



Komori (Clan of Ninja Bats)

The mysterious and dangerous Komori ninjas are masters of the night. Not only can they fly, but they wear deadly blades on their wings, making them silent and formidable killers. After the Neko Ninja fell out of his favor, Lord Hikiji now employs the Komori for much of his espionage and treachery.



Koroshi (Guild of Assassins)

An underground organization of killers-for-hire, the Koroshi are criminals who specialize in assassination. Unlike the ninja, who seek out the sponsorship of lords and nobles to set up elaborate networks of spying and neutralization, the ruthless members of the Koroshi work with anyone who will pay, be they lords, crime bosses, or even commoners who can put up a bounty of appropriate size.

Even though they have neither the soldierly discipline of *bushido* nor the secret methods of *ninjutsu*, the assassins have their own tricks of misdirection, close-quarters combat, and ruthless brutality that are not to be under-estimated. The only consistency among the Koroshi is that they will use almost any means to reach their murderous goals.

(As the MC, always remember that the players are the stars of the story. The world of *Usagi* has its share of corrupt nobles, ruthless criminals, and supernatural menace. It can be very tempting to write about monolithic entities with more power and influence than our heroes will ever have. Use such organizations in your own games sparingly, as you don't want your players to feel helpless and overwhelmed.)



Lord Kotetsu (Male Cat Daimyo)

A scheming and ruthless man, Lord Kotetsu was a core member of the Conspiracy of Eight, who sought to return the power to the Emperor. His plan hinged on producing the three royal treasures as symbols of the heavenly mandate... which meant finding Grasscutter, a sword lost for over four centuries. A master of manipulation, he employed a network of agents both mundane and supernatural.

(Some adventures will begin and end in a single session, the so-called *one-shots*. Other adventures may span over two or more sessions, in a long *arc*. And then there are villains stay throughout the entire storyline, or *campaign*.)

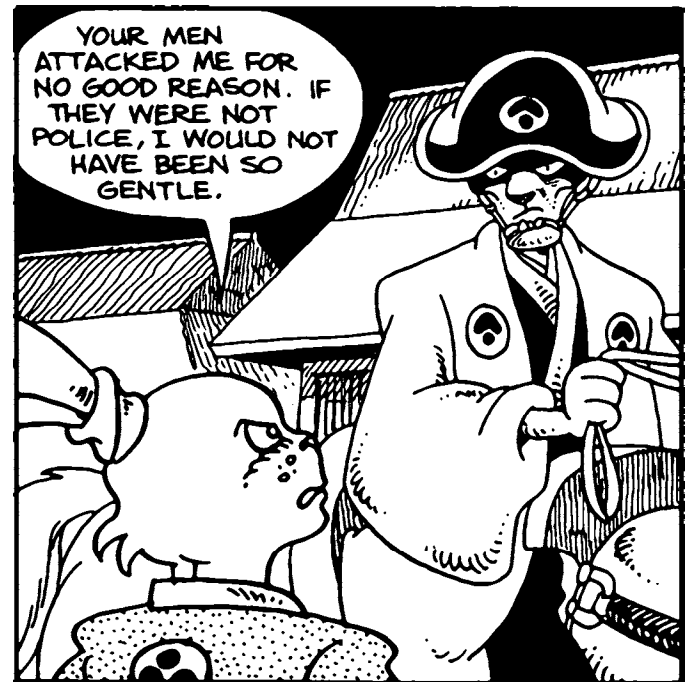
Not every villain needs to be as grand as Lord Hikiji. Sometimes you can have a villain show up for a few episodes and then be defeated. Regular wins like this will give the players a sense of progress, some closure that what they are doing is changing the world for the better.)



Mariko (Female Rabbit Samurai)

Mariko is the dutiful wife of Kenichi, though she still harbors fond feelings for Usagi, her former lover. Mariko is of the samurai caste, and upholds the *bushido* code as fiercely as any warrior. She will not betray her duty to Kenichi or her son Jotaro.

(If Usagi has a weakness, it could be his love for Mariko. In the *Yokai* story, a monster assumes the form of Usagi's most beloved person ... and that happens to be Mariko! Heroes who have other people that they care about have more possibilities for storytelling than angry loners. As the MC, don't threaten the loves or relatives of the player-characters too often, or players may come to resent having their friends and family used reduced to mere bait.)



Yoriki Masuda

(Male Cat Assistant Magistrate)

Though pledged to serve the law, Masuda has no real respect for anything that does not line his own pockets. Masuda is an inveterate gambler, and he uses his influence over the local police force in his town to keep them from entering certain areas where his *yakuza* (organized crime) associates rob travelers in order to pay for Masuda's gambling debts.

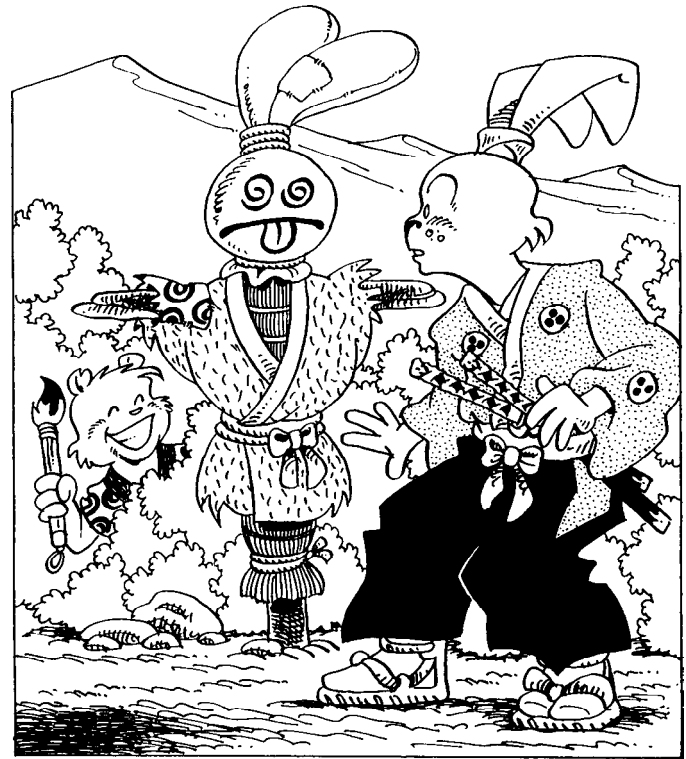
(Masuda is an excellent example of a villain. He's clearly up to no good, but he has a position of superior authority. Our heroes couldn't just beat him up or kill him. They have to find evidence of his wrongdoing, first.)



Lord Mifune (Male Cat Daimyo)

Though now dead, the memory of Lord Mifune continues to hold a powerful influence over his former subjects and retainers. He is remembered for his devotion to the ideals of *bushido*, and his recognition of the fact that a good lord has as many duties to his retainers as they do to him.

He fell in battle with Lord Hikiji, after being betrayed by one of his own generals. His former samurai, Usagi, took his master's head, and buried in secret. Though a wandering ronin, Usagi is still loyal to the memory of Mifune.



Miyamoto Usagi (Male Rabbit Bodyguard)

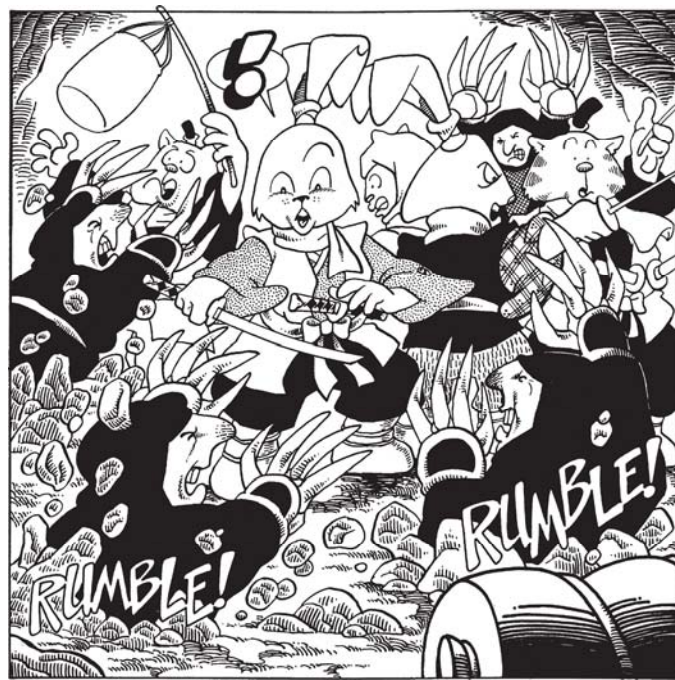
Miyamoto Usagi was born in a small northern village, the son of the headman. Early in his youth he showed promise as a future samurai, and was sent to train with the hermit sword master, Katsuichi. Throughout his childhood years, Usagi also maintained a fierce rivalry with Kenichi, another local boy. Usagi always managed to gain the upper hand in their contests (if only slightly), and this created a bitterness on the part of Kenichi that has not died.

Usagi excelled in his training, and went into the service of Lord Mifune, shortly before Lord Hikiji decided to make war with Clan Mifune. In the resulting conflict, Clan Mifune fell. Usagi was left masterless.

Since that time, he has wandered Japan seeking employment as a bodyguard. He often works for Clan Geishu and is also prone to taking on noble causes and quests with no promise of reward. Though he may wander far and wide, Usagi has never forgotten his master's betrayal, or the evil of Lord Hikiji. His eventual goal is to bring Hikiji to justice, either before the Shogun or on the field of battle. On the single occasion the two met face to face, Hikiji left Usagi with a terrible scar over his left eye.

Usagi is a brilliant swordsman, certainly one of the best in living memory. He is also an intensely honorable and moral fellow, and will not kill when it is not necessary. Though he is a pleasant and urbane companion, Usagi seems drawn by fate into conflicts — if you meet him, it is likely that something important (and dangerous!) is about to happen.

(Strong, brave, resourceful, and honorable, Usagi is such a great hero, they named the book after him! What makes Usagi such a great model for player-characters to follow is that he is often very aware of his own limitations. He's humble enough to ask or to receive help. He uses violence only as a last resort. And even when out of his depth, he is willing to sacrifice himself to save others.)



Mogura (Clan of Ninja Moles)

The mysterious and deadly Mogura are moles, all trained in the deadly arts of ninjutsu. Their long claws are deadly in close combat and are effective digging tools. The Mogura specialize in infiltration and surprise, able to enter buildings and fortifications by tunneling through the earth. They have also been known to ambush the unwary, by remaining below the surface and then erupting to attack by surprise. Their eyesight is quite poor, especially in bright light, which limits their abilities of disguise and infiltration.

(The Mogura Ninja are an excellent example of villains with unusual abilities and weaknesses. Our heroes must find ways to defend against their stealthy digging, and they would do well to exploit their poor eyesight. As the MC, look for unique challenges for your players, in lieu of just overwhelming them with big numbers.)



Murakami Gennosuké

(Male Rhinoceros Bounty Hunter)

Gennosuké (known to his friends as “Gen”) might have been born into a life of relative leisure, as a the son of a prominent samurai, General Murakami. His father served Lord Asano of Clan Shirogeta, who had been slain years ago by a treacherous vassal named Oda.

Murakami had sworn to find and punish Oda, his loyalty to his dead lord overcoming even his feelings for his wife and young son. After his wife died, General Murakami began relentlessly training Gennosuké in *kenjutsu*. Under his harsh tutelage, Gen grew to resent and even hate his father. When he learned all he could from Murakami, he left and started his own career as a bounty hunter. Murakami’s fate is unclear, though it is believed that he finally found Oda the traitor, only to be slain.

In the time since then, Gen has had many adventures, often in the company of Miyamoto Usagi. Shortly after meeting Usagi, the two of them encountered the man who slew Gennosuké’s father, and assisted in bringing him to justice.

Gennosuké is a gruff and sometimes crude fellow, who at first glance may seem motivated entirely by greed. Those who travel with him will learn that he is capable of loyalty, and is as often actuated by honor as he is by the lure of money. The most noticeable thing about Gennosuké is his broken horn — it was cut off in a duel with the blind swords-pig, Zato-Ino.

(In the *Usagi* stories, Gennosuké is often used as a *foil* — a contrast to our hero, Usagi. Gen is greedy, violent, and brusque; Usagi is generous, reserved, and polite. As the MC, you could introduce a non-player-character like Gen into the party to have him always say the “wrong thing” or to introduce ideas that might be less than heroic, specifically so the players can choose *not* to do bad things. Note in the writing that Gen often does the right thing, because the heroes bolster his conscience.)



Nezumi

(Male Rodent Thief)

Styling himself as a folk hero in the mold of Robin Hood, the dashing rogue known only as “Nezumi” steals from the rich and gives to the poor. He is a master of acrobatics, stealth, and burglary. He prefers to avoid combat when he can, as he is no killer ... but if pressed, he is quite formidable in close-quarters combat. More than once, he has joined forces with Inspector Ishida or Usagi to help them catch other criminals.

(As the MC, when introducing powerful non-player-characters like Nezumi, it’s best to keep them out of the way or to use a light touch. Players often do not enjoy having their agency replaced by a know-it-all proxy of the MC. Powerful, supporting characters should be used very sparingly.)



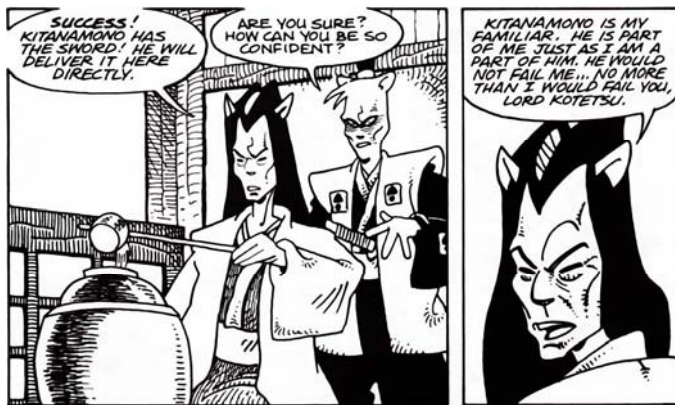
Lord Noriyuki

(Male Panda Lord of Clan Geishu)

Lord Noriyuki found himself leading Clan Geishu after his father was murdered by agents of Lord Hikiji. His own life has been threatened several times by Hikiji’s plots, though Noriyuki always manages to pull through, thanks to the skilled help of his bodyguard, Tomoé Ame, and his friend Usagi.

Lord Noriyuki is in his early teens. Though young, he normally presents himself with obvious authority, at least when dealing with outsiders. He is a wise and capable ruler, and he knows when to seek advice. The burden of rule has hardened him somewhat, but he is still quite capable of expressing childish glee.

(An early introduction into the *Usagi* stories, Lord Noriyuki is the classic example of the “escort quest” — an important non-player-character who needs to be protected by our heroes. Although he is honest, capable, and forthright, Noriyuki is still a child, physically immature and lacking in status. What makes him a great example is that he is keenly aware of his limitations; he works with our heroes, he trusts them, and he rewards them for their efforts.)

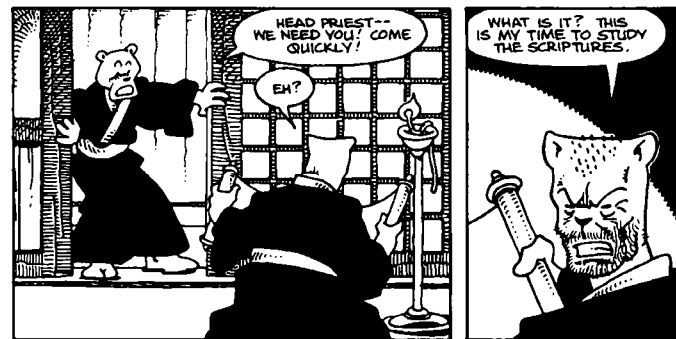


Ryoko

(Female Cat Sorcerer)

A mysterious sorcerer of unknown origin, Ryoko had strong supernatural power, able to possess people even over great distances. She was also able to control the Heike crabs, said to have the souls of Imperial warriors lost at sea, to perform the impossible feat of retreating the long-lost sword *Grasscutter* from the watery depths — which was instrumental to the plans of Lord Kotetsu and the Conspiracy of Eight to restore imperial glory and to depose the Shogun.

(Ryoko is an example of a non-player-character who is important to the story ... but none of our principals ever meet her or learn of her existence! When you're an MC, writing your own adventures, it can be tempting to force reasons for confrontation with your favorite characters, but you shouldn't force the story to go in directions that aren't flowing naturally from the players' actions. The *Grasscutter* arc are direct results of Ryoko's influence, so even though our heroes didn't quite *know* who was behind it all, they still had a understanding of stakes, risks, and goals.)

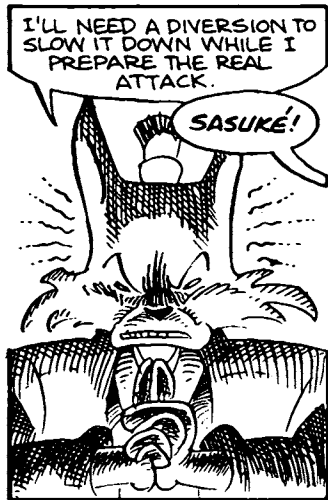


Sanshobo

(Male Bear Bonze)

Formerly a priest in General Ikeda's army, Sanshobo was scarred by the death of his son and the son of a friend. He left the army, changed his name, and became a bonze. His intensity for study and ascetics eventually promoted him to head priest, and he presided over the defense of his monastery. His righteous faith is great enough to exorcise demons and he has no fear of the supernatural.

(From a gaming perspective, Sanshobo is an excellent example of an MC-controlled character. As a veteran of combat, he can hold his own in violent situations. As a priest, he can offer aid and advice to travelers. Because of his obligations to his monastery, he can't travel too far from his base of operations and thus has a reason to drop out of the party.)



Sasuké

(Male Fox Sorcerer)

Sometimes called “the Demon Queller”, Sasuké dresses as a samurai but practices *majutsu* (sorcery). He is more interested in preventing evil than in simply killing, as he is known to have rehabilitated at least one demon. He is capable of powerful magic, such as blasts of supernatural energy or summoning giant monsters to help him ... at the cost of his own soul energy, which needs time to recover. He receives guidance in the form of visions from a mysterious mentor. Sasuké uses his uncanny ability to read minds to ask valiant souls (like Usagi) to help him in his fight against evil.

(In the world of *Usagi*, magic is a strange and mysterious ability. Trying to describe every last little thing that magic can do would take a whole book in itself, and it would rob magic of some of its mystery. To that end, we’ve divided the results of *majutsu* into weak, strong, and grand results, each of which can deal with an appropriate problem. Using magic can carry a terrible price, so players shouldn’t call upon its use too often.)



Shi

(Group of four Assassins)

At one time, the four greatest hired-killers banded together to call themselves *Shi* (“The Four”), only they wrote their name using the Japanese ideogram for “death”, which is also pronounced *shi*. Each of them was trained in a different discipline of the martial arts: sickle-and-chain (*kusarigama*), spear (*yari*), paired swords (*daisho*), and archery (*kyūjutsu*). Though they were highly skilled, they were also extremely greedy for money, their loyalty only to the highest bidder.

Juzo, the brother of the corrupt magistrate Sueoka, hired The Four to kill all the peasants of Izumi Valley. Their hope was to build a gold mine and keep all the profits for themselves. When Usagi arrived and offered his help to the peasants, Juzo sent the Four to kill him.



Shingen

(Male Cat Ninja)

One of the greatest ninja warriors who ever lived, Shingen became the *kashira* (chief) of the Neko Ninja clan. Even though Usagi had foiled his plans previously, the two reconciled their conflict — their personal codes of honor, *ninpo* and *bushido*, took precedence over their personal issues, and both fought as allies against the Dragon-Bellow Conspiracy. Mortally wounded, Shingen detonated the kegs of black powder beneath Castle Tamakuro, destroying Lord Takamura, the castle, and himself.



Spot (Pet)

Once, a feral *tokagé* made friends with Usagi and joined him on his adventures. Never fully domesticated, this creature was loyal and friendly to Usagi and his friends... but he was often quick to lash out against anyone acting hostile, mean, or rude. Later, Spot became the travelling companion of Zato-Ino, the blind swordspig, who probably needed him more than Usagi did.

(From the perspective of the Master of Ceremonies, Spot is an excellent example of a MC-controlled character who hangs out with the players. He can perform useful tasks like guard duty or fetching items, so he can be part of the team. But he can't speak or use tools, so he doesn't eclipse anyone else's rolls. Also, being a wild animal, he can get into trouble that he needs to be rescued from, without being dismissed as incompetent.)



Takekoko (Male Unknown Doctor)

A country doctor in a remote village, Takekoko is always hungry for knowledge. He has collected various books, plans, and schematics from all over the world, and he has had great success in reproducing many of the items, often modifying or improving them. The locals consider him to be a harmless eccentric. (Takekoko's debut story, "When Rabbits Fly", is an excellent example of a one-and-done adventure. First, Takekoko is shown to be a likeable, supportive individual. Other characters come up with a reason to dislike him, but they don't necessarily just want to kill him. The story escalates into a life-threatening encounter where Usagi's quick thinking and risk-taking are the only things that save Takekoko.)



Tomoé Ame (Female Cat Samurai)

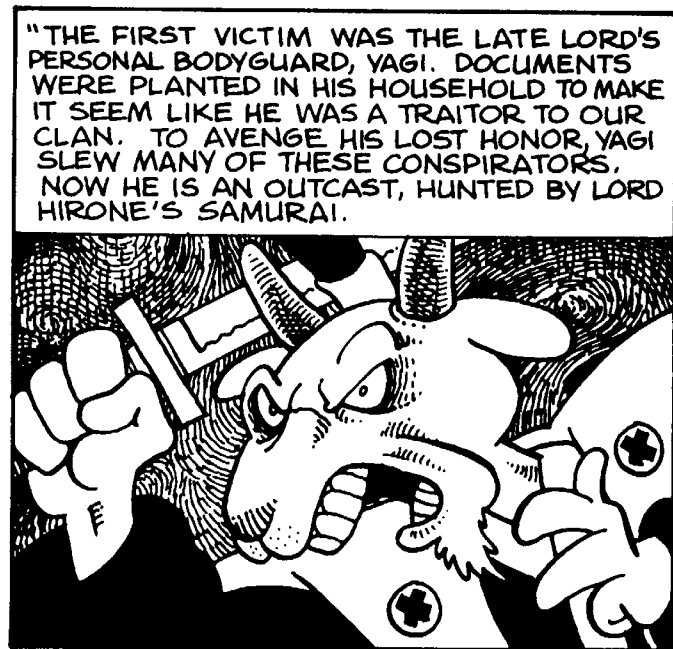
Tomoé Ame is the chief retainer to Lord Noriyuki of the Geishu Clan. She is a fierce warrior, skilled in the Falling Rain school of swordsmanship. Tomoé-San (she uses Tomoé as her first name, rather than her family name, for reasons of her own) has thwarted many plots and conspiracies against her young master.



The Woodcutters

(Pair of Monkey Commoners)

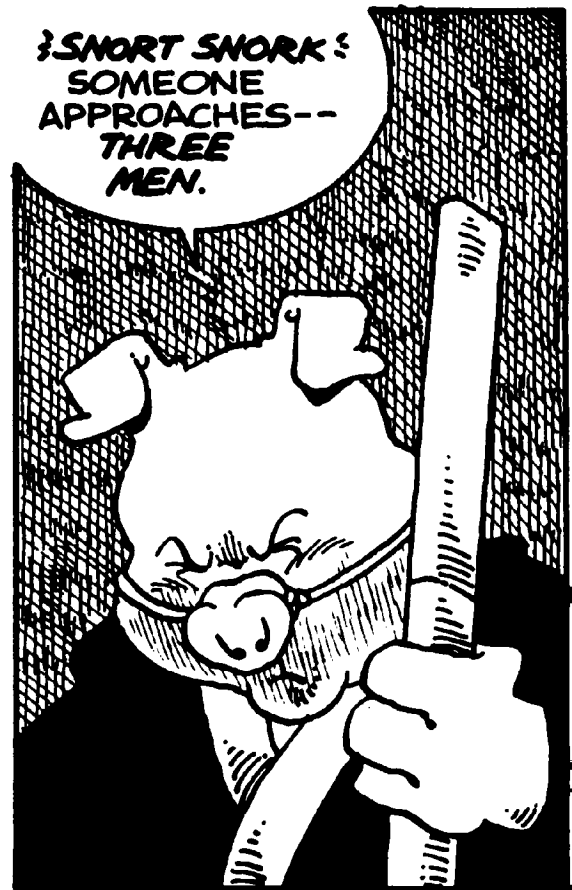
A married couple of nameless characters who repeatedly appear in the *Usagi* stories, the Woodcutters are hard-working peasants who sell firewood. They appear when the story needs some background characters who can push the plotting forward or to add some colorful detail.



Yagi

(Male Goat Assassin)

Yagi was once a skilled general in the service of Clan Higashi. He was framed for treason, and fled his punishment after slaying forty men single-handedly. He took his infant son Gorogoro with him in exile, and began a new career as an assassin. He is highly skilled in this new profession, and is raising his son to assist in his contracts. Yagi is unlikely to be moved by mercy — those who encounter him would be wise to be wary.



Zato Ino

(Male Pig Masseur)

A blind, traveling masseur, Zato Ino longed for a simple life, free of complications. Yet he found himself feared and hunted, in part thanks to his own paranoia and mistrust of his incredible skill with the sword — he used his keen scent to guide his blade. Ino became a well-known outlaw, though not through any desire of his own.

Ino encountered Usagi on the road one day, and the two became friendly traveling companions for a time. However, when Usagi realized that Ino was a wanted criminal, Ino attempted to kill Usagi. The

rabbit sliced off Ino's nose, effectively blinding the pig. He was soon able to obtain a wooden replacement, and swore vengeance on Usagi.

The two crossed swords on a few occasions, and once Ino duelled with Gennosuké, slicing off the rhino's horn. Later, he made his peace with Usagi and Gen, and even assisted them on a quest.

During this partnership, Ino was shot and gravely wounded. Though he survived, his friends put out word that he had been slain. This allowed Ino to start a new life in a remote village, where he lives to this day with his wife.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

The three pillars of good role-playing: **Be fair, build up, have fun!**

When you host a game of *Usagi* in your role as the Master of Ceremonies (MC), you will be the center of attention during the game. It's a lot of work, but the rewards can be even greater.

As the MC, you decide what goes and what doesn't, where the action takes place, how quickly the plot will advance, and who gets to make a difference.

(We also put some more advice for the MC in the "Characters" chapter.

Be fair

Your players are creative, inspired, and above all, eager to get things done. Each player comes with their own ideas about what it means to be a samurai, or a ninja, or a wizard, or Gennosuké, or anything else. Each player's idea of what those things are is a little different from other player's ideas. Are the *Usagi* stories about larger-than-life combat, where one samurai takes on two dozen warriors alone and comes out victorious? Or are these stories more realistic affairs, where any act of violence can have terrible, long-term consequences? Is the tone somewhere in the middle? And what is it that you and your fellow players think *should* be the tone?

As the MC, you'll have to "read the crowd" and talk with your fellow players to find the style of play that works best with your group.

Your players will almost certainly not agree 100% on everything. That's why we wrote this rule book — to get everyone on the same page about what a role-playing game using *Usagi Yojimbo* would be like. Your group should feel free to make your own changes and interpretations of the world, using what we have here as a baseline.

As the MC, you have the authority to say what goes and what doesn't. The players are free to make their own moves and to assert their own control, and you should work with them to make the game interesting. And the best way to keep the game interesting is when you're all working together to stay consistent about what the game is about.

Nobody likes to fail... and since die rolls are random, they always have a chance for failure. Don't ask your players to roll dice unless it's exciting to see what would happen if something unexpectedly went wrong.

Inform your players. A common mistake that MCs make is being far too stingy with details about the game's world. We've put a "read a situation" move in the game to give players specific questions to ask to keep the game going quickly.

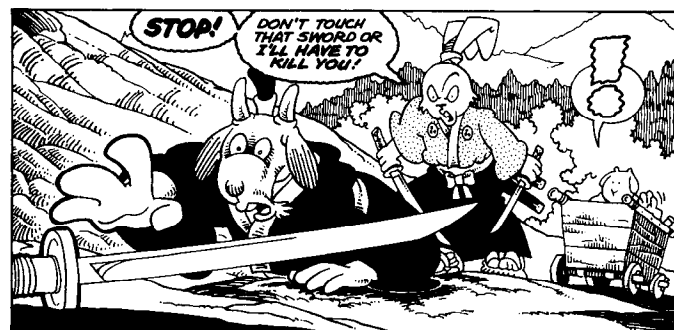
Most of the time, the *Usagi* role-playing game doesn't have a precise "turn order". Some players will be more extroverted than others — they will shout out two, three, or more moves, one after the other, without waiting to give other players a chance to say something. Letting players do lots of things is okay, especially when the game is in a *casual* mood and you're filling out the story to get to the next point. When things get *dicey*, you're rolling dice to see if things happen, and some players may want to get involved if things are starting to go badly. When the game is in a *combat* mood, and lives are on the line, we highly encourage MCs to call on each player at least once before giving anyone another turn; in the excitement of mortal combat, it's all too easy to skip someone.

Sure, many players will pass their turn to let someone else do something ... but some players may want to take a turn but will be too quiet to speak up. (A player might be waiting to be asked what they want to do, because they're uncomfortable about just asking. Another player might be confused because things are happening so fast, unaware that they can participate. Or maybe the player is too shy to speak up when everyone else is being so loud and so sure.) Know your audience and "read the crowd". If one or more players aren't engaging as much as some of the other ones, it's your job as the MC to guide the focus of the story to them — make sure everyone's getting a turn.

You're free to change the rules... but remember that if you change the rules on a whim, your players may lose faith that the rules will help them. Some groups don't mind "winging it" and improvising everything; but other players may become upset if the game isn't working the way they thought it

would. You should always strike a balance that makes the game more enjoyable for your players.

It's better to deny a player the opportunity to roll than to let them roll and then tell them that they lose, anyway. Never ask a player to roll if you're not willing to accept that they might roll a 13 or something huge that will make what they're asking for come true. You will have taken something that was an exciting, rare event and turned it into ashes, and that's not fair. If you want the bad guy to get away, then just say "they get away". If you over-rule die rolls too often, many players will become confused and frustrated.



Using the rules to your advantage

We've designed our rules to work with you and your players to help you, not merely alongside you. Here's some things to keep in mind:

- Rolling dice is inefficient, and failed rolls can disappoint players. Tasks that require two rolls will have bonuses that carry forward. (Reading a situation with +intuition gives bonuses to rolls to act on those results. Every combat move has a "up to 6" option that gives +3 on another try, etc.) It doesn't just make players feel better when their next roll gets a bonus; it also helps make the game more managed and less unpredictable.



- For combat situations, we don't have a lot of rules about range, position, facing, etc. We *do* ask that players describe whether their characters are *exposed* (out in front and directly involved in the action), *neutral*, or *covered* (far in the back, concealed and/or hidden). Your party of heroes will have a mix of warrior-types, sneaky-types, and in-betweens. Informing your players who is at risk of violence and who isn't is an important part of *Usagi's* stories, so they're important to yours, as well. Drama can build when the exposed front-line warriors get overwhelmed or over-come by masses of enemies. When playing out an action sequence, you and your fellow players should describe where they stand.
- Considering introducing the variant rule of *upgrades* (starting on page 193). When players get frustrated because something didn't work during the game, you can suggest that their character's next upgrade be one that specifically fixes the problem. Upgrades that come out of play add to the story, where the character's growth is a natural learning experience.
- All the players' combat moves use "+story" as their bonus. In other words, the players' ability in combat is the number of story points they have built up. We have this rule to encourage your players to push the story along *before* they simply resort to violence. It will be very difficult to engage a grand opponent before your combat bonus is +2 or +3.

Build up

Be your players' biggest fan. You want them to succeed, but you don't want it to be too easy. As the MC, your job is *not* to punish the players with nasty foes and deadly traps. You want your players to work together to make a story with challenges, turning points, and unpredictable outcomes.

Build on your players' moves to bring the next story point into play. Describe everything! If a character hits with their katana, describe how enemies are cut down and how this affects their morale. If they miss, describe the reactions of enemies: Do they taunt our hero's lack of skill? Do they make threats? Do they split up to go after some other objective? Look to the *Usagi* stories for ways to make even the most trivial of actions into something interesting.

Don't stress too much about the quality; you're leading an improv theater troupe, and the only audience you need to entertain are each other. Feel free to make inside jokes or references if they will amuse or entertain your crew (and aren't ruining the tone.)

Tell the story and use broad strokes. As the MC, you are the source of all information that's going on in the game world. If you aren't clearly expressing to the players what's going on in the story, then the players won't know what's going on. (Our game has a "read a situation" move to encourage players to ask for more details when they need it.)

Using die rolls to enhance the story

Encourage your players to interpret their die rolls. When rolls total 6 or less, describe how this affects the character. Was this bad luck? Lack of skill? An

embarrassing faux pas? How do the non-player-characters — the ones you control — react to this?

Likewise, amazing rolls should influence bystanders, too. Are the villains too arrogant to look impressed? Or will they confess their cowardice and flee for their lives? Will they fabricate some outrageous lie? Will they start bargaining? As MC, you play the roles of the non-player-characters; make these characters react to the players' doings and you'll make the players feel like they're in a story of their own making.

When making rolls, results in the 7-to-9 range is the "compromise" range. A 10 or better is enough to get most anything done, and if a 6 or less could've done this, then we shouldn't have bothered rolling for something that was so easily done. When players score results in the middle range, you and the player can start asking questions about how this roll can turn out.

- **Situation** (page 16): Is there something unique to this time and place that would give our hero the advantage? It would be easier to evade people into a crowd than in an open field, or in darkness instead of a bright sunny day. When negotiating, social privilege or a good reputation could help convince people to help you. And old impairments, carried over from a previous encounter, could make the difference between victory or defeat.

When you work the qualities of the setting, history, or plot into the mechanics like this, you're making the experience feel more like a real story and less like an abstract game.

- **Hard Bargain** (page 18): Is there something the player could give up or lose, to still get their way? Weapons, tools, or other important items could break. A bribe, favor, or other price could seal a deal.

Unlike a situation, a hard bargain is a choice: does the player give something up to get what they want, or do they lose gracefully?

When you let the player choose “fail or succeed with a cost” like this, you’re helping the player feel more positive about the experience. Instead of a mere helpless victim who fails due to bad luck, now they are making a choice in a story to deal with misfortune.

- **Compromise** (page 18): Sometimes, a player may be rolling to prevent something (a sword wound, capture or detainment, overcome by supernatural forces, etc.), but their roll isn’t a sure thing — it’s in that 7-to-9 area of gray. You might decide that the player has a partial success or a cost that they just can’t avoid. (Maybe they get hit but they also hit their attacker back; they get captured but they drop a clue so their friends can find them later; the foul magic only makes them temporarily afraid instead of paralyzed with terror, etc.)

Unlike a hard bargain, where you give the player a choice between “failure” and “success but at a price”, a compromise is when you, the MC, just declare the roll to be a partial success. You can use a compromise to guide the story the way you need to, as the players “fail forward” towards where they need to go.

Be careful about asking the players to roll twice to do a single thing. A player may want to use that success to push a negotiation, research, or other incident into new boundaries. If the player rolled a strong 10, they should get a strong result, which might be one big thing or a lot of little things. If they rolled a grand 13, they should get something truly impressive out of the deal.

If you make a player roll twice to do the same thing, that’s two chances for failure, so that’s not always fair to the players. However, you might have to decide if what a player wants to do is building off the last move, or if it’s a new move altogether. If a player already did something great, earlier, then give them bonuses forward to rolls that build on that. (If a character just embarrassed an official by quoting an obscure law, that could give +3 forward to now negotiation favors out of them, etc.)

Many stories may end with a combat vs. a grand foe, who can only be hit on 13s or better. Remind the players to choose moves that assist each other. Every combat move has an option to miss on this move but to take +3 forward on the next combat roll; remind your players that they may have failed to hit this time, but if they can just bide their time, an opening will come soon.

Role-playing is an emergent experience — it’s a story that develops as you and your fellow players make choices at certain moments... and when random die-rolls make some choices for you. We have some idea of what could happen, but we don’t know exactly what will happen.

Have fun

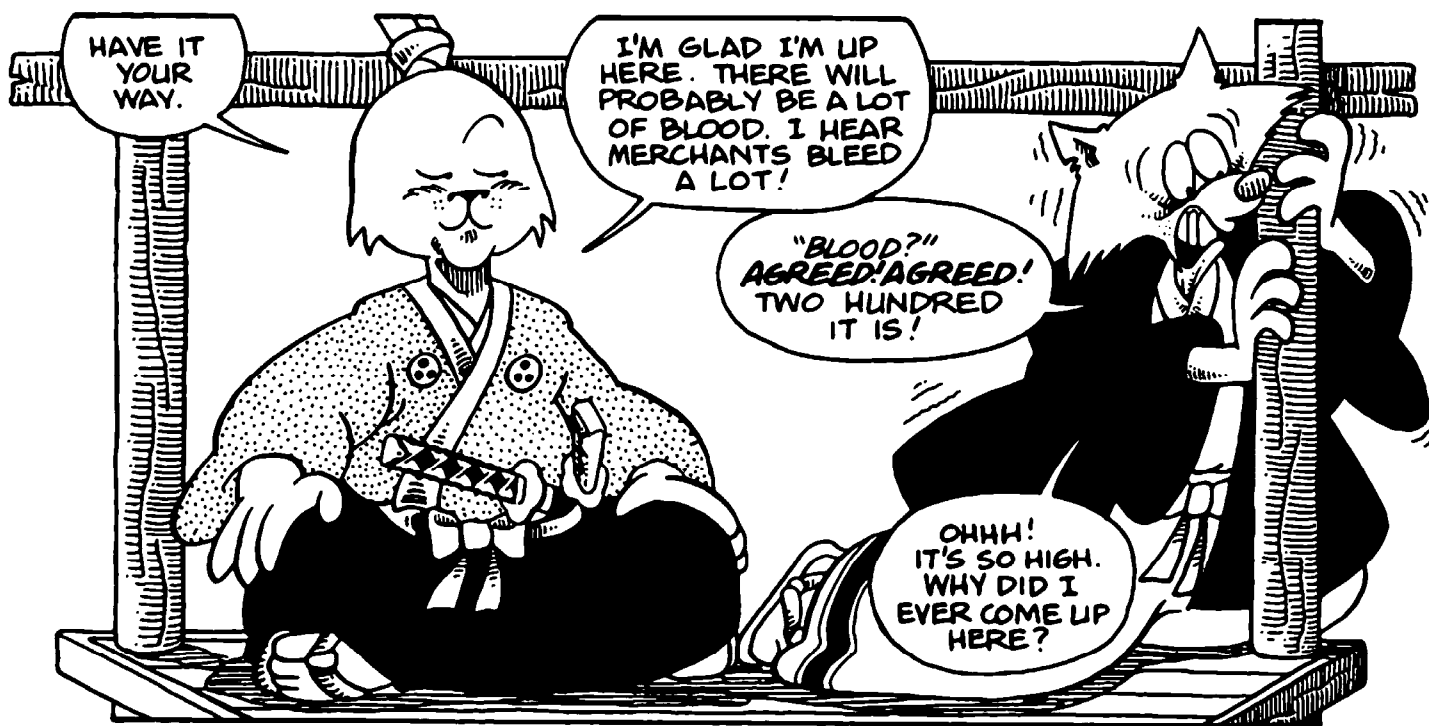
These rules are designed to be fast and easy. If you've played other role-playing games, you've probably seen rules that have lots of modifiers for range, for target size, for visibility, for various buffs, etc. This *Usagi* game avoids all that detail; we encourage players to roll the dice, add one or two things, and then see where the roll ended up. If the roll is high, you win! If it's low, you lose. If it's in the middle, we'd rather you spent time talking about the story than about the numbers. (See page 17 for more details.)

Don't let the rules get in the way of a good time! Even if we could write rules to cover every special case that might come up during your *Usagi* game, this book would be over a thousand pages long, with nothing but rules.

(And why would you want to read that, when you could be reading over a thousand pages of *Usagi* comics?)

As the MC, you must balance following the rules with following your muse. The tastes of each group of players will vary: some parties will want a formalized game that hews close to the rulebook, while other groups might prefer an experience that's a more relaxed and free-form. Your players may also have individual preferences on how they want the game to work.

Role-playing games have a narrative, where the characters go places, meet people, and do things. As the MC, when you're setting up your own adventures, it's best to think in terms of what the *characters* in the setting are doing, rather than as places or timed events. Some of the best stories in *Usagi* are about characters who want to do something.



(In “Shi”, the corrupt magistrate Sueoka wants to drive the peasants out so he can claim the land’s mineral wealth for himself. In “The Dragon Bellow Conspiracy”, Lord Tamakuro is stockpiling weapons for his military coup. In “Grasscutter”, the Conspiracy of Eight want to restore power to the Emperor, etc.) Our heroes get involved in these schemes, and then the villains react, either by using their resources to get the story back on their own path... or by failing to do so because of some weakness or bad stroke of luck.

In tabletop gaming, it’s very tempting for an MC to think of “their story” as a series of events on a checklist, and that the players will have to deal with each event on a programmed schedule, in turn. If the players find some other thread, quest, or adventure to be more interesting, they might try to pursue a different line. Don’t try to “rail-road” your players back into your singular vision of what a “good story” is! When you’re role-playing, you’re here to build upon the emergent paths that your fellow players are bringing to the experience. There’s no “wrong path” for the players to take, if their characters are acting appropriately (staying true to their motivation; behaving according to their station in Tokugawa-era Japan; etc.).

As the MC, think in terms of how *your* characters would react to these changes. (In “Shi”, Sueoka hires assassins to deal with Usagi’s meddling. In “The Dragon Bellow Conspiracy”, our heroes must escape from captivity and then make friends wherever they can. In “Grasscutter”, Usagi gets caught up in the story just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and even he is never fully aware of all the villains in his story — some of them die without Usagi ever meeting them or learning of their existence!) At their heart, *Usagi* stories are

about the characters, both heroes and villains, and the exciting possibilities that comes out of heir interactions.

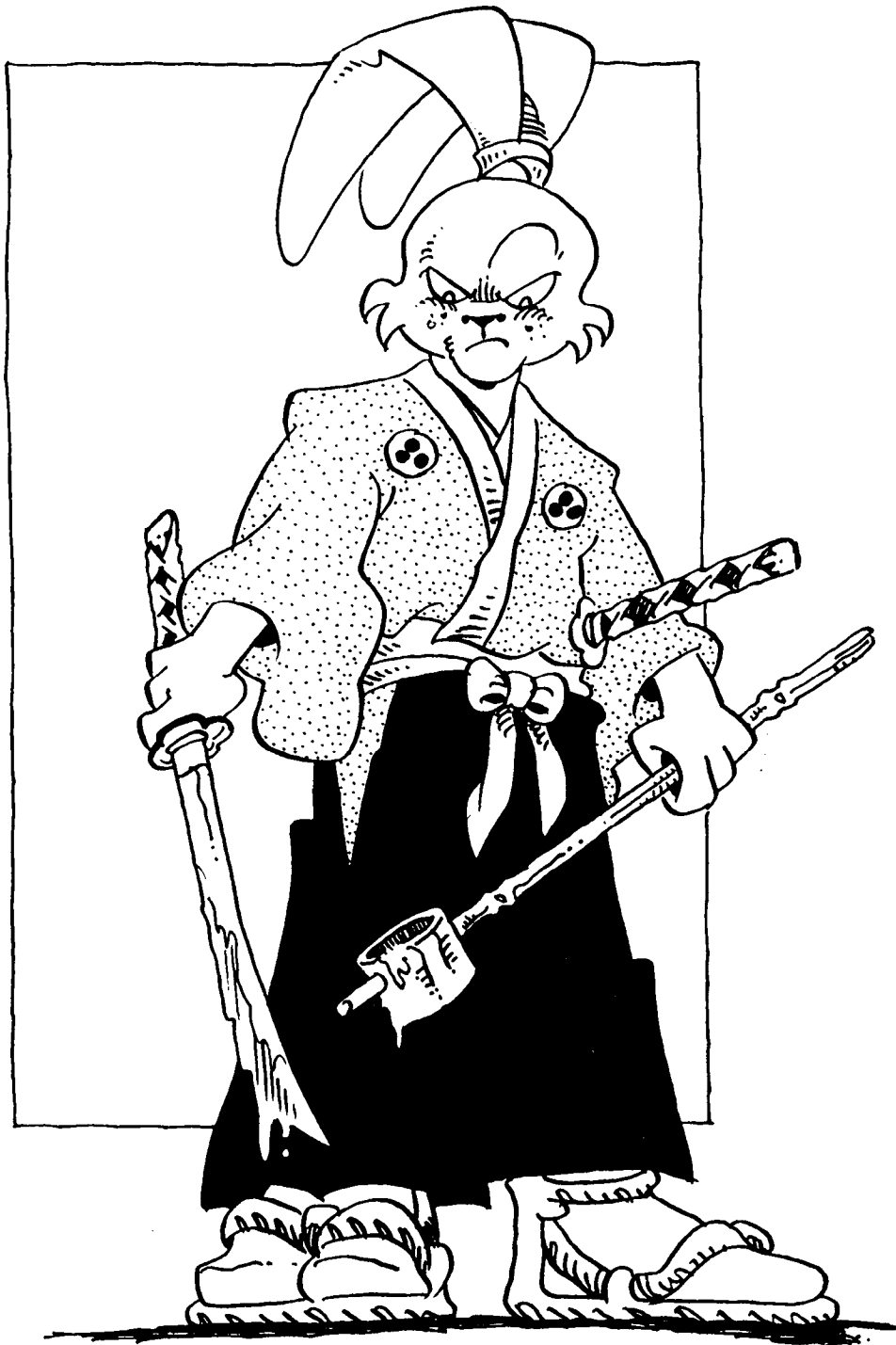
Your goal as MC is to present an *interesting* story, which is not necessarily the same as a *challenging* one. Many traditional role-playing games focus on formal encounters, especially combat, where the players engage in a strategic fight to kill enemies, to reap treasure, and then to level up their abilities to get into bigger fights. The *Usagi* role-playing game doesn’t follow that model. Yes, there is combat, and it’s often dangerous and exciting ... but violent encounters are *part* of a good story, not the whole. In particular, you can’t plan your games around “killing our heroes” — most villains have some objective like “get rich” or “conquer Japan”; killing some random, penniless adventurers wandering aimlessly around Japan isn’t going to make much progress towards that goal.

That said, the story is more exciting when there’s stakes involved, and there’s a world of characters who aren’t players who need to be protected. (In “Shi”, the farmers are at risk of being killed. In “Dragon Bellow Conspiracy”, a war will result in even more lives lost.) As the MC, you can introduce non-player-characters such as innocent peasants, loyal retainers, and other allies ... who might be threatened by danger in later stories. If our heroes are too slow or too unlucky to save their friends, then there may be ultimate consequences.

After the game session has finished, spend a few minutes **debriefing** your players

After each game session, spend a few minutes to debrief your players on how the experience went. Ask your players if they have questions about what just happened. Is anyone confused about how the rules work? Did something happen in the story that didn't make sense? What did your players like, or dislike? This debriefing doesn't have to be too long or involved. A good role-playing game experience is about finding a balance among what everyone enjoys.

In the *variant rules* sections, we offer new options for character design, game-play, and design that offer new ways to experience *Usagi's* world ... but more rules also means greater complexity and possibly more confusion. You and your fellow players should work together to find the balance that makes for the personalized game that you enjoy the most.



CONFLICT & STORY

One character wants something, but there's something else keeping them from doing it. That's when a story has points of conflict. As the Master of Ceremonies, you'll be in charge of putting obstacles in players' way.



Weak, Strong, Grand: Degrees of Conflict

Most adventures will have several weak conflicts, a few strong conflicts, and then maybe one grand conflict at the end.

Weak conflicts

are small story points, comic relief, or background extras

These are minor issues that can help move the story along. They provide opportunities for our players to show off.

A weak, strong, or grand result can resolve a weak conflict — basically, any roll of 7 and up. Even a near-miss might be able to resolve a weak conflict if the player can make a hard bargain.

Weak conflicts are so trivial, it might not be necessary to change the mood of the story to have a die roll. Encourage your players to deal with weak conflicts by describing their characters' abilities, methods, and resources in a logical manner.

Strong conflicts

are major beats in the story

These are major beats in the story. Clashes with important characters. Dealing with these conflicts show that our heroes are protagonists of a higher order. Losing these conflicts can provide drama.

A weak success has no effect on a strong conflict. A strong or grand success defeats a weak conflict. (Only rolls of 10 or better will be able to make a dent in a strong conflict.) Rolls in the 7-9 range may be able to deal with a strong conflict if the player has something that can tip them over the edge (circumstance), if they are willing to make a sacrifice (hard bargain) — see page 16 for more ideas.

In some cases, a strong success may overcome two or more weak conflicts, at once. For example, a *katana* can defeat several weak opponents with a single strong result, as you slash through your foes.

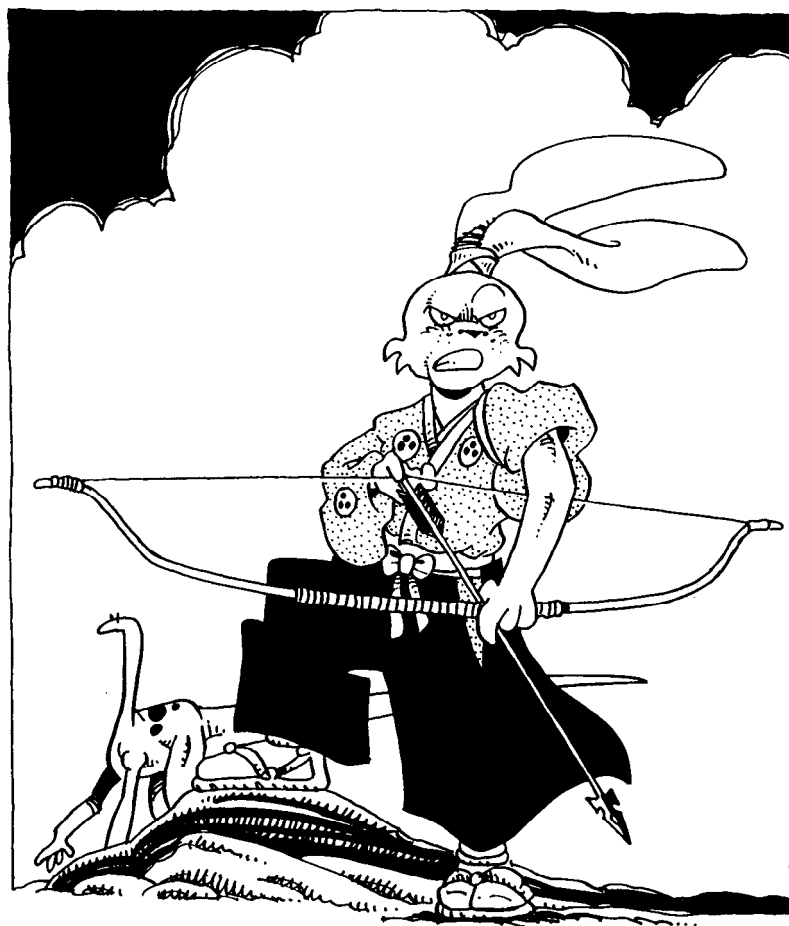
Grand conflicts are the stuff of legends, the climax to a good story

Grand conflicts are the stuff of legends, the climax to the story. Grand characters have names, motivations, history, dimension. Dealing with a grand conflict will be the focus of many stories.

A weak success or strong success has no effect on a grand conflict. Only grand successes — rolls of 13 or more — will be able to dent them. To defeat a dicey problem like this, players must use their resources to their advantage:

- The +initiative move of “reading a situation” first can give a player +1 forward to rolls. This move also encourages the player to ask probative questions about what’s going. When things are this serious, encourage your player to investigate.
- Players can assist one another, giving each other +1 to their rolls. Some playbooks have moves that can give even greater assist bonuses.
- Non-player-characters and better circumstances can provide assist bonuses or better situations. (Did our heroes learn the layout of the land? Did they gain support from allies? Did they do research on other clues?)
- Story points and support points can be spent to add bonuses to a previous roll (a “back” bonus), to push that total to 13 or more.
- Some rolls have results that give boosts to later rolls. (All combat moves have an option “take +3 forward to your next attack”; katanas and other weapons with the “Aim” special have the option “miss on this attack but take +6 forward to the next attack”, etc.)

- A grand conflict is the time for sacrifices. Marginal rolls that only score 10, 11, or 12 are excellent candidates for *hard bargains*: when the player gets what they want but at a cost. *Usagi’s* stories are full of examples: taking a hit from a sword to give another hit right back; throwing one’s weapon away because getting a hit right now is more important than being disarmed later; suffering injury, exhaustion, or other setback; etc. You and your fellow players should use these near-misses as an opportunity for dramatic role-play.



Grouping Conflicts Together

Sometimes, a conflict in the story is a bunch of little things all at once. (In the *Usagi* stories, our hero could easily dispatch one common warrior...but two dozen at once? The slopes and cliffs of the Chrysanthemum Pass might not be that difficult on their own, but there's many of them and any mistake could be fatefully dangerous. Sure, we might convince one local to help us, but all of them? Etc.)

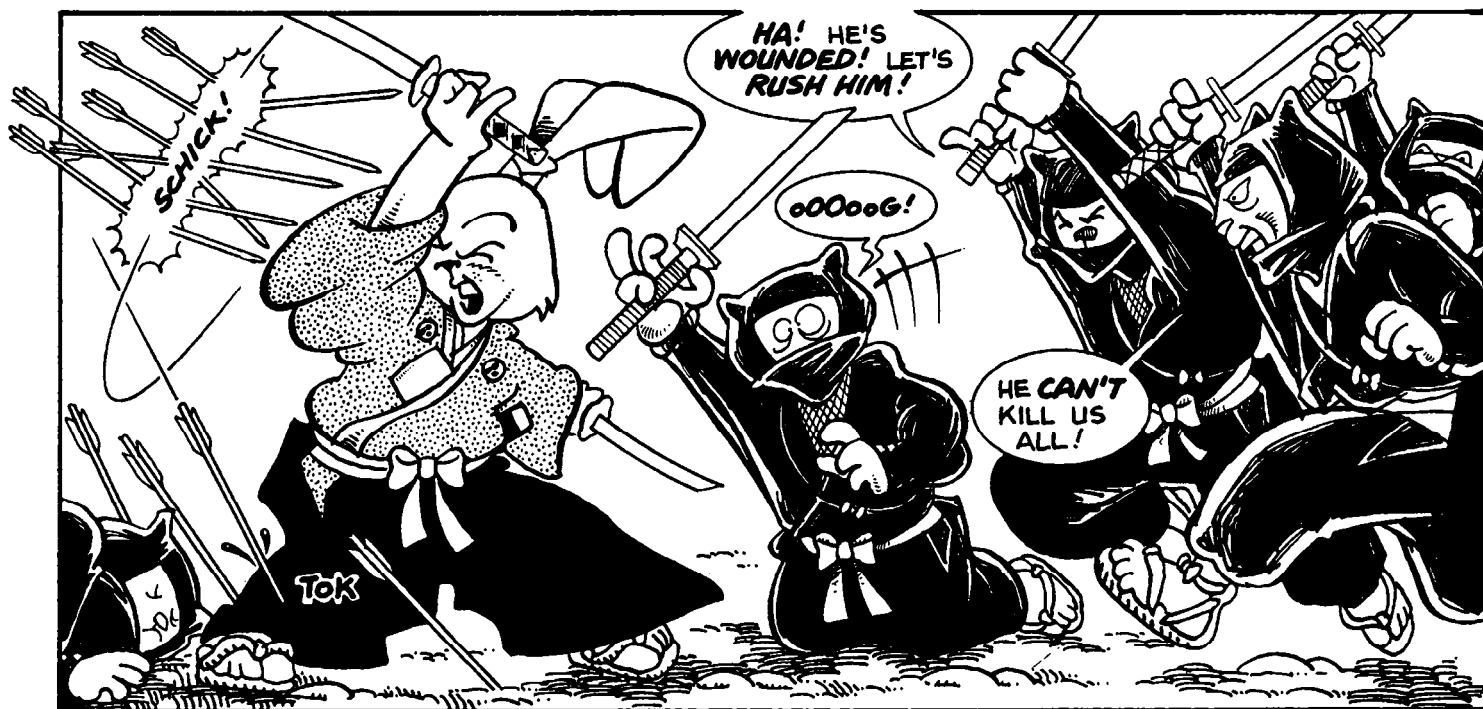
If the conflicts are very similar, consider upgrading several weak challenges into one strong one, or several strong into one grand one. If the players fall short, you can use the compromise rule (page 18): the player defeats some of the weak challenges but not others. (We have the combat system set up where military-grade weapons like the katana can destroy a group of weak combatants with a single strong result.)

Working as a team to defeat challenges

Sometimes you'll have a challenge that everyone must face. (Everyone must climb the wall to escape; everyone has been arrested and must convince the magistrate of their innocence, etc.) Some of your players may pass this challenge but not others.

Remember that characters may have +story points to help themselves and +support points that can help each other. (Remind the players how these points can give bonuses to bad rolls that they've already made.)

As a kind of compromise, you can let a character who over-achieves give a bonus to someone who didn't quite make it. (If swimming across the water was a weak challenge, but Hajime still missed it, you could let Hatsuko bail them out with their strong result.)



Long-Term Conflicts: Fronts with Points

As the MC, if you're more experienced with role-playing games, you can try to move onto a front, a challenge that requires multiple moves to defeat it. (A boss villain might take multiple hits; a burning fire might take multiple buckets to put it out; a magical ritual might require several rounds of sorcery; a marathon needs several sprints; etc.)

First, you decide upon a total of points needed to defeat the goal.

- **Minor front**
(takes about three moves to defeat):
5 points.
- **Major front**
(takes about five moves to defeat):
9 points
- **Extreme front**
(takes about a dozen moves to defeat):
20 points

Each time a player rolls to defeat the front, their result reduces its point total:

- Miss result (up to 6): no progress
- Weak result (7 to 9): -1 point
- Strong result (10 to 12): -3 points
- Grand result (13 or more): -6 points

For example, the village might be on fire. You want this to be a major issue to deal with, so you decide that the front begins with 9 points. You then ask your players how they will put it out. (One might use +initiative to assess the damage, or +negotiation to start a bucket brigade, or +righteousness to brave the flames and rescue people, or +schooling to use

proper fire-breaking techniques, or maybe other abilities as you and your fellow players decide.)

As the MC, you can make fighting a front more exciting if you offer *hard bargains*, as per page 17: offer the player an opportunity to reduce the front's total even more but suffer in the process. (For a roll of 7-9, you might tell a fire-fighter that he could play it safe and just put out 1 point worth of fire ... or they could rush into a blaze to rescue someone, reducing the front by 3 but also suffering 1 setback from the burns.) Always look for ways to turn mechanical die-rolls into exciting, risky choices for your players.

A staple of role-playing games is the *boss fight* — the villain who requires an entire party to take them out. Instead of playing out a boss villain as a single grand challenge, you can try playing them as points, instead. Can our heroes defeat them before the villain's responses take them out?

Creating a sense of urgency: Deadlines and Countdowns

As the MC, you may run into a problem where the players lose focus on the main story-line. It's okay to let players pursue what interests them — the game is about building up and having fun, after all. But if the players lag too much, any sense of drama can be lost because there's nothing at stake and there's no urgency. Sometimes, you need to establish a clear *deadline*. (A villain might issue a threat of "If the letter with the *daimyo's* confession is not brought to me by sunrise, I will kill this peasant and his entire family!") Sometimes the deadline is looming but it isn't obvious. (As the weather worsens, it's not a question of "if the town will flood", but "when" — we've no time to waste!)



Sometimes it's not a specific date or time that our heroes must worry about, but whether the villains will finish their task before the heroes can stop them. (If Ryoko and the other agents can get the Grasscutter sword delivered to Lord Kotetsu, then their plan to overthrow the Shogun will succeed!) A **countdown** is the foil to a challenge; our heroes are only given a limited number of scenes or moves to deal with the challenge. (Our heroes have an extreme challenge to overcome: destroy Lord Tamakuro's storehouse of weapons before he can use it to start a war. To make things more tense, our heroes are given only 15 scenes before support arrives. Or it's the night of *Hyakki Yako*, the parade of demons, and if their ritual isn't stopped,

they will enslave the world; our heroes only have to inflict a major challenge's worth of damage, but if they can't do it in ten moves, the world will fall to evil! Etc.) Note: time pressure is only effective if the players are *aware* that they have limited time! Give your players ample notice that they must act urgently. (Non-player-characters could warn of the rising waterline. Demons could taunt our heroes that their fate is inevitable. Notify a player that they've stumbled across a legendary artifact and then have villains show up and try to take it away, etc.)

A simple way to add urgency to almost any story-line is with a *rivalry* — a non-player-character shows up to attempt to do the same thing. (Our heroes might not have been in a hurry to capture the rogue samurai... but that was before they found out that Inukai is after the same bounty that they are!) The purpose of a rivalry isn't to show up the player-characters; as the MC, you have infinite resources and the power to bend the rules, so that's hardly fair. Play the rival as less able than the players but more than capable of finishing this goal. No one likes to lose, and many players can be spurred into action when they realize that some other character might steal their thunder.

Story Beats = Story Points: The Three-Act Structure

This game is set up so that players will want to drive the story forward to get more story points. The One thing that will drive our heroes forward to get more story points. (The attribute that adds to combat rolls *is* +story, after all!)

As the MC, you need to give out story points to the players, spread over the session. One path to follow is the three-act structure:

Introduction: reset points to zero story points, zero setback points, and 1 support point; remove all impairments.

It's a good idea to start the game session by having each player describe their character: their name, species, playbook, and motto. This introduction helps get everyone into character.

After this short introduction, all players reset their character's points to zero story points, zero setback points, and 1 support point. Tell all players to remove any impairments they still have from the previous session, too.

1st Act: **Exposition**, then +1 story point

After introductions the MC describes the setup for the action and introduces a conflict that needs to be solved.

If there is a combat at this point, it's almost certainly against weak opponents. These enemies might be lower-ranking members of a larger gang. (Because our players don't have any story points yet, they'll only be rolling two dice, with no adds, with their combat moves.)

2nd Act: **Rising Action**, then +1 story point

Our heroes investigate the conflict, learning details about it, possibly interacting with it.

Players might want to use this time to take care of other side business (recovery, research, shopping, maintenance, etc.). See *Downtime*, on page 171.

The MC may introduce a major villain at this point, not as a confrontation but as a way for the players to learn more about what's going on. (Some players may be hesitant to engage in combat, with only +1 in their story-point pool.)

After a few more scenes are resolved, the MC gives +1 story point to all players.

3rd Act: **Leadup to Climax**, then +1 story point

Our heroes work to bring the story to a resolution. There may be a showdown with the villain, either because the villain has come after the players or because the players are going after the villain.

Just before you play out this climax, the MC should give out +1 story point to all players. This should be at least the third point that the player-characters receive, so they have a chance to have +3 for this climax.

Climax and Resolution

The final confrontation might be an action-packed battle, perhaps against a major villain, or a mass of warriors, or both! A climax could also be a resolution of finally reaching an objective, overcoming hardship and adversity, or convincing others to go along with your plans.

The climax to the story is when its appropriate for grand challenges appear in the story.

When the action heats up, you should be watching your players carefully. Make sure everyone gets a chance to do something, because this final resolution is their last chance to shine.

How was the game: **Debriefing**

After the final encounter is done, the game session is over. We recommend spending a few minutes to *debrief* your players about how the game went.

- Does anyone have any questions about the rules of the game? Did all the moves and special abilities work the way players thought they would?
- For future games, what changes or implementations could we make that would make the game better?

- Does anyone want to change their character? (Attribute points can be moved around, as long as the total remains +1 and no single attribute is higher than +2. Players can also add, change, or remove quirks.)
- Are there any variant rules that we want to start using? (Or stop using, for that matter.)

The variant rule of upgrades (p. 193) allows characters to “level up” their characters to enhance their abilities. Upgrades improve players rolls on many types of abilities, such as social situations or combat resolution. Upgrades also complicate the game, which might not be fun for everyone involved. The debriefing is a good time to discuss changes to the game, when the experience is fresh in everyone’s minds, and players are keen to find ways to improve their characters.

Casual Gaming & Dicey One-Shots: **Downtime**

Not everything in your game must be played out, move by move. Between the important events of the story, when our heroes get back to town, to temple, or whatever passes for their base of operations, players may want their characters to bind their wounds, to maintain their weapons, to research information, or otherwise to take care of details that have some story impact but aren’t so complicated that they must have every step gamed out. *Downtime* can be a character-building exercise in any game.

Downtime activities are the sorts of things that a story might mention as a caption with a footnote, might include a bit of dialogue from a character referencing a past event, or maybe wouldn’t even mention at all. They’re certainly not anything that would be challenging for reasonable, able-bodied characters to do.

Here are some examples of downtime activities:

- Get a meal and a rest at a proper establishment
- Replace missing ammunition (arrows, shuriken, etc.)
- Draw and sheath one's katana a thousand times, to maintain the discipline of *iaijitsu*
- Pray or meditate at a shrine

For a variant rule that can add more complications to your story's downtime, see "Downtime Bonuses" on page 234.

The Drama of the Combat Mood

The world of Usagi is full of action and adventure, and a fair amount of it is violent combat. As the MC, you'll want encounters with combat to be exciting but also to be building upon the story.

While combat is important to both role-playing games and to the stories of *Usagi Yojimbo*, it's always more important that everyone is having fun. All conflicts in your game should be fair: players should understand the risks and strategies of the situations their characters are in. No one wants to "lose" because they didn't know what was going on.



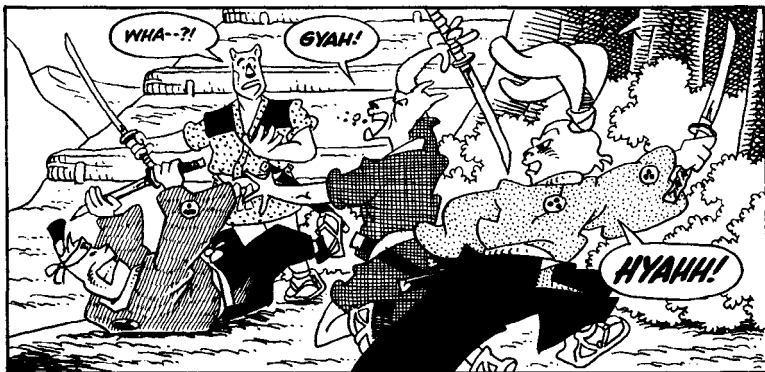
Going 'Round the table so everyone gets a turn

When the game is in a casual mood, we can be informal about the order of actions. One character might make several moves to go places, to negotiate deals, to pick up things, etc. in just a few minutes of time.

When the game is in a combat mood, lives are on the line, we recommend that the MC gives each player a single turn before they have their non-player-characters take theirs — a combat round.

When the tension of the story ratchets up to violence, some players may not realize that they can act unless you, the MC, call upon them and ask what they're doing. Some players will be intimidated by combat; they don't want to make a wrong choice and then die! It's okay if one or more players want to pass, if they don't have anything to do in this combat.

Some player-characters will have moves that are better for assisting the samurai and other warriors — to give them bonuses to go forwards. You should let your players take their turns in whatever order that they want. Just don't let the game stall; if the players can't make up their mind who should act next, it's up to you, the MC, to call on someone to take a turn.



Where is everyone? Positions

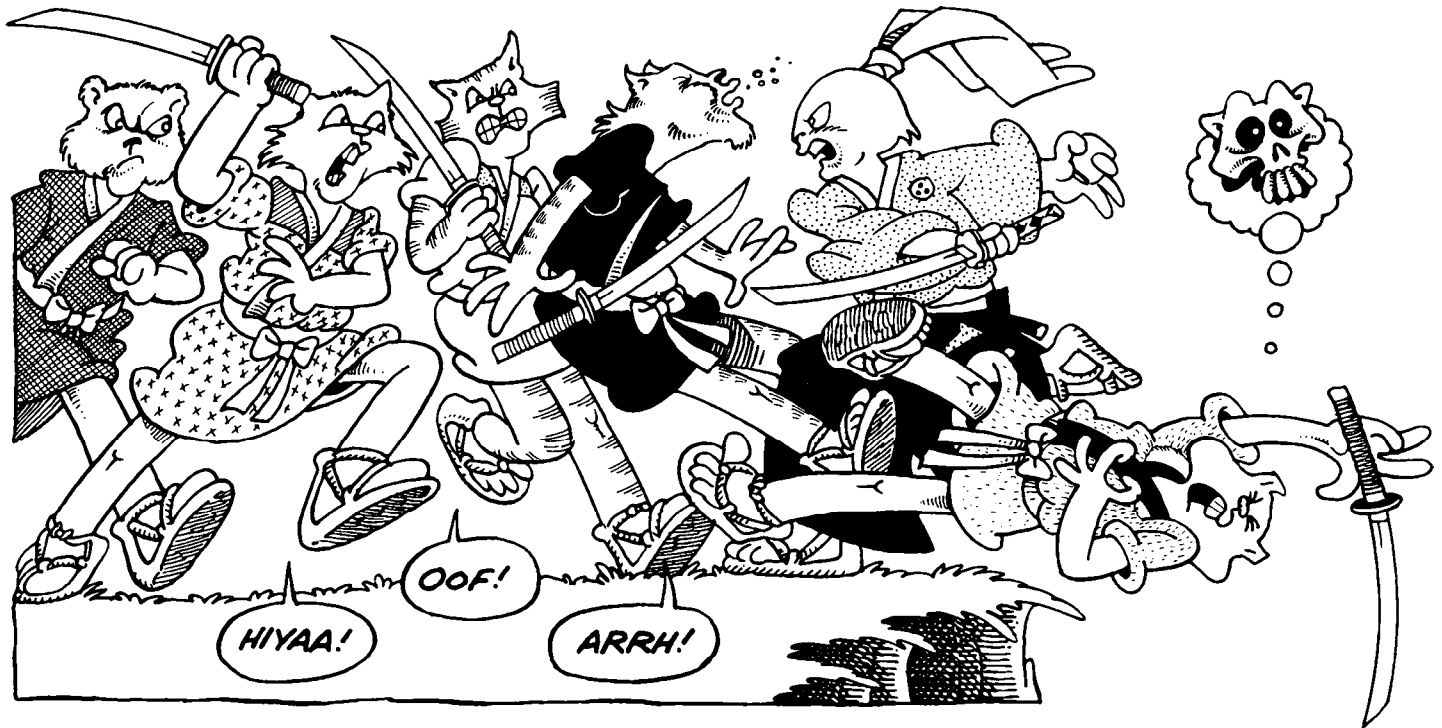
When the mood of the game is casual, we can be informal about where characters are standing. But when people are trying to kill each other, where you are and what you're doing becomes very important.

Some groups will prefer precise, tactical maps to show where everyone is. Other groups prefer a "theater of the mind" approach, where player-characters are wherever they need to be to do what they want. As with all rules, your group should strike a balance of detail and description that works best.

Position in combat can be very important because no one wants their character to get killed because they didn't know they were in harm's way! An important part of *Usagi's* world, where people can be killed with a single stroke of the play, is where brave heroes stand in between the villains who would cause harm.

- *Exposed* characters are standing in the open, vulnerable to attack. You have the worst defenses, and most enemies will prioritize attacking you before other characters. You may choose an exposed position if you want your foes to attack you before they attack your friends. You might become exposed from a move that you made. If you were engaged, ambushed, or otherwise at a disadvantage, you may have started the fight exposed.

Samurai characters will often in front, exposed to danger to protect other characters. Usually, an exposed character may engage a up to three enemies, preventing them from attacking anyone else.



- **Flanking** characters are participating in the fight, but they're not up front and as vulnerable as the exposed characters. They will be striking from the sides, or maybe in the back of the line using ranged weapons or offering support.

Commoner and criminal characters may be assisting in the battle, flanking but not exposed to as much danger as those in the front-line. Characters who are wounded may fall back from the exposed front to the flanking sidelines. While a flanking character is participating in the fight, they aren't preventing enemies from engaging other characters.

- **Covered** characters are hanging back, or behind some brush or a doorframe, or are otherwise much further away from a fight than flanking characters. Most enemies will have to engage the exposed and flanking characters before they can engage you. If *you* decide to use a combat move, you will move to a flanking position and then make your move. (You will be giving up your cover.)

Supporting characters, who don't want to get hurt, will often move to the rear, under cover. Ninja characters can get special bonuses to their combat moves if they started their turn under cover, and their unique weapon techniques will let them strike at their enemies and then return to the safety of cover afterwards, often unseen.

- Characters who are *out of combat* are not participating in this fight. They may have been incapacitated or captured. Maybe they were here and then fled the scene. Or maybe our heroes have been split up, and only some of them are in this combat and others are far away. Characters who are out of the combat do not take turns during the combat mood.

Some player-characters may choose to flee from a combat. (Maybe they have setbacks or impairments that put them at great risk; or perhaps this fight is a needless and dangerous distraction from the real mission.)

Every combat should be different and exciting. Describe the terrain, the features, the weather, the lighting. As the MC, you may decide that some positions are possible, and others aren't. (The edge of a bare cliff might leave everyone exposed. A night-time brawl in the deep forest might be so dark and so dense that everyone is covered, etc.)



Setting up challenges for the players

Now that we've got the frameworks set up, let's show you the fronts that you can use to challenge your players.

A lone, weak enemy attacks a player-character

This sort of encounter probably shouldn't come up too much. Most player-characters are far too powerful. As the MC, you may choose to play out such a combat if a player is alone and wounded. Or you might be putting a twist in the story, that players shouldn't be going to combat as their first move all the time.

Dodge the attack:
roll +initiative.

up to 6 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback
7 or more = you avoid the attack.

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback
up to 9 = if the enemy has low morale and no leader, they will back off; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback
10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy:
roll +righteousness.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback
7 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon:
roll your attack move and apply results.

No hits = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point.
Weak, strong, grand hit = Eliminate the enemy before they can get to you.
Weapon's special = do what the text says.

Make something up!
MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 6 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.
up to 9 = It only works if something if circumstances are in your favor or you make a hard bargain
10 or more = It worked!

A group of weak enemies attacks a player-character

All too often in the *Usagi* stories, our heroes are outnumbered, and a wave of blades descends upon them. A group is two to six enemies of the same power level. Usually, groups will break up into even numbers and engage the exposed characters first. A player-character that is *exposed* to danger can force up to three enemies to engage them first; a larger group may break up into smaller groups if there's someone else to attack.

Dodge the attack:
roll +initiative.

up to 6 = you are hit by at least one of the enemies and suffer 1 setback
up to 9 = you must flee the scene or have some story effect in your favor. (Are you at range? Could you flee the scene? Could you duck behind cover or into a building? Be creative!) If you can't find a reason in the story, you are hit and suffer 1 setback.
10 or more = you avoid all enemies now.

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback point
up to 9 = One or more of the enemies (about half) will back off to consider what you say... but the others will hit you; you suffer 1 setback point
10 or more = all the enemies back off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy:
roll +righteousness.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, you are hit; suffer 1 setback
up to 9 = One or more of the enemies (about half) will flee, escape, or otherwise leave the fight... but the others will hit you; you suffer 1 setback point.
10 or more = One or more of the enemies (about half) will flee; the rest back off and do not hit you

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon:
roll your attack move and apply results.

No hits = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point.
Weak, strong, or grand hit = Eliminate one enemy, but the rest hit you; suffer 1 setback
Weapon's special = do what the text says; after that, if even a single enemy survives to strike at you, you will be hit and suffer 1 setback

Make something up!
MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 6 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.
up to 9 = It works on one of the enemies but not the rest
10 or more = It only works if something if circumstances are in your favor or you make a hard bargain; they have the advantage of numbers

A lone, strong enemy attacks a player-character

Hardened criminals, rogue samurai, and terrible monsters can be a cut above the nameless rabble that would threaten our heroes. A strong opponent is often the leader of many weak enemies; they will often order their minions to move in to soften up the heroes before they put themselves at risk. As the MC, consider declaring most of your named “bad guys” to be strong enemies.

Dodge the attack: roll +initiative.	up to 6 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback up to 9 = Ask another character to deal with this attacker; otherwise you are hit and suffer 1 setback 10 or more = you avoid the attack
Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.	up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback up to 9 = if you have an overwhelming reason for them to leave you alone, they will; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback 10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said
Threaten or intimidate the enemy: roll +righteousness.	up to 9 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback 10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said
Counter-attack with appropriate weapon: roll your attack move and apply results.	No hit or weak hit = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point. Strong or grand hit = Eliminate the enemy before they can get to you. Weapon's special = do what the text says.
Make something up! MC and PCs discuss what to roll.	up to 9 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback. up to 12 = It only works if something if circumstances are in your favor or you make a hard bargain 13 or more = It worked!

A group of strong enemies attacks a player-character

A group of weak enemies is a threat to a typical hero; a group of strong enemies can easily overwhelm them. As the MC, you shouldn't be setting up stories with enemies at this level of power on a whim; player-characters are more than likely to be defeated by a force of this size. (If you're playing the game with the *upgrades* rule, page 193, then your player-characters might have enough combat upgrades to take on this small army.)

Dodge the attack:
roll +initiative.

up to 9 = you are hit by at least one of the enemies and suffer 1 setback
up to 12 = you must flee the scene or have some story effect in your favor. (Are you at range? Could you flee the scene? Could you duck behind cover or into a building? Be creative!) If you can't find a reason in the story, you are hit and suffer 1 setback.
13 or more = you avoid all enemies now.

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 9 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback point
up to 12 = One or more of the enemies (about half) will back off to consider what you say... but the others will hit you; you suffer 1 setback point
13 or more = all the enemies back off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy:
roll +righteousness.

up to 9 = it doesn't work, you are hit; suffer 1 setback
up to 12 = One or more of the enemies (about half) will flee, escape, or otherwise leave the fight... but the others will hit you; you suffer 1 setback point.
13 or more = One or more of the enemies (about half) will flee; the rest back off and you are missed.

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon:
roll your attack move and apply results.

No hit or weak hit = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point.
Strong or grand hit = Eliminate one enemy, but the rest hit you; suffer 1 setback
Weapon's unique choice = do what the text says; after that, if even a single enemy survives and can strike at you, you will be hit and suffer 1 setback

Make something up!
MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 9 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.
up to 10 = It works on one of the enemies but not the rest
13 or more = It only works if something if circumstances are in your favor or you make a hard bargain; they have the advantage of numbers

A lone, grand enemy attacks a player-character.

Enemies of this strength should be rare. They can only be hurt on rolls of 13 or better, which will be difficult to achieve. Players will have to spend a lot of time gaining story points and bonuses to their rolls to be able to defeat this enemy in combat. A grand enemy makes for a good climactic encounter to finish a story arc.

Dodge the attack: roll +initiative.

up to 9 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback

up to 12 = Ask another character to deal with this attacker; otherwise you are hit and suffer 1 setback

13 or more = you avoid the attack

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback

up to 9 = the grand enemy makes a counter-demand; either agree to this or suffer 1 setback
up to 12 = if you have an overwhelming reason for them to leave you alone, they will; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback

13 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy: roll +righteousness.

up to 12 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback

13 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon: roll your attack move and apply results.

No hit = your counter fails, and you are hit for 2 setback points

Weak hit = Your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback.

Strong hit = a hard bargain! Choose one: your attack misses and you are hit for 1 setback but you take +6 forward on your next attack vs. this foe ... Or, miss completely but suffer no setback at all

Grand hit = The enemy is defeated!

Weapon's special = do what the text says; if your result doesn't defeat this foe, you suffer 1 setback

Make something up! MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 9 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.

up to 12 = It only works if something if circumstances are in your favor or you make a hard bargain. Grand enemies will want grand concessions.

13 or more = It worked... for now.

A strong enemy as a minor front (5 points)

As presented in the rules, enemies can go down with a single lucky hit, or by a hit that's boosted with a lot of bonuses. If you want an enemy that feels more like a typical "boss fight", you can set up your climactic foe as a point challenge (as per page 168). Instead of a single hit, this enemy must suffer multiple assaults, reducing its challenge total from 5 to zero, before they are defeated.

Dodge the attack:

roll +initiative.

up to 6 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback

up to 9 = Ask another character to deal with this attacker; otherwise you are hit and suffer 1 setback

up to 12 = you avoid the attack

13 or more = you avoid the attack, and the enemy loses 1 point

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback

up to 9 = if you have an overwhelming reason for them to leave you alone, they will; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback

10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy:

roll +righteousness.

up to 9 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback

10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said; if the front is 5 or more, they will probably attack again

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon: roll your attack move and apply results.

No hit = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point.

Weak hit = you reduce the front by -1 and you are hit for 1 setback point.

Strong hit = you reduce the front by -3

Grand hit = you reduce the front to zero. Victory!

Weapon's special = do what the text says. If that result doesn't include a strong hit or a grand hit, you suffer 1 setback point

Make something up!

MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 9 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.

up to 12 = If the front has 3 or more points remaining, reduce the front by -1 but this doesn't work. If the total is 2 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain

13 or more = It worked!

A strong enemy as a major front (9 points)

What is sometimes called a “boss fight”, a point-challenge enemy starts with a total of 9 points. Each player-character will have to take turns trying to take it down. When its challenge total is drained to zero or below, the enemy is defeated. The nature of the defeat depends on how they were beaten: if it was because of violence, then they may be killed; if it was because of other reasons, they may be subdued, they may flee the scene, they might surrender, or something else appropriate.

Dodge the attack:
roll +initiative.

up to 6 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback

up to 9 = Ask another character to deal with this attacker; otherwise you are hit and suffer 1 setback

up to 12 = you avoid the attack

13 or more = you avoid the attack, and the enemy loses 1 point

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback

up to 9 = if you have an overwhelming reason for them to leave you alone, they will; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback

10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy:
roll +righteousness.

up to 9 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback

10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said; if its challenge total is 5 or more, it will probably attack again

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon:
roll your attack move and apply results.

No hit = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point.

Weak hit = you reduce the front by -1 and you are hit for 1 setback point.

Strong hit = you reduce the front by -3

Grand hit = you reduce the front by -6

Weapon's special = do what the text says. If that result doesn't include a strong hit or a grand hit, you suffer 1 setback point

Make something up!
MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 9 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.

up to 12 = If the front has 5 or more points remaining, reduce the front by -1 but this doesn't work. If the front is 4 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain

13 or more = If the front has 5 or more points remaining, reduce the front by -3 but this doesn't work. If the total is 4 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain

A grand enemy as a major front (9 points)

Like the strong challenge above, only much more punishing. A typical group of players shouldn't think of taking this on until they've received three or more story points. (Or if they have a lot of upgrades, if the variant rule from page 193 is in play.)

Dodge the attack:
roll +initiative.

up to 9 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback
up to 12 = Ask another character to deal with this attacker; otherwise you are hit and suffer 1 setback
13 or more = you avoid the attack

Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.

up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback
up to 9 = the grand enemy makes a counter-demand; either agree to this or suffer 1 setback
up to 12 = if you have an overwhelming reason for them to leave you alone, they will; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback
13 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Threaten or intimidate the enemy:
roll +righteousness.

up to 12 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback
13 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said

Counter-attack with appropriate weapon:
roll your attack move and apply results.

No hit = your counter fails, and you are hit for 2 setback points
Weak hit = Your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback.
Strong hit = a hard bargain! Choose one:
• Reduce the front's total by -3 but you are hit for 1 setback
• Miss completely and reduce the front's total by -1
Grand hit = Reduce the front's total by -6
Weapon's special = do what the text says; if your result doesn't defeat this foe, you suffer 1 setback

Make something up!
MC and PCs discuss what to roll.

up to 9 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback.
up to 12 = You suffer 1 setback. If the front has 5 or more points remaining in its challenge total, reduce the total by -1 but this doesn't work. If the total is 4 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain
13 or more = If the front has 5 or more points remaining in its total, reduce the total by -3 but this doesn't work. If the total is 4 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain

A weak enemy as an extreme front (20 points)

So you really want to open the gates and unleash hell? This sort of challenge is the fight on the battlefield, the chaos of uncountable foes all swarming around you. A weak, extreme challenge is a test of endurance: it's not especially difficult, but unlucky heroes might be worn out before it's over.

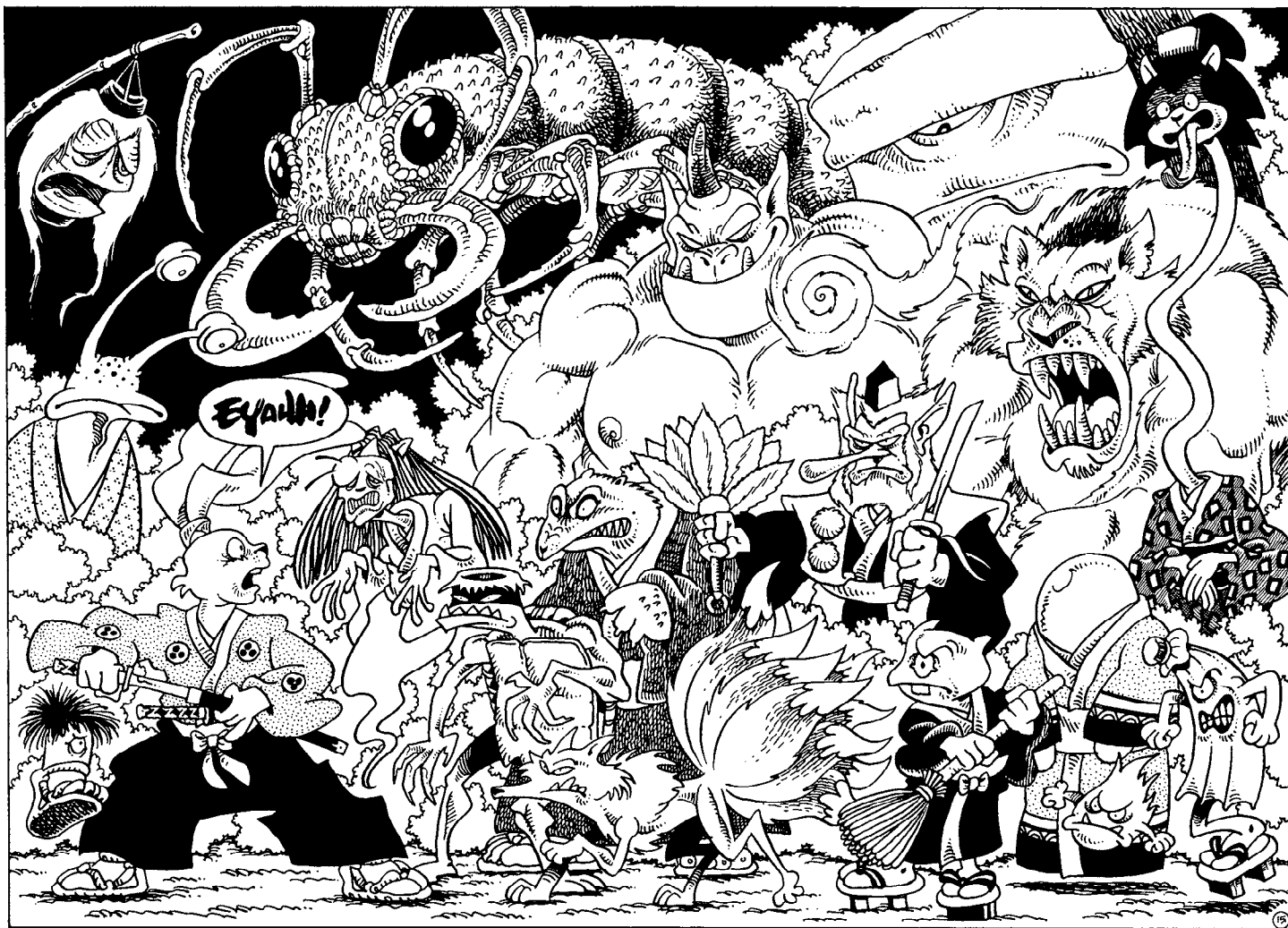
Dodge the attacks: roll +initiative.	up to 6 = you are hit and suffer 1 setback up to 9 = Ask another character to deal with this attacker; otherwise you are hit and suffer 1 setback up to 12 = you avoid the attack 13 or more = you avoid the attack, and the enemy loses 1 point
Say something to convince the enemy to back off: roll +negotiation.	up to 6 = it doesn't work, the enemy hits you; suffer 1 setback up to 9 = Reduce the front's total by -1. If you have an overwhelming reason for them to leave you alone, they will; otherwise they hit you and you take 1 setback 10 or more = the enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said; reduce front's total by -3
Threaten or intimidate the enemy: roll +righteousness.	up to 9 = it doesn't work, the enemy sneers at you and strikes; suffer 1 setback 10 or more = Reduce the enemy's total challenge total by -1. The enemy backs off and will deeply consider what you said; if its challenge total is 7 or less, they will flee.
Counter-attack with appropriate weapon: roll your attack move and apply results.	No hit = your counter fails and you are hit for 1 setback point. Weak hit = you reduce the front's total by -1 Strong hit = you reduce the front's total by -3 Grand hit = you reduce the front's total by -6 Weapon's special = do what the text says.
Make something up! MC and PCs discuss what to roll.	up to 6 = It doesn't work, and you suffer 1 setback. up to 9 = Reduce the front's total by -1. If the front's total is now 8 or more, this doesn't work. If the total is 7 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain up to 12 = Reduce the front's total by -3. If the front's total is now 8 or more, this doesn't work. If the total is 7 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain 13 or more = Reduce the front's total by -1. If the front's total is now 8 or more, this doesn't work. If the total is 7 or less, then this might work, though it might require compromise or a hard bargain

Other challenges

There's all kinds of ways to challenge your players.

You can look to the *Usagi* stories for ideas. Here's a few ideas to get you started:

- **The Thousand-Mile Road:** Our heroes must get from one place to another. They may be escorts for an important non-player character. Or they may be couriers for a letter, a gift, or other item. Or they may be on their way to fetch something and to take it somewhere else.
- **The Big Show:** our heroes must prepare some kind of presentation for an audience. (A festival? A temple ceremony? A theater play? A wedding?) Materials must be gathered, lines must be rehearsed, and there may be jealous rivals that must be prevented from sabotaging the show.
- **The Competition:** It's a duel, a race, a cooking contest, a sumo-wrestling match, or other event where there are judges, there are winners, and there are losers. (And possibly, there are cheaters.) How will our heroes prepare? What conspires against them? And what sort of shenanigans are going on around the competition?
- **The Mystery:** It could be an abandoned temple, or a darker patch of the forest, or something else that is just too strange for most people to want to bother with. But when things get a little too strange, our heroes must find out what's going on, once and for all.
- **The Frame-Up:** One of our heroes is accused of doing something that they didn't do. It's easy to blame stuff on the itinerant strangers that just wandered into town, after all. Or is this a simple case of mistaken identity? Proving your innocence might be tricky, because you can't get caught using under-handed methods.
- **The Call to Action:** Someone needs your help! They could be too poor to pay their debts. Or their seaweed-farming boats have been sabotaged. Maybe they need help with something that's embarrassing or illegal, such as securing their foreign goods shipped from overseas. Since our heroes are strangers to this town, they can take risks because they don't have any standing to lose from this community.
- **World Building:** Does a player-character have a family, friend, or other character in their back-story? Is there a non-player character from a previous adventure who still has unresolved issues? It's always good to use the lore of your own game; the continuity of recurring characters and themes will make your stories feel like a continuing saga of your own making.
- **The Aftermath:** Alas, not every story has a happy ending. Maybe there's an adventure where our heroes didn't meet the deadline, or where one die roll just wasn't high enough to prevent a tragedy. Wait a game session or two, then bring back the survivors of a previous adventure. What happened to them? Is it too late for our heroes to redeem themselves?



SUPERNATURAL MONSTERS

The Japanese word *yōkai* translates loosely as “bewitching mystery” and is a catch-all term for ghosts, spirits, demons, and other creatures of paranormal origin.

Japanese folklore goes back hundreds of years, with many different versions. The *Usagi* stories have their own interpretations, too. And if there's one thing that's consistent about monsters, it's that they're inconsistent. One demon might be able to survive dismemberment and to reattach its lost limbs... another might shoot deadly poisoned needles... a third might have another shape it can shift into ... while still another might have dozens of forms, even those of close friends. The versions we present here are biased towards their portrayals in the *Usagi* stories, with an emphasis on spookiness for a young-adult audience.

The supernatural creatures of *Usagi's* worlds aren't to be trifled with. They are clever, motivated, and resourceful. They often seek to avoid combat, especially against trained warriors. The most evil among them will use trickery, stealth, and lies to get what they want.

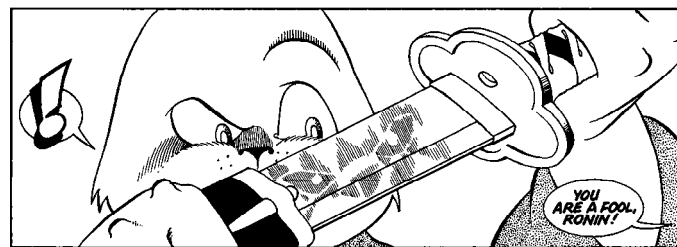
Supernatural creatures may or may not be formidable combatants. What makes them extremely dangerous are their supernatural powers to deceive others, to paralyze them with fear, or to control others' minds or bodies to make them do their bidding.

Not all supernatural creatures are inherently evil. In the "Kyuri" story, Usagi met a family of *kappa* that had no interest in drowning innocent victims; they just wanted to be left alone. Other haunts might be reformed, too.

On the other hand, sometimes terrible people who cause great evil in this world become supernatural monsters, themselves. (In one story, The Goblin of Adachigahara was a former soldier whose shame and malfeasance warped his body and caused him to become a flesh-eating cannibal.)

Ao Bōzu (One-eyed Blue Monk)

A bizarre creature of folk-lore, the Blue Monk appears resembles a house-keeping priest, except their hide is colored blue and they only have one eye. They may be found in abandoned buildings (which, after the Warring-States era, are in some abundance.) They are said to threaten people at night or to abduct children who don't come after dark.



Bakeneko (Feline Shapeshifter)

Cat monsters come in a variety of sizes, from the size of a typical humanoid to bigger than a horse. They are tricky shape-shifters who may have a single form, but some may be able to read minds to appear as loved ones or as innocents in need of help. They are almost always evil, spreading curses, diseases, and death. The worst of them can start fires, such as with the tip of their tail or by hurling balls of flame.

Chōchin-Obake (Lantern Ghost)

It is said that a paper lantern is left out for too long, it can turn into a monster with a gaping mouth or lolling tongue. The *chōchin-obake* is mostly harmless; it can give people quite a scare. What makes the lantern ghost dangerous is that it's often in the company of *other* dangerous creatures. More than one, a powerful *yokai* has changed shape to impersonate a "harmless" lantern ghost.

Ippondatara (One-Footed Monster)

A bizarre monster that is either just a leg or a foot, with only one eye. It may or may not have arms. It might be the ghost of someone who was maimed in real life, or maybe it's a manifestation of forest spirits. Smaller ones are the size of a regular foot, and they are no great threat by themselves. Larger ones may have a footprint large enough to squash a person.

Kami

There is no direct translation for the word *kami*. The 6th-century book *Kojiki* describes them as “any being whatsoever which possesses some eminent quality out of the ordinary”. *Kami* can be anything from a spirit of the household to a divine god. Belief in *kami* comes from the Shinto religion, popular throughout Japan; *musubi* (the interconnecting energy of the universe) is expressed within all things. These powers cannot normally be seen by mortals as they inhabit a world that overlaps our own (*shinkai*). Priests and sorcerers may call specific *kami* by name to help them.



Kappa (Shelled Swamp Monster)

Resembling a turtle or a lizard more than anything else, the *kappa* has a bowl-shaped head full of water. If this water is emptied out, the *kappa* will become helpless. They can survive underwater for an unknown amount of time, and they are excellent swimmers. They absolutely love the taste of cucumbers.

Many of them are quite civilized; it's rumored that it's the *kappa* who first taught medicine to the people of Japan. Some of them are not so nice, and they attack the innocent. A few of them may have supernatural powers that can paralyze people or that can force them to drown themselves.

Karakasa Kozō (Umbrella Ghost)

A monster that resembles a Chinese-style umbrella, most *karakasa kozō* are more of a nuisance than an actual threat. They delight in scaring people, often by sneaking up behind them and licking them.

Kitsune (Multi-Tailed Fox)

A popular figure in Japanese myth, the magical *kitsune* is a wild fox that has supernatural powers. They are inveterate pranksters, often assuming the forms of commoners, nobles, or priests to trick mortals. Their power for illusion is legendary — they can disguise themselves; others may give away fake money or other items; another might make a ruined hovel appear as a fantastic mansion. Some *kitsune* are honorable, and they will repay kindness or keep their promises. Others might be mean, cruel, or murderous.

Nopperabō (Faceless Monk)

This *yokai* looks like an ordinary person in all ways except one — it has no face! Its head is a smooth, featureless orb. Most of them appear just to scare people, usually in disguise as a merchant or other humble profession, only to reveal their facelessness when others get close. Some *nopperabō* are highly-skilled professionals who serve the supernatural community.

Nue (Monster)

The word *nue* defies translation, and the creature defies description. It is often described as having the head of a monkey, the body of a tanuki, the limbs of a tiger, and the tail of a snake. All accounts agree that it is evil, vicious, murderous, and formidable.



Nurikabe (Wall Monster)

A strange creature, the *nurikabe* appears as a massive wall that blocks the traveler's progress. Sometimes it can be dismissed with some common action, like tapping the ground with a stick. Other times, it blocks the way to force people to only head towards a destination. Only the most powerful forces can hope to divert or to destroy a *nurikabe*.



Ōmukade (Giant Centipede)

Regular centipedes are small, multi-legged insects. Giant centipedes are much larger. The legends have almost no limits to how big they can get: they can be as big as a person, or tall as a tower, and one legend has a centipede large enough to wrap around a mountain. They have razor-sharp mandibles with crushing force, not to mention a venomous bite. Heroes prefer to engage them at a distance, with bows and arrows.

Oni (Ogre)

The typical Japanese ogre is a hulking brute who carries a giant club. Basically the demons of folklore, *oni* can have a variety of powers: fire-breathing, paralyzing spells, flight, etc. Smaller *oni* are sometimes called “goblins”, instead.



Onibi (Ghost Light)

The dreaded “demon fire”, ghost lights are found in areas of supernatural activity. Some of them may be the spirits that have died, who seek to drain the life-force from new victims. Others may be simple haunts. People have been known to confuse ghost-light for lanterns in the distance and to wander off into the night, never to be heard from again.

Onryō (Ghost of Vengeance)

One of the most terrible of haunts is the ghost or monster that spawns from someone’s death. Some of these ghosts want to avenge some wrong done to them in life, such as being denied an honorable death. Most of them are just terrible creatures who wreak havoc on the living. They may be hunting one particular person, such as an unfaithful husband. Or they just

might be a terrible demon who attacks most anyone, delighting in destruction and death. *Onryō* can have a variety of powers such as great strength, jumping, climbing, or flight. Sometimes they can be killed normally, sometimes decapitation is required, and in very rare cases, there may be a unique supernatural method or task that must be done first. A related monster is the *hannya*, the jealous female demon.

Rokurokubi (Pulley-Neck Monster)

The *rokurokubi* looks like a normal person, most of the time... but they can stretch their neck to several stories tall. Some of this *yokai* use this ability to drink the oil from high lamps, getting drunk. *Rokurokubi* are more likely to scare people for their amusement than to engage them in violence.

Sazae-Oni (Sea Snail Monster)

A demon whose real form is a giant turban snail, the *sazae-oni* can change shape, usually into a distressed human. They have been known to lure sailors to their doom. *Sazae-oni* can walk on the surface of the sea, sometimes even dancing merrily to taunt hapless travelers to come closer.

Tanuki (Raccoon-dog monster)

Another animal turned trickster, the *tanuki* can also change shape to impersonate mortals. They are generally friendly, but some unpleasant ones have been known to attack people and to eat them.

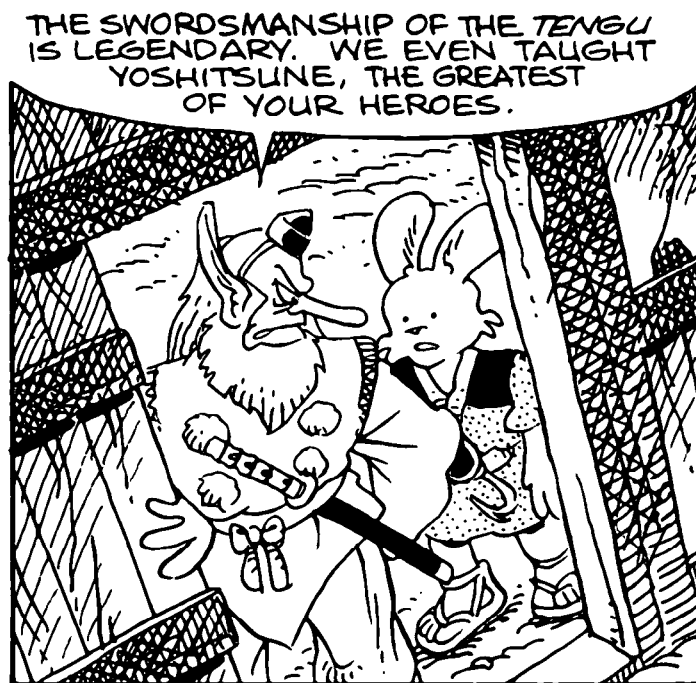
Tengu (Sword-Using Monster)

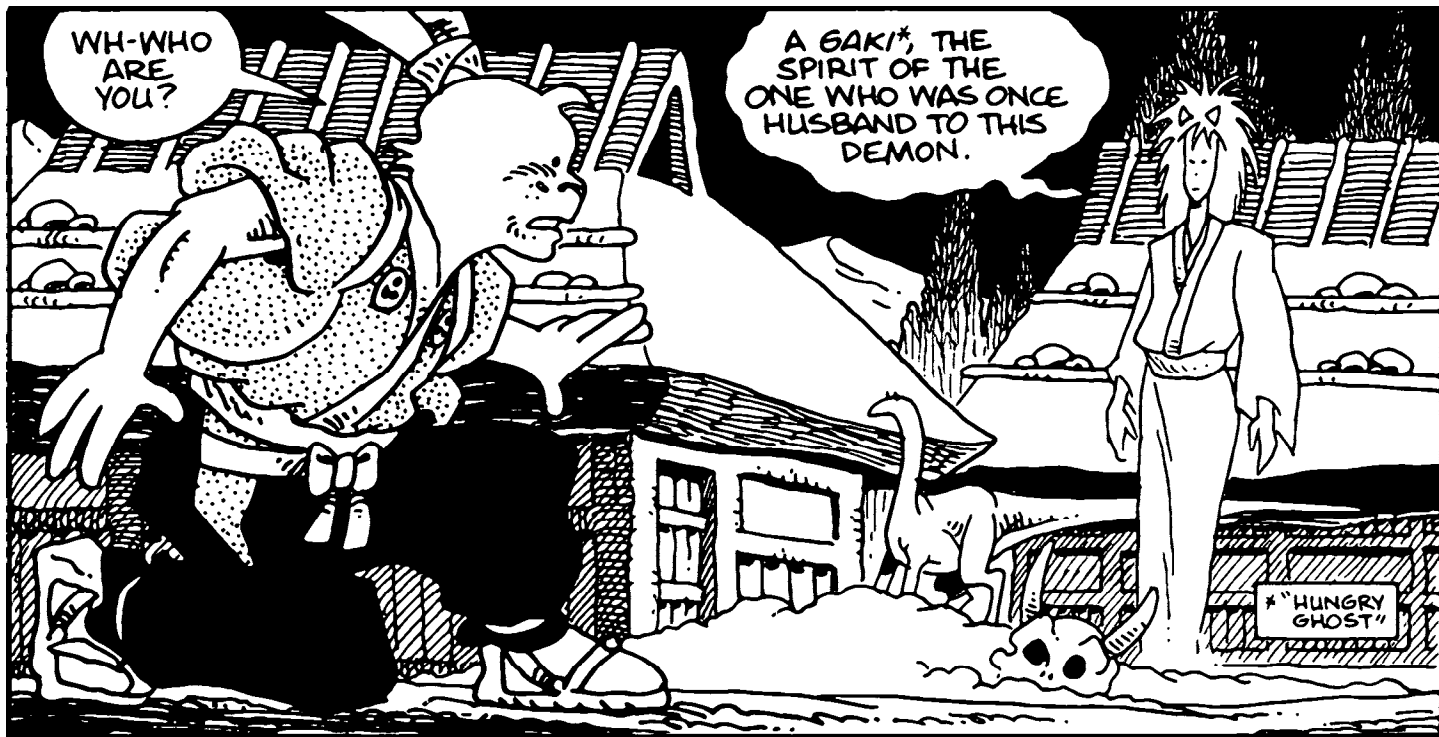
The lesser *tengu* (*kotengu*) are bird-like humanoids that wear stolen clothes, often in the style of priests

or of mendicants. They scavenge for fine objects, even bold enough to steal from temples. They have a short temper, and they may act out violently if offended. *Kotengu* are terrible monsters who often revel in killing and eating people. While they can fly, they don't appear to have much endurance for it.

The greater *tengu* (*daitengu*) are less scruffy and more august. They are tall, red-faced humanoids with a prominent nose, and they may or may not have long feathered wings. They usually dress like mountain warrior monks (*yamabushi*). *Daitengu* have a variety of divine powers and are masters of the art of swordsmanship.

Sometimes, a rock might fall from an empty sky, and people who are struck by them can become ill or cursed. Since *tengu* are said to hate the wickedness in humans, such mysterious rocks are sometimes called *tengu tsubute* ("stone thrown by *tengu*").





Tengu are often attended by a particular kind of ghost-light called *tengubi* (tengu's fire). These tiny lights sometimes can split into thousands of tiny flames that ride down the mountains on the river, spinning and dancing, only to return before sunrise. Tengu's fire may or may not be able to curse or to doom people like *onibi*.

Yūrei (Ghost)

In *Usagi's* Japan, when a person dies, their soul usually passes on to the afterlife... but not always. *Yūrei* are pale and (ahem) ghostly figures, missing features such as feet or a face. They are most likely to be seen during "the hour of the ox" (1 a.m to 3.a.m.), the time of witchcraft.

Some *yūrei* can be very articulate about their needs, asking for help from anyone brave enough to listen to them. Other ghosts may be less lucid, and some may be actively hostile, which makes exorcising them very difficult.

Gaki ("hungry ghosts"), the suffering spirits. While *yūrei* might advise or might warn the living of dangers, *gaki* are actively suffering and often hostile. Their curses may spoil food, steal money, or even sicken people. In Japanese folklore, there are all kinds of *gaki* with all sorts of appearances, desires, and abilities.

Too often, who are killed by supernatural monsters will know no rest, their ghosts doomed to walk the earth. Calming these ghosts and then speaking to them is an important part of a priest's duty.

For the MC's eyes only: INTRODUCTORY ADVENTURE

For the MC Only!

Players Read No Further

Players should not read this section. The text contains surprises which will be ruined by advance reading.

Involving the players

As this is a beginning adventure, your player-characters might not know one another yet, even though the players do. This adventure opens with a *narrative device* — the player-characters are all assumed to be walking down the same road together, to the same destination.

The default setting for this adventure is the road to Nara in the Kawachi province (page 110) on Honshu island. Ask your players what reasons their characters would have to visit Nara.

- Looking for work
- On a personal pilgrimage
- On the run from somewhere else
- Or make something up!

Ask the players to describe their characters to one another: what they look like, what they carry, and the like. Allow for a few minutes for the players to become familiar with each other's characters, as this is the prelude to greater adventures together.

Introduction: The Unfortunate Road

Tell the players that their characters have been walking together for a day or two, stopping at roadside inns and generally making small talk — nothing of interest. It's not until they are a half-day's walk from Nara that they happen across a dreadful scene.

As the player-characters crest a small hill, they will see ahead of them a male middle-aged dog being beaten by a motley crew of four: rough customers of various species. The poor man is down on his knees and begging for his life, while the toughs laugh and continue berating him. As the struggle goes on, it will become clear that the crooks intend on murdering this poor, defenseless man.

The player-characters will most likely ask what is going on, or one of the toughs will order them to be on their way. If all of the players decide their characters don't want to become involved, then move on to "Act 3: Aftermath".

Odds are, one or more of the player-characters will ask why these ruffians are attacking this poor man. The toughs will offer no answers, and they will stubbornly order the player-characters to be on their way. They will say things like, “Begone, or you’ll know the bite of our blades!” and other grand-standing challenges — feel free to ad-lib your favorite clichés from movies and the comics.

Change the mood to **Dicey**: trying out moves

The players may try something *dicey* to get the crooks to leave the poor merchant alone:

- A player may try to read the situation, by rolling two dice plus +initiative. (See page 25) Some advice for answering their questions:
 - The crooks want the poor man’s money
 - The crooks are not here to help anyone.
 - The crooks have the poor man at a disadvantage. The crooks all dress in plain clothes, with no *mon*, crests, or other insignia to identify them.
 - All four of these crooks are weak enemies. Weak hits will defeat them.
 - This ambush spot is in a field. There’s nothing to hide behind. (The crooks might know this area?)
 - These crooks are hardened criminals. Violence is the only thing they understand.
- They might try to intimidate, using +righteousness. Only a roll of 10 or better will convince them. A roll of 7 to 9 will start a combat with reservations (see below).

- They may try to negotiate. Only a roll of 10 or better could convince them to go along with a fair deal. A roll of 7 to 9 will either make absurd demands (“That’ll be 50 *ryo*! From each of you!”) or start a combat with reservations (see below).
- Or try something else! Your players should always be encouraged to try anything. If our heroes are a sneaky lot (with lots of +initiative and Stalking), they may choose to not get involved at all. (If they don’t, then the poor man will be beaten within an inch of his life, robbed, and left to die.)

Changing the mood to **Combat**: now fight!

At the sight of the large number of player-characters, who look like more of a threat than a cowardly commoner, the crooks will draw their swords.

When a fight starts, ask your players who wants to be in front (*exposed*), who wants to attack but not take the focus (*flanking*) and who wants to stay out of the action (*covered*).

When the crooks attack, they will gang up on exposed characters first. There’s four of them, so if there’s not enough exposed characters, they will group up.

In the rules of the *Usagi* role-playing game, players can take their turns in any order. The round doesn’t roll over until everyone takes one move. If this is your first game of *Usagi*, or if your players are inexperienced, you may find that if you just ask the players, which one wants to go first, you might not get any responses. Players might be worried about making the wrong choices, or they may not be comfortable declaring the actions of their characters before they fully understand how the game works. As the MC, you’re in charge of pushing the story forward; if the players are hesitating, pick a player and

ask them what their move will be. Here's a suggested order for playing out the player-characters' moves:

- An exposed player-character with two or more crooks attacking them plays against **group of weak enemies**, as described on page 177.
- An exposed player-character with only one crook attacking them plays against a **weak enemy**, as described on page 176.
- Flanking characters may attack next, or they might do something else.
- Covered characters act last. If a covered character wants to attack, they will move up to either flanking or exposed.

If a player chooses to attack, no story points have been handed out yet, so attackers will roll two dice and add nothing. Remind your players that they can help one another, using assist moves and their support points.

Each player gets a turn to attack the crooks. After all the players have taken their turns, the crooks can respond. Combats happen so quickly in *Usagi's* stories that the crooks might all be killed in only one or two rounds. These crooks are low-ranking bravos in Lord Akimaru's domain — they're not samurai, but they're looking to prove themselves as people who can take care of problems.

The player-characters should win this combat with no more than a few minor scrapes. Take notes on how the players fight. Do they work well together? Do they concentrate on brute strength? Who are the powerhouse characters, and who are the ones who rely on tactics? Knowing how your players fight will help you craft greater challenges later.

If the players are successful, the man will thank them profusely. He will introduce himself as **Yuufuku** of Nara, where he is a wealthy rice merchant. As thanks for saving his life, he insists that the player-characters enjoy his hospitality.

All players gain +1 story point

After playing out the fate of Yuufuku, the players have finished the introduction part of the adventure. Tell the players to mark down on their character sheet that they have received a **story point**.

Characters have combat moves that add story points. If the player-characters get into another fight during this adventure, they will now roll two dice and add 1.

If this is your first time playing *Usagi*, explain to the players that they can spend a story point for **+3 back** to their last roll. (Whatever they last rolled has its total increased by 3. This increase may turn a failure into a success.)

Exposition: The Merchant's Dilemma

Yuufuku will not volunteer why he was on this road, nor why such a wealthy man would travel alone. If asked, he will say that he was on a pilgrimage to Houkasu Shrine. As thanks for saving his life, he will invite our heroes to come back to his rich house and to enjoy his generous hospitality.

What the Players Don't Know, and What Yuufuku Isn't Telling

Yuufuku's story of visiting Houkasa Shrine isn't entirely truthful. The Shrine burned down years ago, during the wars of Nobunaga's Ambition.

Yuufuku did visit the ruins of the shrine, where he met with *Sousei-no-Chuushin*, a mercenary who has agreed to help Yuufuku with his current problem with Lord Akimaru.

Like many rice merchants, Yuufuku stores the *koku* (bushels of rice) reaped as the tribute for samurai — he charges a fee to store it, but he allows samurai to borrow against future harvests, much like a modern-day bank.

Unfortunately, Lord Akimaru — one of Yuufuku's many clients — has been demanding more and more money as loans, despite that he is already several years in debt. Yuufuku has refused to lend out any more money until the current debts are paid. But that hasn't stopped Akimaru's men from bullying the poor merchant. As a commoner with no laws to protect him from a samurai's brutality, Yuufuku fears for his life and the lives of his family.

(In *Usagi's* time, this problem of samurai borrowing money, then refusing to pay it back and using violence against the lenders, is relatively rare. This sort of thing will be a much bigger problem in the future.)

In desperation, Yuufuku has followed the advice of some of his merchant allies, and he has paid a large sum of money to *Sousei-no-Chuushin*, who he hopes will protect his family.

Getting details from Yuufuku

When dealing with Yuufuku using moves and rolls (in a *dicey* context), you should consider him to be a **weak character**: rolls in the 7-9 range can get reveal facts about him.

Players tend to be naturally suspicious, but they also don't want to be offensive; if they offend Yuufuku, he won't give them free food and soft beds! The players would do best to get more information later. Here's some examples:

- During the previous encounter, our heroes might recall hearing the crooks say things like, "You should've given up when you had the chance!" or "You're never going to get what you want" — clues that the crooks had some ulterior motive other than simple robbery.
- A player-character who has a high schooling or education might know that have heard that Haokasu Shrine was destroyed some time ago, which makes Yuufuku's story sound suspicious.
- A close inspection of Yuufuku can reveal that he has a sheath for a *tanto* fighting knife, but his knife is missing. (Not even Yuufuku knows this fact! During his encounter earlier today, *Sousei-no-Chuushin* distracted Yuufuku and stole the knife, to frame him for murder.)
- Before dying, one of the crooks might say something incriminating, such as "Akimaru... I have failed you."

The Hospitality of the Rice Merchant

Yuufuku will make a big show of introducing the player-characters who saved his life to everyone he meets while passing through town to his home, boasting about their fighting prowess. (Secretly, Yuufuku wants everyone to know that he has powerful allies to protect him against further attacks.)

Yuufuku is indeed wealthy—he lives in one of the richer town-houses with his wife, *Saiiiko*, his two sons *Ichiro* (aged 11) and *Jiro* (aged 9), and his daughter *Keiko* (aged 6). The family will make a very hospitable welcome, and they will be eager to be good hosts.

Use this opportunity to let the players show off their characters conversational skills. Some will try to get more details out of Yuufuku and his family — as MC, you will have to assume the roles of the merchant and his family, and you will have to improvise.

Yuufuku will be reluctant to talk about his business. An experienced merchant, he will encourage the player-characters to talk about themselves and where they're from. (Since Yuufuku is a commoner and Lord Akimaru is a samurai, he will be very careful about what he says to strangers.)

Player-characters can attempt to steer the conversation towards topics they want to know about. Yuufuku is quite knowledgeable about the area. Yuufuku will insist that the player-characters sleep in some of his many spare rooms, as “gratitude.” (In reality, Yuufuku fears that Lord Akimaru might send more killers and having our heroes around might keep him safe.)

You can use dinner for improvised role-playing. Some ideas:

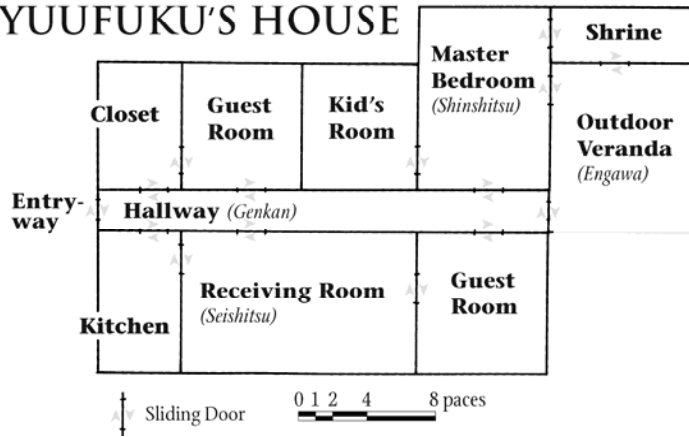
- Yuufuku’s wife and children may ask our heroes about their pasts. You can encourage the players to role-play, describing their characters’ appearances, backstories, and motivations.
- A player might be suspicious of Yuufuku and try to get more information out of him and his family. You need to decide if you want to do this sort of questioning as *casual* (where you and the player act out the dialogue) or *dicey* (where you ask the player to make rolls to ask questions or to get information, such as +negotiation to get him to confess details, +righteousness to intimidate him, +schooling to compare personal knowledge to what’s being said, the unique playbook’s move to use one’s career skills, etc.).

Some players prefer to role-play their interactions with non-player-characters. Others prefer to use rolls to gain advantage, because their fantasy is to play as a character who is more capable than their own ability to improvise. During the game, look for cues — or just ask your players how they want to handle these things. (And use the debriefing after the game to discuss how things went.)

- A player might want their character to snoop around for clues. Snooping is popular with characters who have the unique Stalking (so they can easily travel around unseen), such as ninjas. The player may wait until after bedtime (when it’s dark and people aren’t around), or they might sneak away during or after dinner, making some sort of excuse.

Clues they could find could include: finding Yuufuku’s ledger that shows his imbalance

YUUFUKU'S HOUSE



with Akimaru; eavesdropping on Yuufuku arguing with his wife about their money troubles; discovering Akimaru's crooks casing out the house before tonight's attack, etc.

All players gain +1 story point

After spending some time with Yuufuku and his family and then bedding down for the night, give all the players a *story point*. (That's two, so far.)

Rising Action: Unwelcome Guests

All will not be peaceful in Yuufuku's household. More of Lord Akimaru's henchmen are coming. This evening, they will sneak into Yuufuku's household like thieves and attempt to murder him.

The home-invaders will try to be sneaky about their entry, but they're warriors, not ninjas. Some of your player-characters may describe the extensive precautions they prepare before sleeping. Any characters with *Dairokkan* and other vigilant heroes will hear the forced entry. If, for some reason in the story, none of the player-characters are awake for the entry, Saiaiko's scream will wake everyone up.

This situation is a lot more confusing than the previous one, as it takes place in the large merchant house. Instead of an open field, there's lots of closed rooms. Exterior walls are solid, but interior ones will be paper and thin wood; strong characters with high +righteousness might be able to smash through them. Sneaky, fast characters with a Stalking move or high +initiative might be able use the walls to their advantage.

The invaders are all *weak enemies*, but still more than a match for the non-combatant classes of Yuufuku and his family. The invaders are intent on leaving no witnesses — and that means no survivors. They are also looking for Yuufuku's debt ledger so it can be destroyed.

As the MC, your role is to make sure this confrontation is tense and exciting. There's pressure of time, and lives are on the line!

- We've provided a map of Yuufuku's house, so that you and your fellow players can better understand the staging of "who is where" when things happen. Some players prefer to lean heavily on narrative, "the theater of the mind", where locations are only described. Other players will have a better time understanding the story if they have a map or diagram they can look at. As the MC, *you* must keep track of where everyone is during this invasion, and there's numerous targets. Your players-characters split up to help multiple people, so you'll need to keep track. Find the level of detail that works best for you and your group.

- How many invaders are there? We recommend using **six** invaders as a good number. However, you know your group better than we do, and you've already seen them go through one combat encounter. As the MC, you should decide how much of a challenge that your story will be.
 - Are your player-characters very good at combat? Did they get through the last fight without a scratch? You might increase the invaders' count to seven or eight.
 - Did your heroes have a hard time? Did any of them suffer serious impairments or lots of setback points? You might decrease the invader's count to five or four.
- The invaders are experienced combatants. The house has two exits: the entry way and the outdoor veranda, on opposite sides. The invaders would leave at least one person at both these exits, while the rest sweep through room by room.
- The invaders don't know where Yuufuku keeps his ledger, so they will be searching the house for it and threatening Yuufuku to show him where it is. As the MC, describe these loud noises and boisterous threats to your players, echoing from other rooms. Our heroes will need to move from room to room to deal with them. To make things exciting, you can introduce various dicey elements. Do our heroes try to move quickly, using +initiative? Do they bash through the interior paper-and-wood walls, using their strong +righteousness? What about their unique moves? Encourage your players to come up with creative

ways to roll; reward risky moves with extra time or with forward bonuses to follow-up moves.

- Yuufuku is not very brave, but he will try to defend his family. You can build tension by having one round where the invaders get in, a second round where they search for Yuufuku, a third round where they find him, a fourth where they threaten him, and a fifth where the invaders cut him down. That gives our heroes five chances to do something to stop them.
- The invaders know that if they are caught, their crimes will disgrace them and their lord, so they will fight to the death. They know they can leave no witnesses, so anyone who flees will be chased down to be killed. (Our heroes might have to run to help the fugitives.) You can make the story feel more realized for our heroes by dropping clues during this encounter (our invaders fight with katanas; they know the tactics of battle; their sword-strokes are made with trained hands, etc.)

After the Fight

If Yuufuku survived, then he will tell them what he knows: that these invaders must have been sent from Lord Akimaru, after Yuufuku refused to lend him more money nor forgive any debts. Yuufuku will also be angry — and he will confess details.

- Yuufuku gave a large sum of money to *Sousei-no-Chuushin*, a warrior monk and a leader of a band of *ikko-ikki*, who use the ruins of Houkasu Shrine as their hideout. (His wife Saiaiko does not know about this.)

Chuushin is the leader of an *ikko-ikki*, a league of warrior monks who oppose the rule of the Shogunate and the Emperor. Pockets of *ikko-ikki*

have had some success throughout the Warring-States era and before, and Chuushin is seeking to use the murder of Lord Akimaru to set himself up as the true leader of the village. He really doesn't care if Yuufuku lived or died; that's just collateral damage in his war against the old guard.

- Yuufuku has noticed by now that he lost his *tanto* knife, a decorated and unique weapon. He doesn't remember exactly when he lost it, though players might suggest that he might have lost it at that meeting.

If he was killed, his wife Saiaiko could piece this story together and tell our heroes, while wailing for the loss of her husband. If the story went worse than this... well, it might just end here, unless the heroes want to go on a fact-finding mission to find out what happened.

All players gain +1 story point

After dealing with the assassination attempt on Yuufuku life, give all the players a *story point*. (That's three.)

Leadup to Climax: The Fate of Akimaru

So our heroes were almost killed by Lord Akimaru's men... and in a manner most unbecoming of *bushido*, the code of the warrior. What will our heroes do?

- Appealing to local law isn't going to work. Lord Akimaru is the nobility of this village. Our players would have to appeal to an out-of-town magistrate.
- Our players might challenge Akimaru directly. They'll have to hurry, because Akimaru is about to have his own encounter — see below.

- At the same time our heroes were having their own battle, Sousei-no-Chuushin has his own plan. He will sneak into Akimaru's house, kill the lord, and leave behind Yuufuku's own *tanto* as the murder weapon. If Yuufuku is arrested for the crime, then both the merchants and the nobility of this town will be dishonored.

By now, the players probably know enough details that Yuufuku hired an assassin to kill Akimaru and they have only an hour or so to intervene. Do they rush there to stop it? Do they go to Houkasu Shrine to ambush Akimaru after he's done the foul deed, to extort a confession? Do they wash their hands of the whole affair and just leave town? Or do our heroes try something else?

Watching the clock

We're at the climax of the adventure... but we also don't want the game to take up too much time.

- In this final part, it's better to end early than it is to run too long. Taking too long to finish the adventure can exhaust your player's energy or risk having them forget a lot of key details if your next session won't be for a week or more.
- It takes less time to play out one or two strong challenge than lots of weak enemies. If you're running short on time, players could confront Akimaru or Chuushin alone, as a strong front of 5 points (as on page 181). Or, if you have more time, you can give a villain some backup with a group of weak enemies.

- If you've got a lot of time, and you feel up to handling the confusion, you could have a three-way match between our heroes, Lord Akimaru, and Chuushin as they all converge at the same spot. (Even more confusing if they have their own gangs!) We do not recommend such chaos for beginning hosts — only experienced MCs should try for such complexity. Your job is to challenge and to entertain the *players*, so keep in mind what they enjoy.
- Your players may choose to avoid violent confrontation. Maybe they want to steal Yuufuku's *tanto* back from Chuushin so he won't be blamed. Or maybe they will confront Akimaru and give him an honorable way out. They might even choose to ally themselves with one of these other parties.

We encourage you and your players to come up with your own path through the story. As MC, you need to keep an eye on the clock; don't let your players debate endlessly about what to do. Because role-playing games let players think about their turns and then describe them, it's all too easy for players to talk and to talk without committing to any action. Give your players

some time to talk among themselves about what to do next, but after a few minutes, make it clear they must act now or miss the moment.

- Remind your players that they now have three story points. Unless players have spent some already, they now have +3 to all combat rolls, and they can spend a story point to take +3 back to a previous roll and get 1 support point (page 29). Oh, and they can spend support points to help each other, too.

How will this story end? Only you can answer that! There is no right or wrong ending, only the ending that you and your fellow players create. Good luck!

After the game: Debriefing

Once the game session is over, ask your players how they felt about the game. What was good? What could be better? See *Debriefing* starting on page 171.

Congratulations! You've just hosted your first game of *Usagi Yojimbo* as a Master of Ceremonies. Here's hoping it's the beginning of a fun and exciting campaign in a mythic fantasy of historical Japan.



For the MC's eyes only: MORE ADVENTURES

As the MC, you should modify these adventures to be better suited to your group of players. We've put in some advice on what changes you can make, but you know your players better than we do. Remember: be fair, build up, and have fun!

Edge of Love

Our heroes stumble into a dispute between a gang of bandits, an incompetent lord, and star-crossed lovers. (At the start, reset all players to =0 story and +1 support.)

Introduction: The Bandit Encounter

Our heroes are going to another place, travelling a winding path through the Kōansareta Forest. They will hear the cry of battle, coming from ahead, obscured by trees. If they rush to the scene, they will find bandits (three groups of 3 weak enemies), led by Taisuke, the dog bandit chief. (a strong front of 9 points). Taisuke is berating a peasant woman (Nishi) and demanding to know "where the sword is".

If Taisuke sees our heroes, he will order his men to kill them. "Leave no witnesses!" In the confusion, Nishi will flee. After losing a third of his men, taking some damage personally, or something else, Taisuke will flee.

After this encounter, give all players +1 story point.

Exposition: Gathering clues

In the middle of the forest is Kōansareta village, a logging town. Players may search for clues. (Gossip with locals! Snoop into people's houses and read their mail! Eavesdrop on conversations! Confront

people and demand answers! Read their body language to learn what they're *not* saying! Etc.)

Weak results: Everyone agrees the bandits are terrible and Lord Tetsuharu should do something about them.

Strong results: Nishi has disappeared, it's feared that she ran off to be with her boyfriend, Uemera; a courier was supposed to come through on the way to Edo to present the *Tadatsugu* sword to the shogun, but no one's seen them.

Grand results: Taisuke the bandit king tried to steal the *Tadatsugu* sword from Tetsuharu's men... but he and his men were routed when Uemera took the sword from its scabbard and fought them off. Uemera was wounded and hiding in an abandoned house in the forest; Nishi is trying to get medicine and money so they can run away to the capitol together.

After gathering clues, give all players +1 story point.

Rising Action: Decision to be made

Ask your players how they want to proceed, based on the clues they discovered. Your players are a creative, resourceful lot, so listen to their unprompted ideas *before* you make any suggestions.

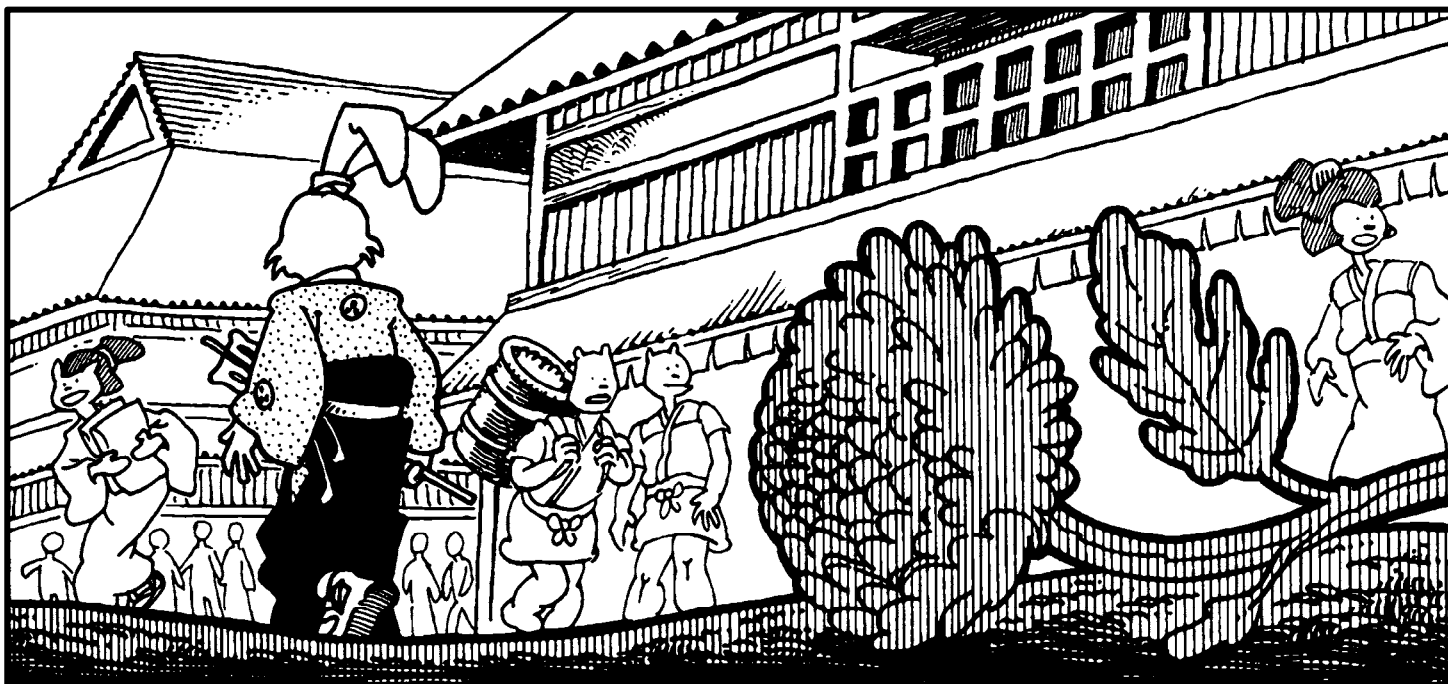
Do they want to recover the *Tadatsugu* sword? They must find the lost shack in the woods. (+Initiative to search for a trail? +Schooling to use forestry and history? +Righteousness to just stubbornly walk around until they finally find it? Something else that the players come up with? Etc.) If our heroes don't find it, eventually either Taisuke or Lord Tetshuaru's surviving men will, and they might not be so nice to our two commoners, so there's some pressure of time.

They players may choose to eliminate the threat of Taisuke's gang. (Find their camp and ambush them there? Pretend to have the sword and lure them out? Actually get the sword and use that as bait? Something else? Etc.) Taisuke only respects force, so it's probably going to be a big fight, but other methods might motivate him.

What about Lord Tetsuharu? If our heroes return the sword to him, he will only grundgingly accept the help, as he has lost significant face by losing the sword to begin with. If the players shake him down for a reward such as money, he will resist, but he can be overcome by good die rolls or by a strong confrontation. Attacking him and his men may prove successful, but it's murder so it's not the best idea.

What's the fate of our star-crossed lovers, Nishi and Uemaru? They're young and in love, and blind to the problems they are causing. Our heroes could give them help such as money and guidance, maybe even escorting them to the big city. Or our players might castigate them for defying their family and for getting mixed up in all this nonsense that is really none of their affair.

After your players decide on a direction, give all players +1 story point.



Climax

Whatever your players decide, play out that encounter. You know your players better than we do, so you know what they find interesting and challenging. A boss fight battle of “strong front with 5 points” will be difficult but solve-able in a short amount of time.

You can raise the stakes by adding one or more groups of weak enemies. Or you can add complications, such as a torrential rainstorm that obscures vision, or the return of an enemy from a previous adventure. Don't over-complicate! Only add more problems if you're worried that the story has been moving too quickly or too easily.

The Hidden Furnace

A twisty mountain pass conceals a dangerous secret. (At the start, reset all players to =0 story and +1 support.)

Introduction

Our heroes attempt to travel through the mountain passes. In Japan, the best way often is not the shortest, as they go up and down inclines. While attempting to cross a rope bridge, they are about to cross a rope bridge... but the first character who steps on it discovers it has been trapped! Someone has frayed the ropes, and it's a strong . (+Initiative to jump clear? +Righteousness to cling to ropes? Something else? Don't forget other players have support points to help.)

The bridge collapses before they can cross. The collapse is quite noisy, as old pans and sticks have been tied to it as a loud alarm.

After playing this out, give each of the players +1 story point.

Exposition

Right after the bridge was broken, the players are attacked by bandits. (Did your players heed the warning of the alarm? You might use rolls of +initiative or +schooling to let them prepare, or something else.) How many? We suggest 3 groups of 3 weak bandits, but you should use your judgement. All of them are ronin, armed with bows as well as swords. They will fight to the death, and they will prefer to engage at range. The players will have to close with them. (This could be a weak challenge of 5 points, using +initiative or +resolve, but bad rolls mean getting hit by arrows and suffering 1 setback; or make something up!)

If there are any survivors, they might confess under strong interrogation: they are under orders to kill an armed procession that is supposed to pass through here; first, the bridge would give out, hopefully sending some to their death in the fall, then they would finish off survivors with their bows.

It's possible to find the trail that the bandits took to get here. There's also the matter that there's no way to take the bridge, they'll have to go around in the hills, the long way. (Struggling through the wild mountains might be rolls of +righteousness for endurance, or +schooling for mountaineering knowledge, or other challenges that you can devise.)

After our players decide what they want to do, give each of them +1 story point.

Rising Action

Travelling through the mountains can be as long as or short as you like, with a variety of encounters. (The pleasant discovery of a hot spring, to relax in? The terrible reveal of a river polluted by ash and metal, for reasons we'll mention below? Something else?)

Deep in these mountains is a secret forge, being used by Boss Fusao and his genius-in-crime, Tama-go. Using plans they acquired from foreigners, they have built a secret furnace up here in the mountains and are struggling to forge gun-quality steel, necessary for *teppo*, the matchlock firearms that served so well in the Warring-States era. Their furnace is in a mountain valley, where they hope that the plume of smoke can't be seen over the mountains around it. Unfortunately, Fusao's operation has gathered attention of surrounding lords; too many strange ingredients, all going to one place.

Now that they're up here in the mountaintops, our heroes will almost inevitably discover the smoke from the furnace. Do they investigate? (Sneaking in would be a strong challenge; the unique Stalking move will certainly help). If any of Fusao's warriors escaped from the first fight, they will warn their master. (Of course, our heroes might also decide to avoid this area entirely; then Fusao might decide he has to track them down, to eliminate all witnesses.)

Once the players make their pivotal decision with this furnace plot, give each of them +1 story point.

Climax

Our heroes may get into a pitched battle at the furnace and the camp. You could play this out as several groups of weak combatants with a strong leader. You could make the fight more deadly by giving Fusao a *teppo*; avoiding being shot would be a grand challenge for exposed characters, a strong challenge for others. (In the *Usagi* role-playing game, only players roll dice; when non-player characters attack, players roll to avoid being hit.) Maybe Fusao's weapons are defective; when a player rolls an event (doubles) when avoiding gunfire, the gun bursts, becoming useless and possibly injuring the shooter. Gunfire in the mountains will be thunderously loud; samurai will soon come to investigate. Of course, our heroes could just flee the area, and then report it to the authorities, chased the entire way to the city.

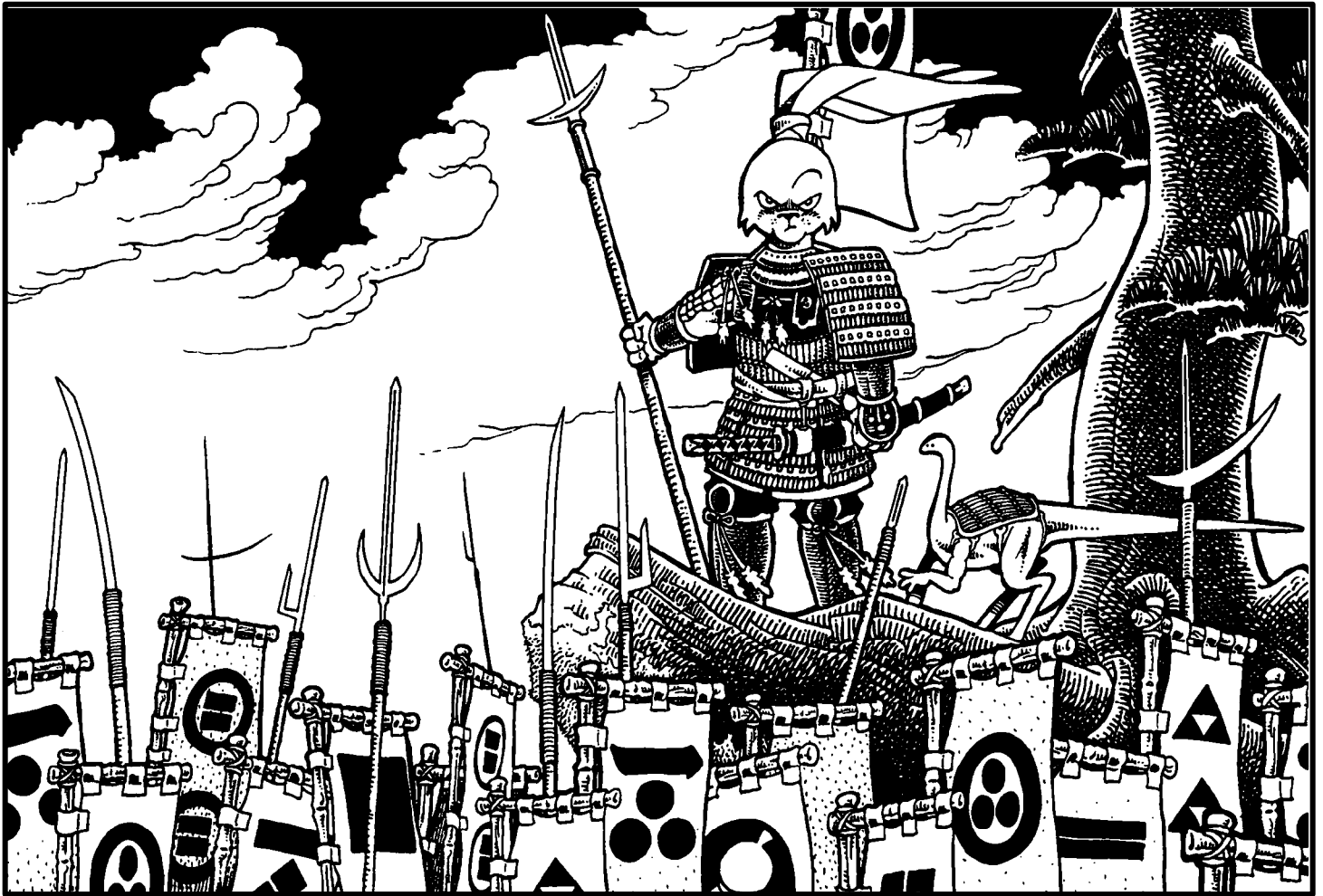
The Mistaken

Introduction

Our heroes arrive in a large, urban city, and deal with their business as usual. (As the MC, you might want to use the variant rules for *downtime*, as described on page 171.) Choose one of the player-characters; that person will be accosted by the authorities, under arrest for trespass and theft.

(Stories that have an arrest can be difficult with some groups. Role-playing is often about an empowering fantasy, and almost no one's fantasy is to be arrested. Choose a player that will be casual with being detained.)

After the player is detained by the authorities, give each of your players +1 story point.



Exposition

The player-character will be briefly detained while the authorities summon Inspector Sugita. Our heroes could try to cooperate (+negotiation), brush up on their law (+schooling), form a solid alibi using their past experience together, or do something else. (If they want to break their friend out of jail, that's an option, too, which should be a strong front of 9 points or more. This adventure will take a much different path.)

Convincing Sugita of their innocence shouldn't be too difficult. This arrest is simply a case of mistaken identity; the actual culprit of the crime has a physical resemblance to our hero but is a completely different person. (Problems might arise if our players have a previous history of law-breaking, if they fail to comply with the investigation, etc.)

If the players have good standing (such as having helped others in previous adventures, if they are samurai themselves, etc.), then Inspector Sugita may ask for their help. Earlier this week, an unknown person, whom witnesses described as resembling our hero, was seen leaving the estate of Lord Nishimura. The lord has reported that “important documents” are missing, but hasn’t been specific about what those are.

After dealing with the incarceration issue, give each of your players +1 story point.

Rising Action

Our lookalike thief is Michi, an apprentice lamp-maker who serves under their master Yasu. They have become convinced that a *gaki* (“hungry ghost”) is haunting their shop at night, so they sought to repel the monster by stealing a holy scripture from the shrine in Lord Nishimura’s house. (Michi has a lot more superstition than sense.)

The problem is that what Michi stole was not scripture, but a love letter sent from Lady Koide to Lord Nishimura, agreeing to his proposal for marriage. The lord and lady are secretly in love with one another and seek to marry. (In this era, all marriages must be approved by the Shogun, to prevent political alliances. Nishimura and Koide are planning to have their marriage in secret while consolidating their power.) If this letter were discovered, both Nishimura and Koide could be executed. And right now, that letter is nailed to the wall of Michi’s shed to keep a ghost out. Right now, the secret is safe, as Michi can’t read. But if anyone else sees the letter...

Once the players agree on their next direction to take, give each player +1 story point.

Climax

As the MC, you have some choices to make, about how this adventure.

- Is the ghost real, or a figment of Michi’s imagination? (Maybe if Michi knew how to join wooden planks together, they wouldn’t get that whistling noise at night through the gaps.) Is the ghost a benign presence, who just needs to be put to rest, or are they a genuine threat to Michi’s life?
- Lord Nishimura can’t just wait for the letter to be recovered. He may send his own agents out to recover it, making it clear there can be no witnesses. Or he might employ the player-characters for help; they are outside the local politics, and they may be more trustworthy than inspectors who might report him to the Shogun.
- Are there other parties involved? You can add the pressure of a *countdown* by introducing non-player characters who are also looking for the document. Bandits could assume that the missing scroll has some monetary value. Ninjas or spies might want to steal the document, looking for ways to embarrass or to weaken Lord Nishimura. Maybe an evil sorcerer or other supernatural entity gets caught up in Michi’s obsession, thus seeking the scroll for their own. (Boy, will they be disappointed.)
- Or make something up!

Take care to watch the clock. You don’t want the game session to run too long, so don’t over-complicate. You also don’t want the story to be too simple or too short. You could consider splitting one adventure over two or more sessions, keeping the same story, setback, and support totals until the adventure finally ends.



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Variant Rule: UPGRADES

In the standard rules of the *Usagi* role-playing game, you make most of your choices about your character when you choose the species and the class. You can re-arrange the attribute numbers around, you can swap quirks, and you can change your equipment, but that's about it.

Some players like the idea of their characters gaining in skill, power, and agency as the gameplay goes along. You and your fellow players may want to add the variant rule of *upgrades* to your game.

When this rule is in effect, a player-character earns upgrades, which increase their character's ability to influence the game story.

An upgrade might change or increase an attribute. It might add a new move or add new options to an existing move.

- **Progressive** =
1st upgrade after 1 adventure;
2nd upgrade after 3 adventures;
3rd upgrade after 6 adventures;
4th upgrade after 10 adventures

Some popular games prefer to give more upgrades early in a character's career, gradually slowing down as they level up. A pace like this requires more record-keeping on the part of the players.

Upgrades are optional

Find a balance of rules that works for you

Putting upgrades in your game will make the game more complex. Not everyone enjoys a story that has dozens of rules about how something works. And the more rules you stack on top of each other, the more complex their interactions become.

How often should players get upgrades?

- **Slow** = *one upgrade* every 3 adventures
At this rate, characters change so slowly that most players might not even notice.
- **Moderate** = *one upgrade* every 2 adventures
Many campaigns like to have an upgrade every other adventure.
- **Fast** = *one upgrade* every adventure
Some groups prefer for the game to be exciting, with character changes after every incident. More upgrades mean more rules, so be careful that the upgrades don't overwhelm your sense of fun.

You can only apply a single upgrade **once**. You cannot apply the same upgrade over and over again

You can't take the "Yuuaku" upgrade twice, adding 2 points to your +negotiation.

However, you *can* take different upgrades and have their effects stack, even if the upgrades are pretty much the same thing. (You could take the "Yuuaku" upgrade to raise your negotiation, then take "Wagering" to raise it again. Different names are different upgrades, even if they both do the same thing.)

An upgrade that adds a new special to a weapon doesn't stack with other specials. You can only choose one special when you roll 10-12 on an attack roll. Some upgrades will give you access to specials that are simply better than what the weapon offers for characters who don't have the upgrade.

Some upgrades have qualifiers. For example, you can only upgrade with "Katana Critical" if your character can use the "Bushido" move. If your character can't use Bushido, then you can't upgrade with "Katana Critical".

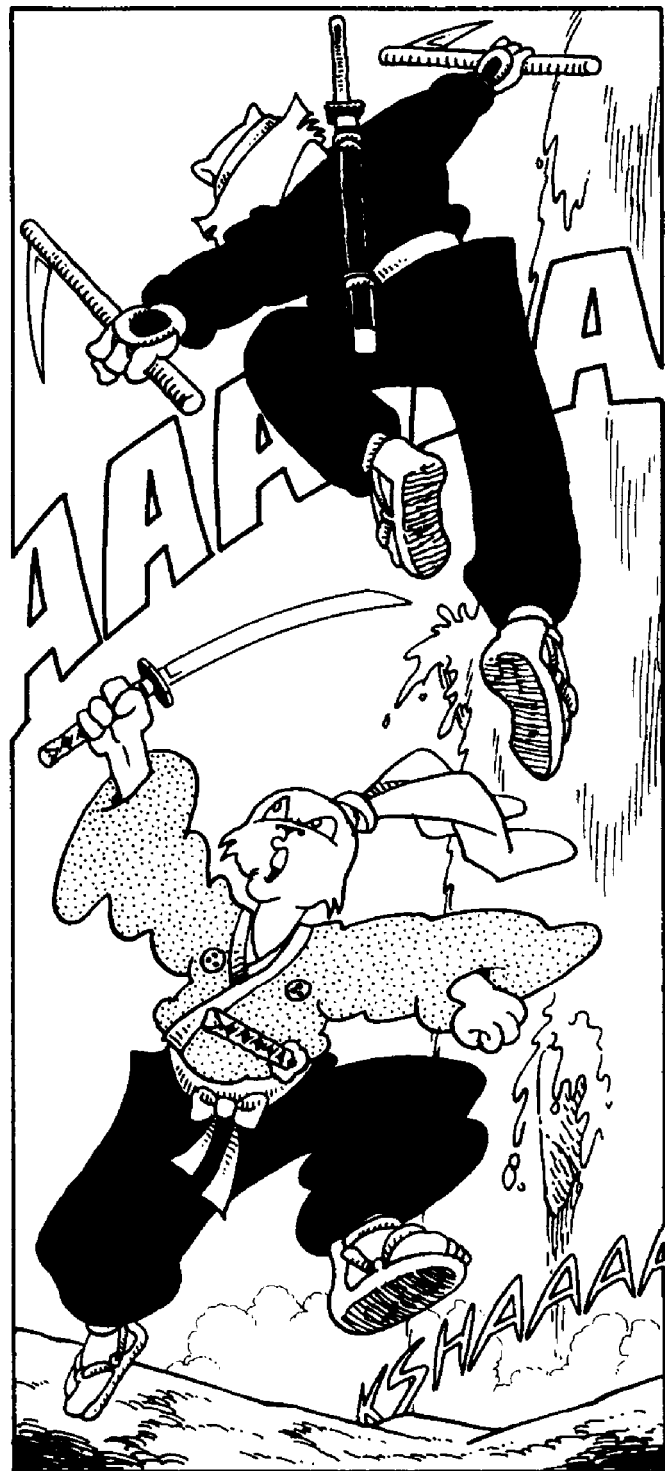
If you change your attributes around, remove the bonus from this upgrade, balance the numbers to zero, and then re-apply the upgrade's increase. (Don't use "Tsuyo" to increase your righteous, then swap that increase to something else, etc.)

Basic Upgrades

(No requirements)

Any character can take these attribute upgrades.

- Josainai:** Add one to your schooling attribute, up to a maximum of +3.
- Kashikoi:** Add one to your initiative attribute, up to a maximum of +3.
- Sanmenroppi:** Choose one attribute that is -2 or -1. Add one to it, up to a maximum of =0.
- Tsuyo:** Add one to your righteous attribute; up to a maximum of +3.
- Yuuaku:** Add one to your negotiation attribute, up to a maximum of +3.



Dice Upgrades

(No requirements)

You can apply these upgrades to any character. These gifts improve your die rolls, but they generally don't work during combat moods... though they can work with rolls to read a situation so that you can take bonuses forward. Such bonuses should always tie into what upgrade you used. For example, using "Athletics Replay" to read a situation should give bonuses to use terrain for personal advantage as you climb up, over, and around. A "Bluffing Replay" reading would help with ruses that get you to interact with who is the most important here, etc.

If it matters, you can stack replays. For example, if you were to busk for money with your top-spinning in a city, you could roll once, then again by using Entertain Replay, then *again* by using Urban Replay. The last roll is the one that's in play.

Players are encouraged to invent new upgrades that allow replays to a narrow set of skill or interest.

- **Athletics Replay:** After rolling for climbing, running, jumping, acrobatics, or any other athletics endeavor... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.

This upgrade doesn't help with rolls to dodge attacks in combat.

- **Bluffing Replay:** After any roll that involves you lying, deceiving, pick-pocketing, or otherwise playing someone false... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.

- **Crafting Replay:** After rolling to build things, to repair things, to sabotage things, or to generally work with tools and crafts... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.
- **Entertain Replay:** After rolling to tell a story, act in a play, or otherwise perform in front of other people... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.
- **Investigation Replay:** After rolling to gossip with locals, to examine a crime scene, or to gather clues and evidence... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.
- **Occult Replay:** After rolling to know about or to deal with spirits, goblins, ghosts, and other strange and supernatural tales... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.
This upgrade does not help with Sorcery rolls. (Understanding magic and using magic are two different things.)
- **Rural Replay:** After rolling to navigate the wilderness, to interact with country folk, or to be wise in the way of the woods... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.
- **Urban Replay:** After rolling to navigate the big city, to interact with city folk, or to be wise in the way of the streets... before you play the results out, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.



Combat Upgrades (No requirements)

Any character can take these upgrades, regardless of their fighting style.

- Blind Fighting:** You can fight in darkness. If you fight opponents who have poor visibility, you get +1 to rolls you make against them. You never are at a disadvantage when fighting blind.
- Desperation:** Add +setback to all rolls made to dodge attacks.
- First Strike:** Until you score a hit in combat, you get +1 to all your attack rolls. Once you score a hit, this bonus goes away until the combat is over.
- Dodge Replay:** After rolling to dodge an attack... before you apply setback points or other results from being hit, you can decide to re-roll. The new roll stands, even if it's worse.

- Monomi o Sadameru:** You have mastered zen to set your gaze upon a target, eliminating the rest of the world from your mind so that the shot can only hit the target.

When attacking with a ranged weapon, or a weapon that you are throwing, you can choose to roll one fewer die in exchange for a +4 bonus to hit.

- Reaping:** After your attack downs one or more foes, you get +1 forward to your next roll.
- Zanzin Zamba:** If you're not currently engaged in combat with someone, you can use this move. You rush towards someone and leap high into the air, ignoring any weak combatants in your way. Then you use gravity to bring the weapon down with full force: the "horse-cutter maneuver". Your attack gets +1 forward to hit; after this, you're exposed, you're at -3 to all rolls to respond to attackers until your next turn, and your next move *must* be "recover from Zanzin Zamba and take +3 forward to your next attack."



Bushido Upgrades

Requires: Bushido

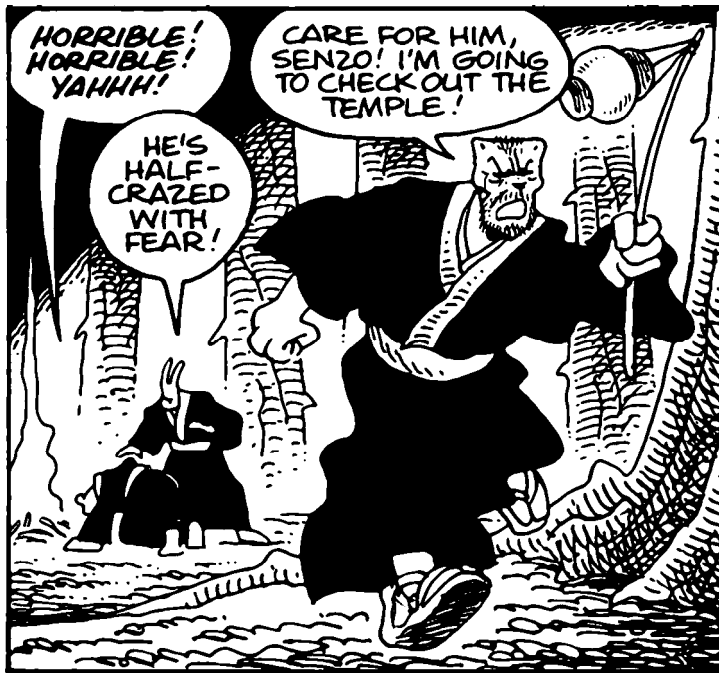
You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Bushido” move.

- Bokken Critical:** When attacking with a *bokken*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Buke-zukuri Subdual:** When you fight with a katana in one hand and its buke-zukuri in the other hand, you take +1 forward when engaging weak or strong combatants. However, any hits you cause only subdue your opponents, it doesn't kill them.
- Daikyu Critical:** When attacking with a *hankyu*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Dai-Sho Defense:** When fighting with a *wakizaki* in one hand and a *katana* in the other, you make take +1 to any rolls you make to respond to other attackers. (There's no bonus to your attack rolls, just bonuses to rolls that the MC tells you to make to deal with attackers.)
- Gunsen Command Move:** When attacking with a *gunsen*, you have the option for a new special move: “Inflict a strong hit on your opponent and all you friends take +1 forward to their rolls in this combat, until your next move.”
- Iai-jitsu:** You have developed a powerful fast-draw technique. When fighting with a *katana*, you have a new menu option for Bushido when you roll 6 or less: “leave or put your *katana* back in its scabbard; if your next attack is Bushido with you *katana*, you draw the weapon so quickly and you strike so precisely that you may claim +one die forward with next attack.” This option is used instead of the typical +3 option.
- Jitte Critical:** When attacking with a *jitte*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Kama Critical:** When attacking with a *kama*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Katana Critical:** When attacking with a *katana*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Konsaibo Critical:** When attacking with a *bokken*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.



- **Kusari Sweep:** When attacking with a *kusari*, *kusarigama*, or *manrikigusari*, you have the option for a Sweep special: “Inflict a weak hit on every member of a group”.
- **Naginata Critical:** When attacking with a *naginata*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- **No-Daichi Improved Smash:** When attacking with a *no-daichi*, replace the Smash special text with: “you inflict a grand hit on the target.” (You no longer must recover, you’re not exposed, etc.)

- **Sumo:** You are a practiced *sumotori*, a bare-handed art form that is only beginning to develop. You get +1 to all rolls related to sumo (using Empty Hand with Bushido, negotiating for matches, showing off your fighting etiquette, etc.)
- **Yari Sweep:** When attacking with a *yari* you now have the option to use the Sweep unique special: “Inflict a weak hit on every member of a group”.



Buddhism Upgrades

Requires: Buddhism

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Buddhism” move.

- Right Conduct:** During a combat mood, you get +1 to all rolls that are *not* combat moves. If you use this bonus to assist someone else, any forward bonuses they get *cannot* be used for combat moves; if that makes the bonus meaningless, it goes away.
- Right Effort:** Increase your righteousness by 1, to a maximum of +3.

- Right Livelihood:** Increase your schooling by 1, to a maximum of +3.
- Right Mindfulness:** Increase your initiative by 1, to a maximum of +3.
- Right Resolve:** You get +1 to all impair rolls.
- Right Samadhi:** Spend some time (out of combat) and tell the MC that you will meditate on an important task. Roll +schooling. Up to 6, you may ask one of the following questions; up to 9, two questions; 10 or more, three questions. The MC answers the questions for you and you make take +1 forward to deal with the answers:
 - What’s happened in history that is relevant to this task?
 - How can we finish this task with the least amount of suffering?
 - What does this task need?
 - How can my task help the greater good?
 - What am I lacking, and therefore need to get, before I can finish this task?
- Right Speech:** Increase your negotiation by 1, to a maximum of +3.
- Right View:** When you gain a story point, you may immediately give it to another player, instead. You gain 1 support point and +3 forward on your very next roll.

Dairokkan Upgrades

Requires: Dairokkan

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Dairokkan” move.

- ❑ **Body Blocking:** If a nearby friend was hit in combat, you can dive into the attack and take the hit instead. You then take +one die forward to the impair roll that you got for taking this hit.
- ❑ **Danger Sense:** When your Dairokkan roll is an event, take +3 back to your roll.
- ❑ **Escape:** When a friend makes a dodge roll, you can spend 1 support point to give them +3 back to the roll (instead of +1).

- ❑ **Interposing:** Before you make an attack, pick a friend who is engaged in combat, to swap places with. You are now engaged with those enemies, and your friend is now covered. (No roll is needed.) You may now attack those enemies.
- ❑ **Intrepid:** Add +1 to your righteousness, to a maximum of +3.
- ❑ **Martial:** Add +1 to your schooling, to a maximum of +3.
- ❑ **Unwavering:** Add +setback to all your Dairokkan rolls.
- ❑ **Vigilant:** Add +1 to your initiative, to a maximum of +3.



Kikotsu Upgrades

Requires: Kikotsu

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Kikotsu” move.

- ❑ **Bo Critical:** When attacking with a *bo* staff, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- ❑ **Brawler:** When attacking with Empty Hands, you get +1 to your attack rolls.
- ❑ **Hachiwari Critical:** When attacking with a *hachiwari*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- ❑ **Hankyu Critical:** When attacking with a *hankyu*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- ❑ **Keibo Critical:** When attacking with a *keibo*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.

- ❑ **Kodachi Critical:** When attacking with a *hankyu*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- ❑ **Line Breaker:** When attacking with Kikotsu, if you attack a group that is engaging a friend, you take +1 forward to your attack roll. (There is no bonus if you engage a single lone foe, nor a bonus to attack a group that isn’t engaged with a friend.)
- ❑ **Masakari Critical:** When attacking with a *masakari*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- ❑ **Militia:** When attacking with Kikotsu, if you roll 6 or less, replace the result with this improvement: “A friend of your choice takes +1 forward to their next attack, and if your next move is Kikotsu, you take +3 forward”



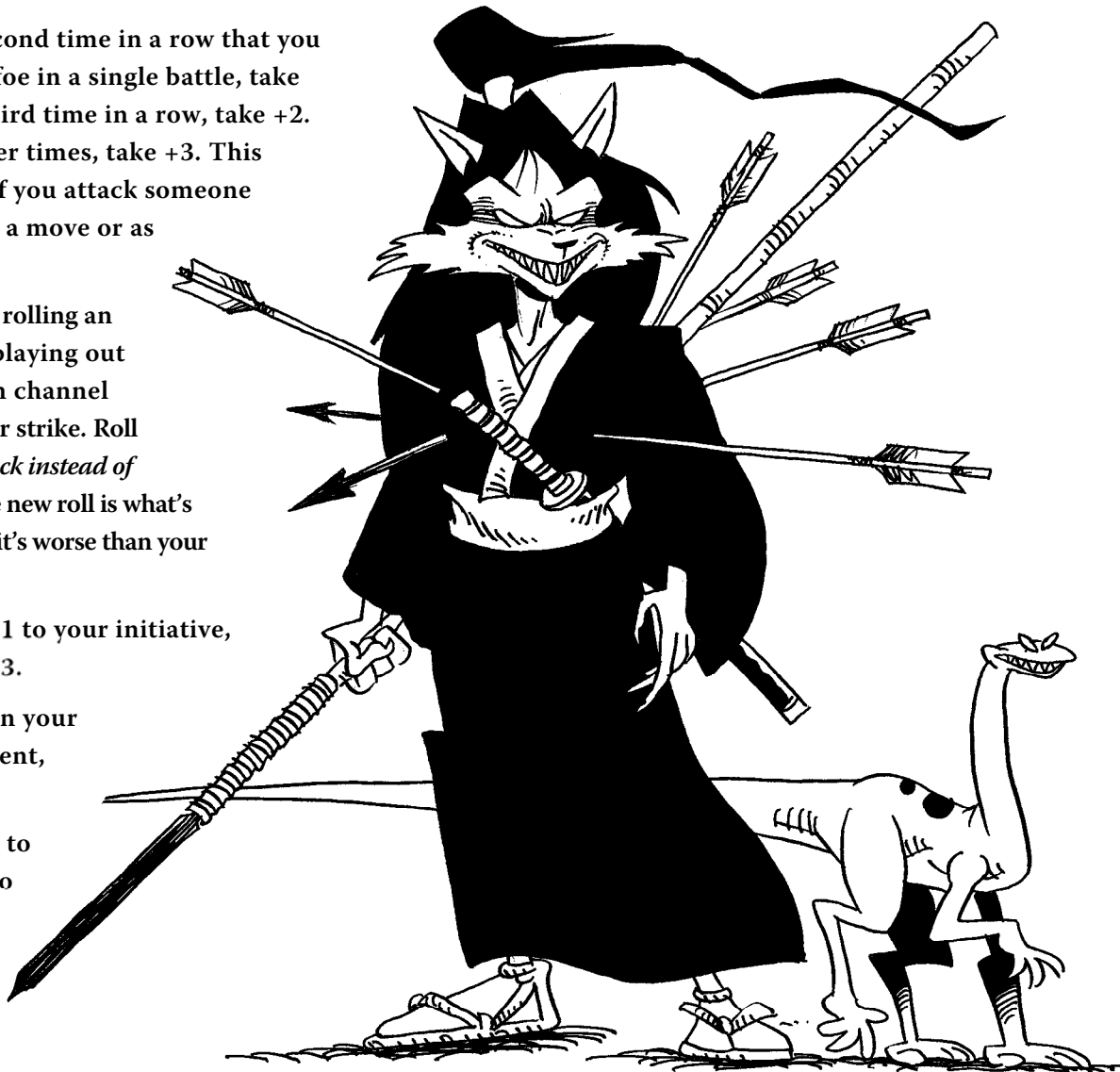
Kiwami Upgrades

Requires: **Kiwami**

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Kiwami” move.

- ❑ **Fiery:** Add +1 to your righteousness, to a maximum of +3.
- ❑ **Inevitable:** The second time in a row that you strike at the same foe in a single battle, take +1 forward. The third time in a row, take +2. The fourth and later times, take +3. This bonus disappears if you attack someone different (either as a move or as a response).
- ❑ **Rage Replay:** After rolling an attack, but before playing out the results, you can channel your anger into your strike. Roll again, adding +setback instead of +story this time. The new roll is what’s in play now, even if it’s worse than your previous roll.
- ❑ **Smoldering:** Add +1 to your initiative, to a maximum of +3.
- ❑ **Unstoppable:** When your impair roll is an event, take +3 back.
- ❑ **Untrifling:** Add +1 to your negotiation, to a maximum of +3.

- ❑ **Vengeful:** If someone hits you, and that hit directly causes you to become impaired, you get +setback to all rolls to get justice from that character, until either you get your justice or the game session ends.





Majutsu Upgrades

Requires: Majutsu

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Majutsu” move.

- August:** Add +1 to your righteousness, to a maximum of +3.
- Deeper Knowledge:** When rolling Majutsu, you may roll one extra die. After checking for events (doubles), subtract your lowest die from your total. (So if you rolled 5, 3, 3, you’d have an event, then you’d subtract the three, for a total of 8.)
- Demon Queller:** When fighting with an obviously-supernatural monster, any event that you roll gives you +one die back to that roll. (You don’t get this bonus when fighting people, mundane creatures, people who are

possessed by the supernatural, nor do you get this bonus with demons in disguise. Exorcise first!) Yes, this bonus die can trigger events if it matches any of the previous dice.

- Sagacious:** Add +1 to your schooling, to a maximum of +3.
- Soulful:** You may add your +setback points to any roll to use Majutsu. This bonus is the setback points from *before* you made the roll, not from setback points you get during or after.
- Voices from Beyond:** After making any roll that involves sorcery or the occult, but before playing out the results, you may commune with the supernatural. Subtract three from your last roll, then roll an extra die and add that. The new total stands, even if it’s worse. (Also, check for events, too.)



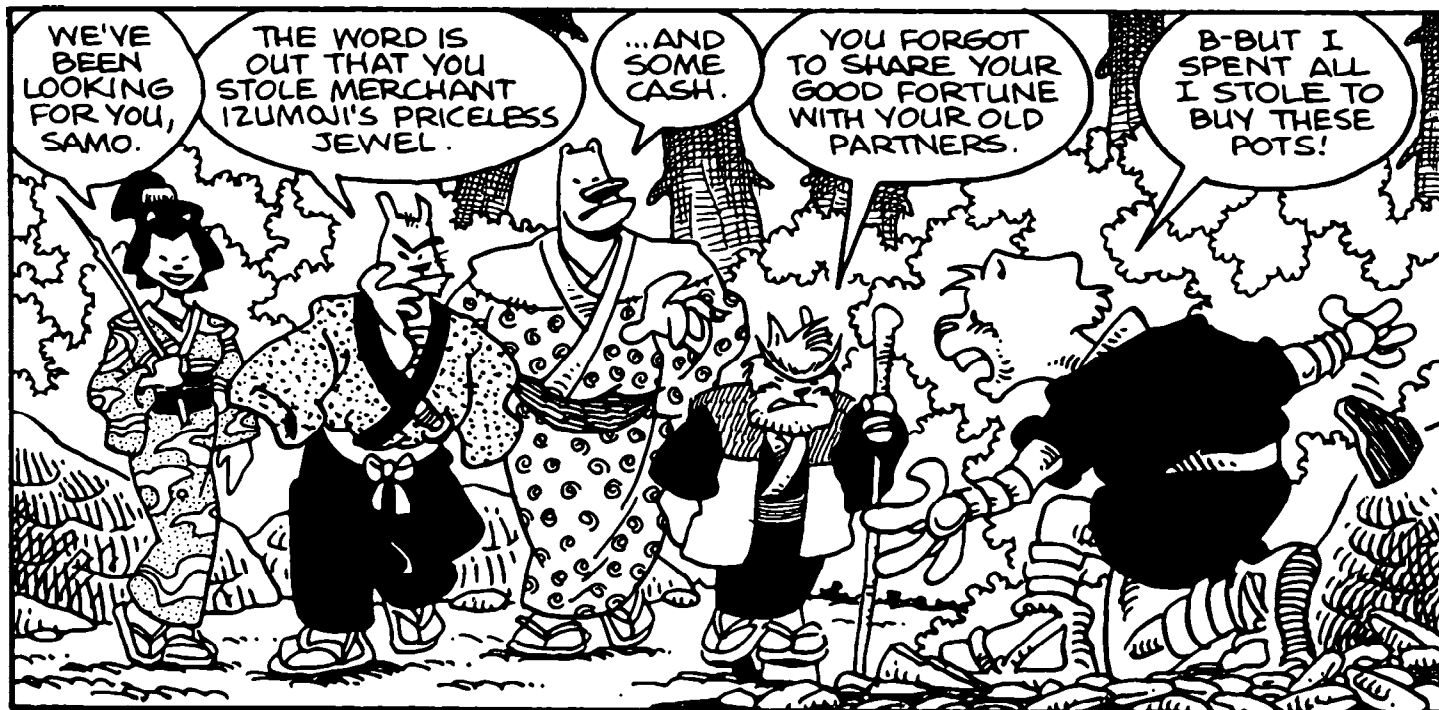
Ninjitsu Upgrades

Requires: Ninjitsu

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Ninjitsu” move.

- Deathless:** Add +setback to all Stalking rolls.
- Devious:** Add +1 to your negotiation, to a maximum of +3.
- Engeki:** When the story is in a combat mood, you may take +one die forward to one Ninjitsu roll of your choice that you make from a covered position. You don't get this bonus to the second and other Ninjitsu rolls for the rest of this combat, nor can you use this upgrade if you're not covered. You can't use this upgrade again until the next combat.
- Instructed:** Add +1 to your schooling, to a maximum of +3.

- Kaginawa Retreat:** When attacking with a *kaginawa*, you have the option for a Retreat move: “Inflict a strong hit, then fall back to a covered position.” Your retreat could be vertical, as you use the climbing rope to scale walls or to swing from rooftops.
- Kieru Ken:** When attacking with Empty Hands, you have the option for a Retreat special: “Inflict a strong hit, then fall back to a covered position.”
- Ninja-to Critical:** When attacking with a *ninja-to*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Nunchaku-jitsu:** When fighting with a Nunchaku, you have the option for a Finish special (score a grand hit on helpless targets) or for a Sweep special (score a weak hit on each member of a group).
- Sneaky:** Add +1 to your initiative, to a maximum of +3.
- Trickery:** When your combat roll is an event, you can use some ninja trick such as throwing a blinding powder, leaping over terrain, or some other ninja cleverness. Your next roll in this combat takes +1 forward, but everyone who saw you use this trickery now knows that you're a ninja.
- Unhafted Thrown Critical:** When you throw a *kunai* or *shuriken*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll. (You don't get this bonus if you're not throwing the weapons.)



Ranto Upgrades

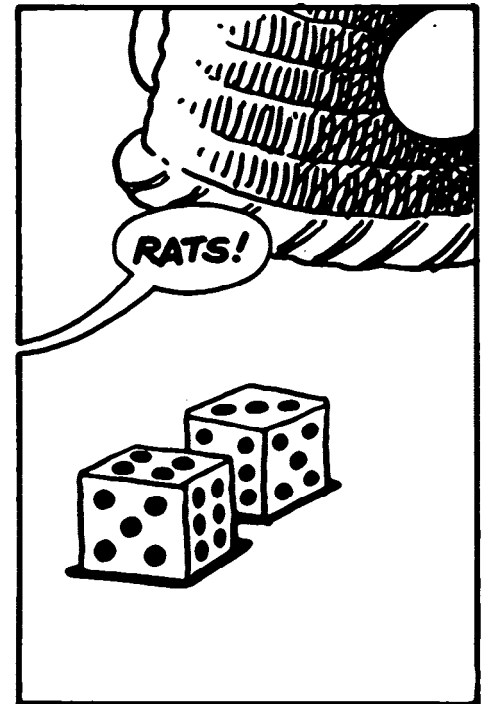
Requires: Ranto

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Ranto” move.

- Dirty Fighting:** When attacking with Empty Hands, if your roll is an event, you may make a low blow, dirty trick, or something else that’s particularly dishonorable. You take +3 back to your Empty-Hand event’s attack roll and you get +1 forward to your next roll, whatever that is. Anyone who sees you use this upgrade will know that you’re the kind of dishonorable person who fights dirty.
- Discretion:** When attacking with Ranto, regardless of the weapon, you have the option for the Discretion special: “Inflict a weak hit,

then fall back to a covered position; anyone who attacks the target you just hit takes +1 forward.”

- Ganging Up:** When attacking with Ranto, if you roll 6 or less, replace the result with this improvement: “A friend of your choice takes +1 forward to their next attack, and if your next move is Ranto, you take +3 forward”
- Kiseru Critical:** When attacking with a *kiseru*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- Shifty-Eyed:** Add +1 to your initiative, to a maximum of +3.
- Street Tough:** Add +1 to your righteousness, to a maximum of +3.
- Tanto Critical:** When attacking with a *tanto*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.



Risk Upgrades

Requires: Risk

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Risk” move.

- Bad Loser:** Add +setback to all your Ranto rolls.
- Charmed:** When *any* roll you make is an event, add +1 back to it. (This bonus stacks with other events’ bonuses.)
- Fast Fingers:** Add +1 to your initiative, to a maximum of +3.
- Fortunate:** When your Gambling roll is an event, take +3 back to your roll.
- Good Winner:** After anteing and winning story points from your gambling, you may give one or more of those points to any friends who only have 2, 1, or zero story points.
- Stone-faced:** Add +1 to your righteousness, to a maximum of +3.
- Streak of Luck:** Instead of spending a story point to take +3 back, you can spend it to take +1 forward to all your rolls... until you roll an event, and then the bonus ends.
- Wagering:** Add +1 to your negotiation, to a maximum of +3.

Sohei Upgrades

Requires: Sohei

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Sohei” move.

- **Atemi Waza:** When you attack with Sohei using Empty Hands, you may add the following specials to your list of options: Aim (no hit but +6 forward on your next Empty Hand attack), Bind (score a weak hit and hinder the target), Disarm (remove their weapon without hurting them), and Riposte (score a strong hit and take +1 forward with your next Empty Hand attack).
- **Bo Sweep:** When attacking with a *bo* or *konsaibo*, you have the option for a Sweep special: “Inflict a weak hit on every member of a group”.
- **Harmony:** When attacking with Sohei, if you roll 6 or less, replace the result with this improvement: “A friend of your choice takes +1 forward to their next attack, and if your next move is Sohei, you take +3 forward”
- **Ono Critical:** When attacking with an *ono*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.
- **Shakuhachi Critical:** When attacking with a *shakuhachi*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.



- **Shōki no Tamashī:** When you make any rolls to deal with sorcery or supernatural monsters, any event that you roll gives you +3 back to that roll. (You don’t get this bonus when fighting people, mundane creatures, or other sorcerers who use fight with swords and other mundane weapons instead of magic. You also don’t get this bonus to fight people who are possessed by the supernatural, nor do you get this bonus with demons in disguise. Exorcise first!)
- **Tetsubo Critical:** When attacking with a *tetsubo*, if your roll is an event, add +3 back to that roll.



Stalking Upgrades

Requires: Stalking

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Stalking” move.

- And Your Shadow:** When you follow a target or flee from some other targets, you can bring another person with you. Whatever results you score on your Stalking roll apply to this friend, too.
- Critical Stalking:** If your stalking roll is an event, add +3 back to your roll.

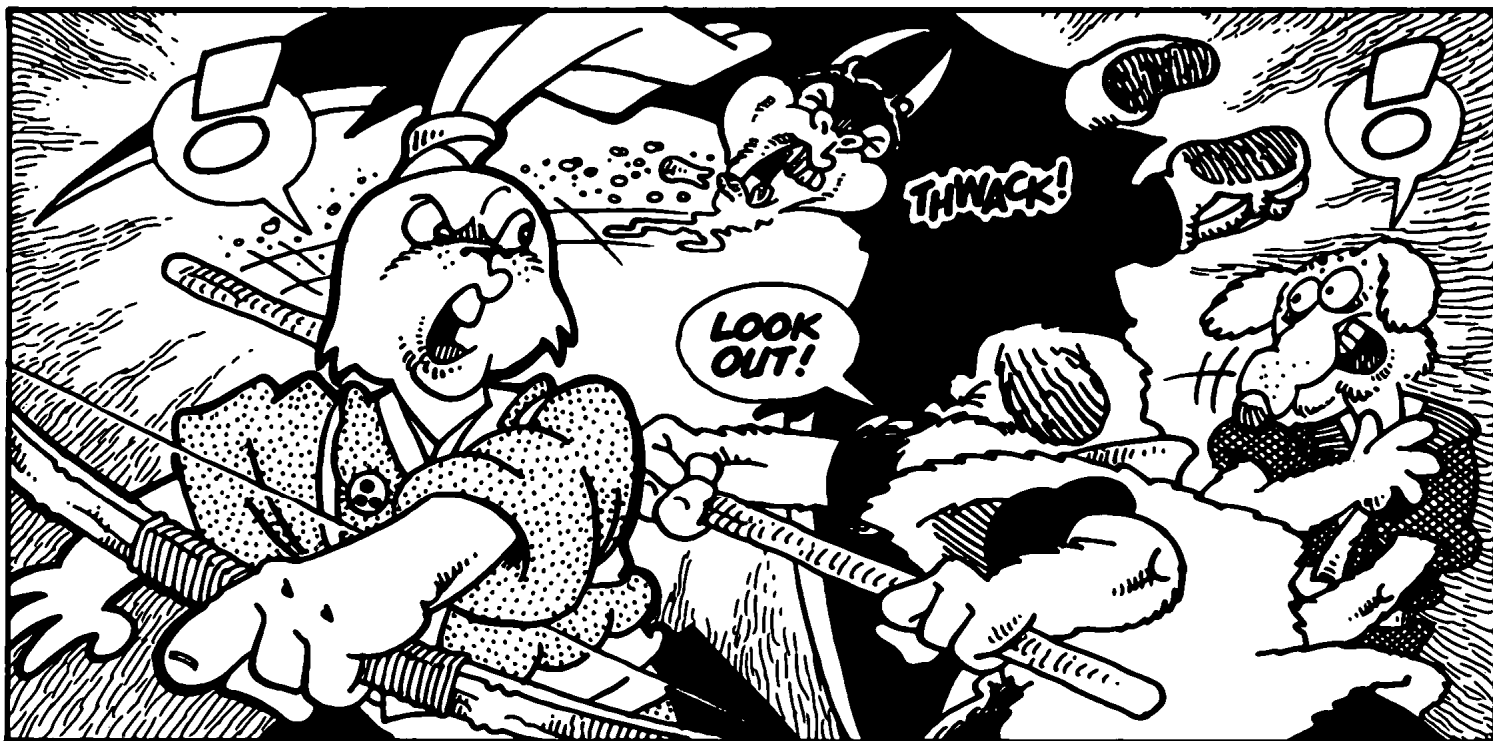
- Eavesdropper:** Add +1 to your initiative, to a maximum of +3.
- Inquisitive:** Add +1 to your negotiation, to a maximum of +3.
- Investigative:** Add +1 to your schooling, to a maximum of +3.
- Second Glance:** After rolling your Stalking, but before playing out the results, you can decide you want to re-roll. This new roll stands, even if it’s worse.

Teamwork Upgrades

Requires: Teamwork

You can apply these upgrades to your character if you already have the “Teamwork” move.

- Critical Teamwork:** When your Teamwork roll is an event, take +3 back to your Teamwork roll.
- Gregarious:** Add +1 to your negotiation, to a maximum of +3.
- Most Valuable Player:** When you spend a story point to take +3 back to a roll, choose another player; they will get +1 forward to their next roll.
- One for the Team:** If someone nearby is about to suffer a setback point, for any reason, you can take the setback instead, by doing something that would make you take this point. You then take +1 forward to the impair roll from gaining this point.
- Steadfast:** Add +setback to all your Teamwork rolls.
- Team Player:** You can spend one of your story points to give another player +2 back. (Without this upgrade, your story points only give +1 back.)
- Tenacious:** Add +1 to your righteousness, to a maximum of +3.





Okugi Upgrades (No requirements)

These *okugi* upgrades are inspired by *The Book of Five Rings*, by Miyamoto Musashi. The founder of Nito-Ryu, or “Two Swords School” of techniques to use *katana* (long sword) and *wakizashi* (companion sword) at the same time (*daisho*, “the long and the short”). Musashi was the inspiration for much of the samurai genre, as well as Miyamoto Usagi, our hero.

Although his book was written many years after the events in the *Usagi Yojimbo* story, these upgrades are well in the spirit of the genre.

- ❑ **Body in Place of the Sword:** After rolling an attack or a response to an attack, if you don’t like the result of that roll, you can call for a new play, where you use an Empty-Hand attack instead. The new result stands, even if it’s worse than your previous roll.

According to the enemy’s cutting method, you can dash against them with your body first, then afterwards cut them with your blade.

- ❑ **Body of the Rock:** When you must respond to a group of foes (two or more), you get +one die to your roll. (There is no bonus when you engage a single foe. This bonus is only for the response, not for your attack.)

When you have mastered strategy, ten thousand things cannot touch you, and you will not be moved. This is the body of a rock.



- ❑ **Causing Confusion:** As your move, choose an enemy on the battlefield. You and all your friends may add +schooling to all rolls made to respond to that enemy until your next move. On your next turn, if your move is to attack, take +3 forward.

You can confuse the enemy by attacking with varied techniques when the chance arises. Feint a thrust or cut, or make the enemy think you are going to close. This is the essence of fighting.

- ❑ **Causing Fright:** As your move, choose an enemy on the battlefield. You and all your friends may add +righteous to all rolls made to respond to that enemy until your next move. On your next turn, if your move is to attack, take +3 forward.

You must gain advantage by using your body, your voice, your weapon to defeat them. Fright occurs by doing the unexpected.

- ❑ **Crushing the Weakened Foes:** After your attack downs a foe, choose yourself or a friend; that friend takes +1 forward on their next roll in this combat.

When the enemy is weak and disordered, you must crush them utterly. If you crush them lightly, they might recover.

- ❑ **Fire and Stones Cut:** If your last move was to attack this enemy or group, you get +1 forward to attack them on your next move.

When you clash your weapon with your enemy's, you must be unrelenting where others would give up.



- ❑ **Flowing Water Cut:** You get +one die to any roll to prevent an enemy from disengaging with you.

When an enemy quickly withdraws, expand your body and spirit and cut him as slowly as possible with your blade, flowing your body like stagnant water.

- ❑ **Holding Down a Shadow:** The first time an enemy engages you in this combat, you may take +1 forward to your next roll against them. Any second or later rolls that you must make to engage this enemy do not get the bonus from this upgrade.

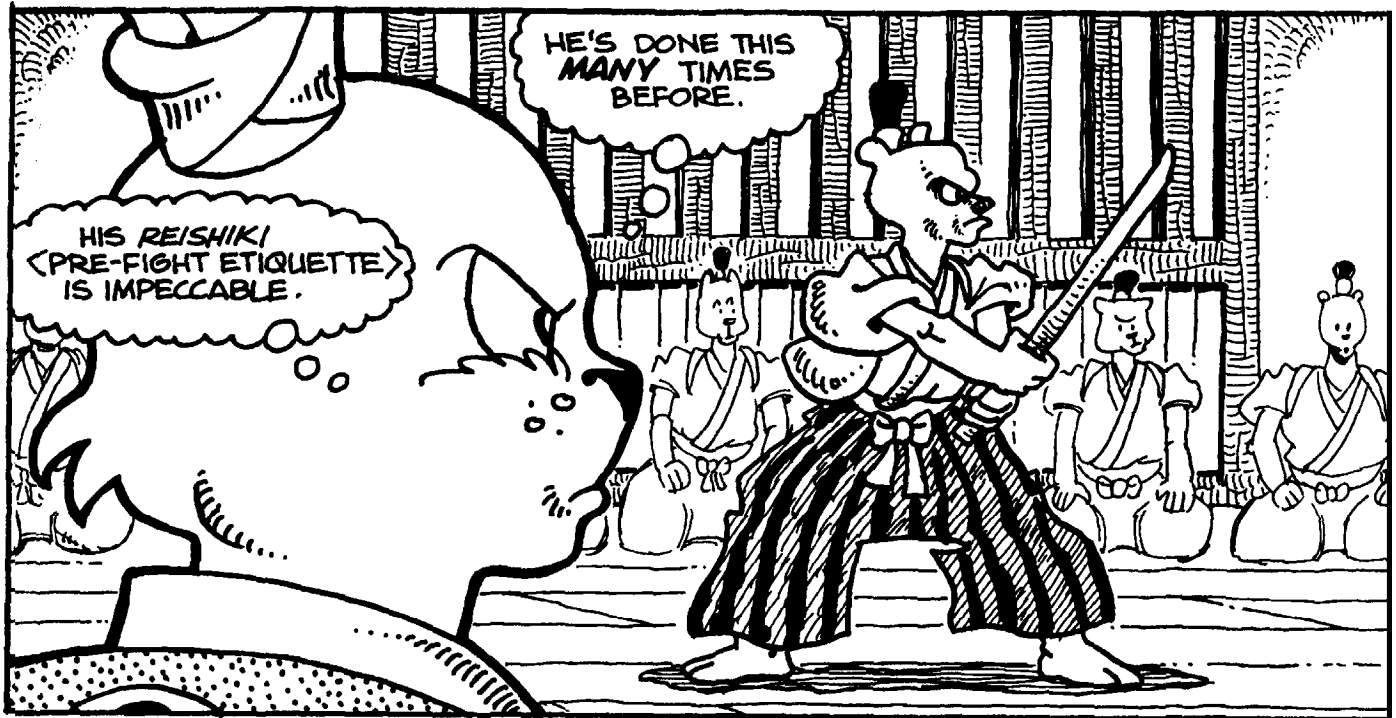
When you can see into an enemy's spirit, you can "hold down their shadows" — defeat them by forestalling them with superior timing.

- ❑ **Indoor Techniques:** When you fight inside a *dojo*, *dohyo*, or other exhibition, you have +3 to all your rolls. This upgrade gives absolutely no bonus for actual, deadly combat.

If you learn "indoor techniques" in a dojo [school of swordsmanship], with too much formality and ritual, you will have difficulty in actual encounters.

- ❑ **Knowing the Enemy's Troops:** When one or more foes move to engage you and your friends, you may tell the MC that you want one enemy or group to engage a different target of your choice, instead. If the MC doesn't change that engagement like you asked, you take +1 forward to your next roll.

Know the enemy's disposition in battle. Is it flourishing or waning? By observing the spirit of the enemy's men, you can move your soldiers accordingly.



- **Living Hands:** When your bad rolling means you would be disarmed (because of an impaired event, an enemy's action, etc.), you can re-roll. This new roll stays in play, even if it's worse.

When you grip a sword, you must be pliable and ready to adapt. A fixed hand is a dead hand.

- **Rat's Head, Ox's Neck:** In a combat, you can spend one support point to give you +1 forward on your next roll *and* each one of your friends gets +1 on their next roll, too.

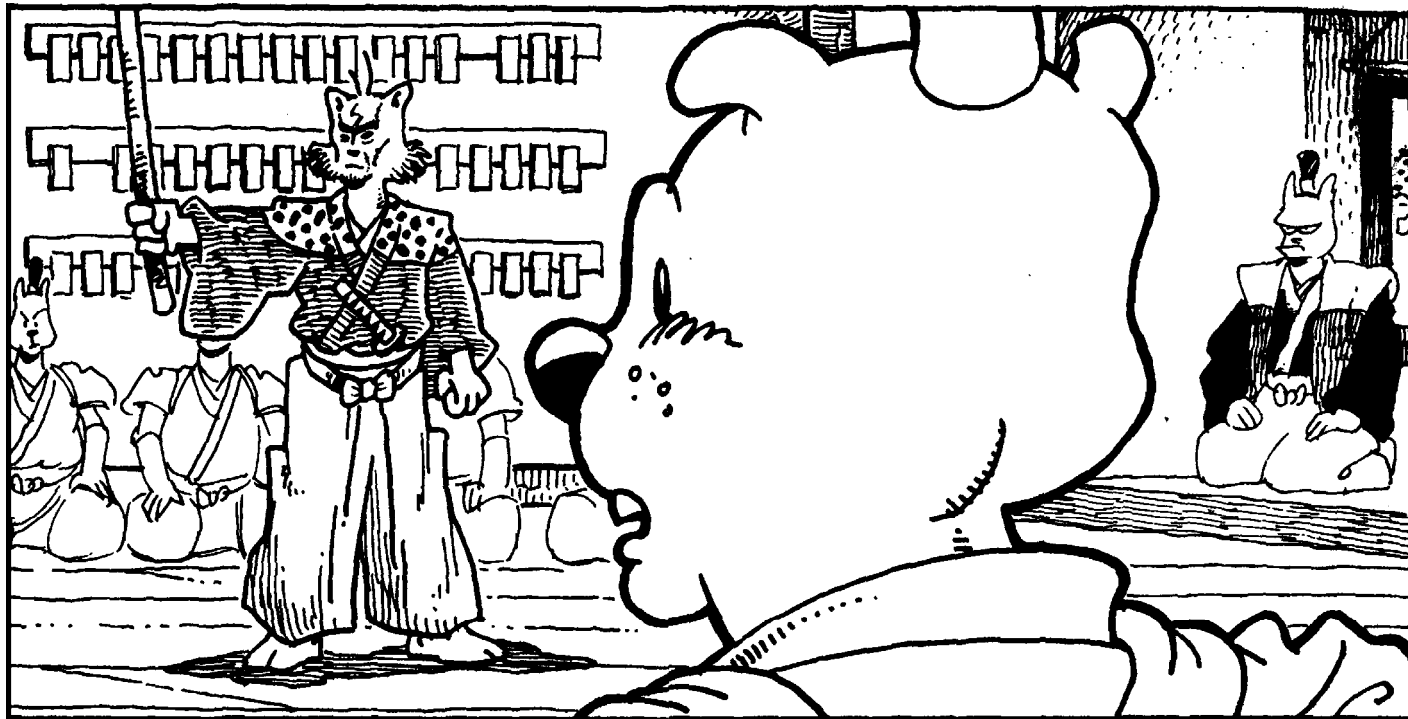
"Rat's Head, Ox's Neck" means that when we become preoccupied with small details, we must suddenly change into a large spirit, interchanging large with small. This is one of the essences of strategy.

- **Renewal:** When you spend a story point or a support point, you may also remove one of your impairments; if you do, increase your setback total by 1 *but don't roll* to see if something happens.

When our spirit becomes fettered, when feel there is no possible resolution, we must abandon our efforts and think with a fresh spirit to win with a new rhythm.

- **Strategic Gaze:** You get +1 to rolls when engaging a group of foes. (A group is two or more foes together. You get no bonus for engaging a single target.)

In strategy, it is necessary to look to both sides without moving the eyeballs.



- **Striking the Corners:** In combat, if you hit a front to reduce its point total, you also reduce it by one more.

Also, when you engage a single strong or single grand foe, you get +1 to all rolls. (There's no bonus for weak foes, nor is there a bonus when you're engaging a group.)

It is difficult to move strong things by pushing directly — you should “injure the corners”. In single combat, strike at the corners of the foe’s body (arms, legs, hands and feet) and weaken them. It is important to know how to do this, so you much research this thoroughly.

- **Timing of Two:** After making an attack roll, but before playing out the result, you may declare a do-over. Re-roll all your dice. The new roll replaces the previous roll, even if it's worse.

You can normally only use this upgrade once per combat. If you want to use it before the next combat, you must suffer 1 setback point.

When your enemy retreats, as you see them tense, you must feint a cut. Then, as they relax, follow up and hit them. This is the “Timing of Two.”

- ❑ **Treading Down the Sword:** When you take a hit from an enemy but *before* you make your impair roll, you may choose to “tread down the sword.” First, add 1 to your setback total (but don’t roll yet). Then, make an attack roll vs. the enemy that hit you, adding your +setback to that attack roll. After playing out this attack, then make your impair roll.

The spirit is to win as we are treading down the attack. Not just with the feet, but with the body, the spirit, and, of course, tread and cut with the long sword. You must achieve the spirit of not letting the enemy attack a second time.

- ❑ **Winding Mountain Path:** After playing out your combat move, you may choose to engage a new enemy or group. If you’re already engaged with someone, that group may follow you or they may not (MC’s discretion).

You must understand the spirit of advancing and becoming engaged with the enemy, and not withdrawing even one step. Attack the enemy’s strong points.

- ❑ **Yin-Yang Feet:** You can change your position (exposed, flanking, or covered) freely. If any enemy tries to stop you from changing position, you take +3 forward on any rolls to overcome them.

You should not move one foot preferentially. When moving fast or slow, with large or small steps, your feet should always move as in normal walking.



Variant Rule: THE X-CARD

It's one thing to be watching a movie or TV show about sex or violence, to be a passive observer to mature issues. It's another thing to be an active participant. And with other people *right here*, putting social pressure for a quick response, a player might time point a high level of anxiety.

Our *Usagi* is a game in the historical past, in a place where social conventions are different than today's. The stories in the comic and television shows have been reviewed and edited for content — something that doesn't always happen in a quick, immediate game of improvisation. Some players may find confronting issues of history and maturity to be interesting; overcoming them as part of the game's story can be fun. ... But other players may be uncomfortable with such subject matter.

In a role-playing game, sometimes players will use their role "in character" to say things that someone might find hurtful. Role-playing games can create a dissociative effect, where what someone is saying "in game" is not considered to have any real-world consequences... while other players may not share the same sense of immersion.

It's never fun when someone's feelings get hurt. You and your fellow players may consider including the *X Card* in your game.

Each player gets a card with a big X on it

A standard 3x5 or A7 index card with a big "X" drawn it works great, but any card will do: a playing card, a common trading card, a coaster, etc.

If something happens that makes you uncomfortable, **throw your X-Card** onto the table. **Whatever is going on stops now.**

The player who threw the card doesn't have to explain why they threw the card.

The game immediately pauses, while the players and the MC edit the last event in the game's fiction. After an X-Card is dropped, the MC might consider declaring a 5-minute break before play resumes, to let tensions die down.

After using your X-Card to stop the game, pick it back up

There's no limit to the number of times you can use it. If you're using your X-Card more than once per game, though, you should really be talking about that in the debriefing, because you're not having fun.

Some groups may find that the X-Card can serve as a quick and easy reminder of the boundaries of what can and cannot go on during your game. The safety net of the X-Card can empower a player to push the emotions a bit further than they normally would, because they trust their fellow players to let them know immediately if they've gone too far.

Other groups may find the X-Card to be too simplistic or formalized. The X-Card is to prevent feelings being hurt — it's not supposed to be used because you don't like how a die roll came up. If you use the X-Card variant, remember that it's about keeping the game fun and exciting as you push the limits of your imagination.



Variant Rule: OTHER WAYS TO PLAY

In a standard game of *Usagi*, each player has only one character, and the MC is the same from game to game. Some groups may want to experiment with letting players have more than one character.

Some players like the challenge of having multiple characters, but some will find it to be a lot of work. As with everything in your game, the MC and the other players should discuss how their game is working for them, and what we can do to make it more enjoyable.

With downtime bonuses, characters get small game rewards forward for small preparations

In the standard rules, downtime activities are parts of the story: important enough to consider, but not so interesting that they need elaborate game mechanics.

With the *downtime bonuses* variant rule, players can have their characters prepare use the casual mood of the game to prepare for future, dicey challenges.

Downtime Activity	Effect
Combat Preparation (restocking ammo, sharpening blades, practicing, etc.)	+1 forward with a combat roll of your choice
Rest (good food, saké, medical care, meditation, etc.)	+1 forward on your next three impairment rolls

Downtime Activity	Effect
Care (helping another player-character with medicine, morale, etc.)	Spend 1 support point to remove 1 setback point from another player-character
Research (going through library records, scriptures, other written materials, etc.)	Ask the MC three questions related to your research; take +1 forward on rolls to act on the answers
Job (plying your trade)	Roll your career's unique move: 7 to 9, get money or other resources; 10 or better, take +1 forward to a unique move's roll
Make something up!	+1 forward to an appropriate roll

Players can often feel overwhelmed by the game world, since they have just the one character and limited resources, so downtime bonuses can give them a sense of control. Other players may not appreciate "gamifying" too many aspects of the game like this, which makes the game less about story-telling and more about mechanics. As with all variant rules, talk with your fellow players about how you want your role-playing experience to be.

You can create new species and playbooks

Fans of anthropomorphic comics may want to make up their own stories. Just make sure all the attributes total up to zero, and you'll be fine.

There's two species that appear in the *Usagi* that have special rules: the bats of the Komori ninja and the moles of the Mogura ninja. These two species are shown to have exceptional abilities (flying, digging) as well as hindrances (no hands, light blindness) that would make them a challenge to play with most tabletop role-playing groups. If you and your fellow players feel up to the challenge, you can introduce them as options for player-characters. The sense of mystery and wonder of these outliers will diminish a bit and be careful about some players abusing their abilities to reduce everyone else's enjoyment of the game.

You can also make up your own playbooks, using the ones in this book as a guideline. These playbooks are intended for a typical role-playing game: one where the players are itinerant wanderers who stumble upon adventure. But that's not the only kind of adventure to be found in *Usagi's* worlds. The players could all be ninjas, working their spy-craft in return for political power. Or the players could all be loyal retainers to a landed lord, dealing with the problems of the citizenry.

When making your own character options, be wary of "ice cream for dinner" — when the players ask for new abilities that are so powerful, they will reduce the challenge of the game. A good role-playing game is about overcoming adversity and about responding to the random emergence that comes from both failure and success.

In a character-tree variant, players play one of multiple characters

In this variant, each player has two, three, or more characters. (You should all agree on the exact number.) Each time a new adventure starts, each player chooses one Player-Character to use for that adventure.

The MC is encouraged to talk to the players before the game starts about what sort of adventure is planned for the day. The player can then choose which character is most appropriate for the challenge.

Character trees can make sense in a campaign that's centered around a location or organization. For example, the characters could all be retainers for Lord Noriyuki, tasked to keep the peace and to deal with problems.

If you are using upgrades, usually only the character who goes on the adventure gets the upgrade... but the other characters in a player's tree could be assumed to be doing their own adventure, and get 50% or 30% as much credit towards an upgrade as the one that was in the story.

Some players will enjoy having a choice between which character to play at one time. But other players may not want to divide their attention this way, preferring to concentrate on a single hero.

You could also give everyone multiple characters to play

If you have only one or two players, you could let players have two or more characters at the same time. In a round of combat, each character would make their moves independently of each other.

Multiple characters per player can get overwhelming very quickly, if you have a lot of players. It can be an

even greater issue if you're using the upgrade rules, which makes for a lot of complicated interactions. As with all variant rules, talk with your players about what works best for your group's style of play.

In a troupe variant, the role of MC changes from player to player

Many games have one person dedicated to the role of MC. In this variant, the players form a troupe, and they rotate who is playing as the MC with each session.

Troupes let you experiment with different MCs, which will give different kinds of stories and styles of play. Being an MC is a lot of work, so sharing that work with multiple people reduces the overhead.

Some players don't like taking on the role of MC. The Master of Ceremonies is at the center of all attention, dealing with multiple players all shouting about what they want their players to do, while the world of the story goes on in the back of their heads. Talk with your fellow players before sharing this responsibility.

Adding permanent death of player-characters to your game

In the standard rules of this game, characters cannot be explicitly killed by misfortune or by setbacks — they can only be disabled or incapacitated. In the *permanent-death* variation, use these rules:

- Any character who has impaired all seven attributes (initiative, negotiation, righteousness, schooling, setback, support, and story) becomes incapacitated. If the incapacitation was caused by a violent event, the character is now dying and must get help within the hour or die.
- Any character who suffers more impairments than they can apply to attributes becomes incapacitated. If that impairment was caused by a violent event, the character is instantly killed.
- Any character who rolls an *event* on a setback roll, when setback was already *impaired before the roll*, will be instantly killed if the setback was caused by a violent attack.

Dead characters are no longer in play. They will not be returning to the story.

Character death can be a dramatic moment, a turning point in the story. Games are also something people play to have fun, and it can be very traumatic for players to lose a character. Always discuss with your fellow players what your expectations will be.

With a character tree or a troupe-style, players have access to multiple characters, so losing one of many to the struggle isn't as terrible of a blow as losing your only character. Permanent-death, multiple-character games have more in common with *jidai-geki* stories of tragedy and violence, of sacrifice and loss. You and your fellow players are encouraged to experiment with new styles of play.

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

Bushido Blade I & II — vintage video games that have a variety of weapons, designs, and philosophy.

Groo the Wanderer — comic-book parody of swords-and-sandals fantasy that has artistic influences on early Usagi stories.

Lone Wolf and Cub — grim comic book series, later made into movies, about an assassin who walks the road to hell, and the son that he takes along with him. Violent and often strange.

The Mandalorian — TV series inspired by the “Lone Wolf and Cub” series, set in the popular *Star Wars* universe. Watch for the episodic story-beats and the parallels to wandering samurai.

Ran — Akira Kurosawa’s movie about betrayal and madness. Beautiful visuals of Sengoku-era warfare.

Rurouni Kenshin — Anime set in the Meiji Restoration era. Portrays the decline of the samurai, taking some liberties with historical accuracy.

Samurai Champloo — mature themes abound in this bizarre anime that drops modern-day anachronisms into Tokugawa-era Japan.

Samurai Jack — Before the final blow was struck, an unspeakable evil tore open a portal in time and flung a samurai into the future, where evil is law. Award-winning, stylish animated series that is highly recommended.

Sanjuro — Kurosawa and Mifune return to tell a new story about the mysterious ronin from *Yojimbo*. Recommended.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles — four mutant animals fight ninjas, robots, and aliens. Usagi and the Turtles have crossed over multiple times.

Yojimbo — Akira Kurosawa’s movie where Toshiro Mifune as a ronin who plays two rival crime bosses against each other. Recommended.

Zatoichi — Several movies about a blind swordsman and all the trouble he gets into. A major inspiration for *Usagi* stories.



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兔
用
心
棒

USAGI YOJIMBO™

Name

Species

Playbook

Quirk

Distinguishing Characteristics

Motivation

Items

Position

Exposed

Flanking

Covered

Out



Roll two dice
& add this value

When an attribute is **impaired**,
any roll of doubles is a **complication**



Initiative

Observation, Speed, Timing

Awkward



Negotiation

Social interactions, Charm

Embarrassed



Righteousness

Endurance, Willpower, Strength

Upset



Schooling

Knowledge, Life Experience

Exhausted



Story

Spend 1 for +3 back, gain 1 support

Fumbling



Support

Spend 1 for a friend to get +1 back

Fatigued



Setback

Each time you gain one setback, roll two dice
and subtract your new setback total from it

Tragic

Zero or less

5 Grand Suffering: The MC will tell you to impair five of your attributes. Also, if you have more than 3 setback points, drop your total to 3.

1 to 3

3 Strong Suffering: The MC will tell you to impair three of your attributes. Also, if you have more than 3 setback points, drop your total to 3.

4 to 6

1 Weak Suffering: The MC will tell you to impair one of your attributes. (You and your fellow players can make suggestions.) Also, if you have more than 3 setback points, drop your total to 3.

7 to 9

Overcoming Adversity: No effect.

10 or more

Esprit: The camaraderie of your friends fills you with determination. Gain 1 support.