

# Spark RPG

## Open Beta

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Please send all comments, actual play reports, recordings, or other feedback to [genesisoflegend@gmail.com](mailto:genesisoflegend@gmail.com) . Please include "beta" in the subject line.

# What's in the Book

Spark is a roleplaying, storytelling game with a lot of moving parts. The book starts with the **Introduction** where I explain what the game is about and what you need to start playing. After that, I show you how you can create your own **Setting** or use a premade one. Each of the players creates their own **Characters** who interact with each and with the setting. The actual rules of how to play the game are in **Gameplay**, while the **Guidance** helps you have more fun while you play the game. There is a detailed **Example** which shows you how I run the game, and there are a series of three premade settings (**NeoNippon**, **Old Cold City** & **The Republic of the Elements**) you can use for your game.

The end of the book has a series of appendixes including various templates, sheets, a glossary of terms and an index. There is a credits section for the fine people who helped me refine the game.

If this is your first time reading a roleplaying game, check out the **Your First RPG** section on Pg. XX, then come back here.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## What is Spark?

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a tale of two youths torn between family loyalty and romantic love. *Moby Dick*, by Herman Melville, focuses on the cost of vengeance. The Spark RPG is designed to help you tell those kinds of stories. It's about examining your character's motivations, convictions, and perspectives.

Spark is a roleplaying, storytelling game. You play important characters in a fictional world. You cooperate to tell a story about heroic deeds and personal struggles. Explore the ideas that matter to you.

- Create fictional characters and use them to explore a rich setting of your making.
- Collaborate with your friends to tell a dynamic story.
- Explore the themes and issues that matter to you.
- Make meaningful choices and drive the story forward.

## Challenge your Beliefs

You tell a story about a group of individuals with their own firmly held convictions. These characters struggle with each other and the world to uphold their **Beliefs**.

The more you challenge your Beliefs, the more Fate supports your characters during play. By changing yourself, you can change the world. It is a game about self-reflection and personal growth. A game that helps you explore real life issues and learn a little bit more about yourself.

## Build your World

The Spark RPG is about imagining, building, and exploring fictional worlds. It gives you all of the tools and guidance you need to create an evocative and engaging setting. It shows you how to work together, how to find inspiration, and how to structure this fictional setting. Most importantly, it teaches you how to create a place that each of you find compelling.

The game is purpose-built to accommodate and support custom settings, without a need to hack the system. You can work together to create a world that interests all of you, one that gives you a context for rich stories.

# What you Need

When you want to play this game, you need...

- **People:** 3-6 to play the game
- **Stuff:** Dice, tokens, pencils and sheets
- **Time:** 2-5 hours per session

## People

You need between three and six people interested in the game. One person fills the role of the Game Moderator, while the others will be Players. The game can easily accommodate missing a player or two for any given session.

## Stuff

You need a few things in order to play the Spark RPG. Our website ([www.genesisoflegend.com](http://www.genesisoflegend.com)) has copies of the sheets, or you can photocopy the ones found in the back of this book with our permission.

- The GM will need a GM Sheet, a Faction Sheet, a Belief Sheet, and a Setting Worksheet.
- Each of the players will need their own Character Sheets.
- A few pieces of paper, index cards, a pen, and a few pencils with erasers.
- One unique marker to represent the Initiative
- About 50 tokens of some kind to represent Fate.
- Everyone in the game should have a set of polyhedral dice. You can usually find these at local hobby stores or comic book shops.

## Time

In the game, you get to play through a series of **Scenes**. Each scene takes place in a set place and time called the **Platform**. Each scene deals with some kind of event or situation called the **Tilt**. Lastly, each scene focuses on answering a **Question**. You can find more information about scenes in the framing section of Chapter 4.

Every time your group gets together to play the game is called as **Session**. Each session will typically take 2-5 hours to play, consisting of a series of scenes. Think of a session as one episode of a television series.

A **story** refers to one or more sessions that focus on a major plot element or narrative arc. It's like a season of a television series and will usually take 2-5 sessions to complete.

A **campaign** refers to the total collection of stories that you wish to tell together. Usually a campaign will focus on the same characters and the same setting, although both of those are prone to change over the long period.

# Choosing Roles

## The Game Moderator

One member of your group needs to take the job of Game Moderator (GM) who will lead the game and control the Setting. The text will always refer to the GM with the feminine pronouns (she/her) to make the examples more clear, but a GM may be of any gender.

As a Game Moderator, you will:

- Portray most of the minor, Non-Protagonist characters (NPC's) that fill the world.
- Create the agendas of the major Factions.
- Express the character of society, based on the setting Beliefs.
- Describe how the setting changes during play, controlling the natural environment.
- Interpret the rules of the game and make judgments when appropriate.
- Organize where and when your group will meet up to play the game.

As a GM, you guide the players into telling dynamic, character-focused stories. Think of a game of Spark as a blockbuster movie; the GM is the director, producer, and most of the extras. Don't worry; the game comes with all the tools you need to moderate the game. [Pg. XX]

As a GM, you need to follow four principles:

- Keep the story moving.
- Say yes or roll the dice.
- Ask them questions.
- Challenge their Beliefs.

The Guidance chapter explains how. [Pg XX]

# The Players

Everyone else in the game plays a Protagonist Character (PC). The text will always refer to the player with the masculine pronouns (he/his) to make the examples more clear, but players may be of any gender.

Each player will create their character with their own Beliefs, histories, personalities and capabilities. They use the character to interact with the other characters and their setting.

As a player, you will:

- Create a character and their three Beliefs that drive the game.
- Make decisions about your character's history and background.
- Portray that character, deciding what they say and how they behave.
- Portray minor Non-Protagonist Characters (NPC's), usually from one of the specific Factions.
- Collaborate to build scenes and affect the world.
- Enter into conflicts to support or refute Beliefs.

The players are the backbone of the game, keeping the game moving forward and bringing the drama to the table. If Spark is a blockbuster, each player is both actor and screenwriter. The game will help you create your own compelling character [Pg XX]

As a player, you need to follow four principles:

- Share your energy and creativity
- Take risks and escalate conflicts
- Take a principled position
- Challenge their Beliefs

The Guidance chapter explains how. [Pg XX]

# Setting Boundaries

Spark can deal with some very sensitive subjects. Uncomfortable topics or triggering content can really cause pain and make the game less fun for everyone. Make sure you are aware of everyone's boundaries and respect them.

## Lines

Lines are subjects that are absolutely off limits. When someone declares something is a Line, it's absolutely off limits. Don't deal with it directly or indirectly during play. Broken lines tend to lead to broken friendships

## Veils

Veils are subjects that you fade to black. Feel free to imply that something veiled happens, but don't describe any details that would make people uncomfortable.

## Thresholds

Thresholds are topics that are sensitive, but ones that you could explore during play. When someone declares something is Threshold, they are asking you to handle it with care.

## Common Boundaries

Here are some of the most common and severe boundaries that I have run into during my experiences. Your group should check which of these are Lines, Veils, or Thresholds.

- Consensual Sex
- Slavery
- Sexual Assault (Rape)
- Child Abuse
- Ethnic Cleansing
- Forced Religious Conversion
- Graphic Violence
- Torture

Write down your group's boundaries on the GM sheet she can keep track. If something comes up in play, you can always add more boundaries to the sheet.



# The Fundamentals

## Beliefs and Fate

Spark is a game about challenging and examining your Beliefs. Everyone in the game has their own list of declarative, subjective, and controversial Beliefs. Challenging Beliefs, either by supporting them or acting against them, gives you Fate. You can spend your Fate to support you conflicts, improve other characters, or suggest new Beliefs for other characters.

## The Core Mechanic

Spark can be reduced to a single, basic procedure. If you are ever stuck in the game or uncertain what the rule is, just follow these steps.

1. Discuss what the problem and explain your intents.
2. If everyone agrees that something should happen, it does.
3. If people disagree, everyone rolls the relevant dice and person with the high number gets their way.

## Starting the Game

Ready to start playing the game?

Decide if you want to make your own custom setting for the game [Pg. XX] or if you want to use a published setting [Pg. XX].

Each player makes their own Protagonist Character, with some contributions by the other people at the table. [Pg. XX]

Each player narrates a prologue scene for their PC [Pg. XX]

Frame your first Scene [Pg. XX]; determining the question, you are trying to answer with it.

Collaborate, making bold declarations [Pg. XX] until a conflict ensues [Pg. XX]. Repeat this until you have answered your question.

Keep framing scenes, collaborating and entering into conflicts until you are out of time for the session.

Most important of all, have fun!

# Chapter 2 – Setting

## How to make a Setting

### Overview

The first part of this chapter shows you a process to create own setting from scratch. Building a setting is an easy, collaborative, and creative process that usually takes a bit over an hour to do during the first session.

The other part of the chapter explains a quick process to start playing with one of the existing, published settings. You can find published settings on our website. This book also includes three published settings for your use.

- **NeoNippon:** Chapter 7 presents a Japanese science-fiction setting inspired by the works of Kurosawa.
- **Old, Cold, City:** Chapter 8 presents a gritty, modern police procedural set in a city of dark secrets.
- **The Republic of the Elements:** Chapter 9 presents an ancient Greek fantasy republic under siege by elemental passions and monsters.

Regardless of which process you choose, each setting will tend to have the same components.

Every setting requires three **Beliefs** that define the world. Whenever the GM confirms or refutes one of these setting Beliefs during a conflict, she is rewarded with Fate. She records the Setting Beliefs on the GM Sheet and the Belief Sheet.

**Factions** represent the major organizations and groups that influence the setting. Each Faction was founded to uphold a particular **mandate**, based from the setting's Beliefs. At the beginning of each session, Factions have a chance to accomplish certain short-term **agendas**. During play, new **ties** will be established or changed between Factions. The GM has a separate sheet for the Factions.

Published settings might also have additional content to inspire play. They might include short written histories, maps, illustrations, lists of potential threats, lists of names or other story hooks. They will also have lists of evocative sample **Talents** and **Conditions** that players can use in character creation. In settings that have supernatural powers or advanced technologies, they will be discussed in this section.

# Creating Custom Settings

Building a setting is an easy, collaborative, and creative process that usually takes a bit over an hour to do during the first session. You start to **Gather Inspirations** from your favourite media, and then use those to **Describe the Genre** for your game. You **Establish Facts** about the setting to include those inspirations. Once you have a list of facts about the world, within your chosen genre, you can come up with a **Title and Tag Line** to help focus your vision of the game. After that, you come up with a list of **Setting Beliefs** and choose the three that are central to your game. **Create Factions** based on those Beliefs and **Create Ties** of relationships between the different Factions. Lastly, you **Create Agendas** which those Factions will start to work towards in the first session of the game.

## Step 1: Gather Inspirations

Go around the table, and ask each person to name one of their favourite pieces of media. This could be a book, a movie, video game, comic, poem, or a song. Write these down on the Setting worksheet or on a blank piece of paper under the heading of **Media**. It's ok not to know the media; that's why you pull out inspirations in the next step.

Go around the table again, giving everyone a chance to explain what they like the most about their choice. Write these down in a numbered list on the Setting worksheet under the heading of **Inspirations**. Each person can add more inspirations to the list if they want.

This step is all about gathering ideas and brainstorming. You assemble a list of ingredients that you would like to include in the setting. The more ingredients, the most material you have available for you to define the world. You aren't obliged to use all of your inspirations later on if you can't come up with a way to include one or more of them.

### Example

Angela: Apparently, each of us is supposed to pick some kind of cool media that we love. Think of books, music, movies, TV shows, or video games. To start things off, I will pick **Firefly**.

Brian: Um, how about Kurosawa's **The Seven Samurai**?

Chris: Cool. I'm definitely in a mood for some **Shadowrun** action, so I will throw that in the mix.

Dave: Oh, I do suppose it's my turn, is it not. Ok, how about this little indie video game **Geneforge**?

Brian: Never heard of it. What's it about?

Angela: That's fine Brian, you don't need to know all the media at this point. We are getting to that in this next step. Now that each of us has contributed a media and we wrote it down, we get to create Inspirations and explain what we like about each of them. Personally, I love the **anachronistic sci-fi** nature of Firefly. You know that scene where they are unloading a herd of cattle from the hold of their space ship? It's very much a western in space, which is cool.

Brian: Ok. I love the **feudal Japanese society** in The Seven Samurai, more concerned with wealth and honour than the well-being of the peasants.

Chris: Cool cool. I love the **oppressive megacorps** that are feuding with each other in Shadowrun.

Dave: Geneforge is all about a group of wizards doing magical genetic engineering. They literally create a new intelligent race known as the serviles, some loyal and some rebellious. I believe that **genetically-engineered servant race** would be a good inspiration.

Angela: Great. We now we get a chance to add a few more inspirations into the pot of things we would generally like to see in the game. The spiritual portion of Shadowrun and the Japanese society tend to make me think of Kami. If no one has a problem with that, I will add it in.

Chris: How about some **aliens**? I think that's all.

## Step 2: Describe the Genre

As a group, you should consider all of the inspirations and decide on some single genre that you want for your setting.

Here are a few common genres you can pick from.

- Alternate History
- Fantasy
- Modern
- Romance
- Mystery
- Horror
- Sci-fi
- Supers

Create a descriptor, a single adjective or noun that makes your setting different from others within that genre. The best descriptors are emotional, cultural, or philosophical.

Be sure to consider your boundaries [pg. XX], since they may restrict what genres you can choose from. If there is a line of "Graphic Violence," you shouldn't pick a genre of "Splatterpunk Horror."

This step helps you get a bit of a common vision to help you interpret your inspirations and establish facts. Write the genre and descriptor on the setting worksheet.

### Example

Angela: Now we come up with some genre along with another word or two that describes our spin on it. With Anachronistic Sci-Fi, Aliens and megacorps, it seems to be Science Fiction to me.

Chris: Sounds good. Could we make it Japanese Science Fiction?

Brian: Hmm, a bit more precise? Shogunate Science Fiction, since that explains this is more feudal and less anime?

Dave: Agreed. **Shogunate Science Fiction** appeals to me.

## Step 3: Establish Facts

In this step, you establish a series of facts about the setting. In Step 1, you extracted your inspiration from a piece of media. In this step, you establish facts about the setting, each of which expresses two different inspirations on the worksheet.

Go around the table, with each person trying to find patterns or associations in the list of Inspirations. When someone thinks up some interesting, evocative fact about the world, they propose it to the group. When the group unanimously agrees on a fact, write it down on the setting worksheet under the heading of **Facts** along with the numbers of the inspirations.

Once you have two facts per person, some common themes should emerge. This step helps you express the unique character of your particular Setting, and it ensures that the world is filled with content that the group is interested in.

### Example

Angela: I'm trying to make some kind of association out of Anachronistic Science Fiction and Feudal Japanese Society. I remember that the explanation for the primitive tech level in Firefly was that colony planets wouldn't have the industrial capacity to maintain or build high tech. Why would a shogunate science fiction setting have limited tech?

Chris: One of the things that limited shogunate-era / Japan was a lack of good steel. Their island didn't have much iron ore, and what they had was lousy.

Angela: Thanks! I propose a fact that **This planet is extremely poor in metals, so technology is hard to build or maintain.**

Brian: Ok. I will link Kami and Anachronistic Sci-Fi to state that **The planet is dotted with small wooden shinto shrines.**

Dave: I do not understand. Could you explain that link?

Brian: Not a problem. The Kami are the spirits in the Shinto religion that was founded in Japan. Shintoism tends to have roadside shrines everywhere to various Kami. I thought that some simple wooden shrines in a science fiction setting would be anachronistic, while still associating with the Kami.

Dave: Yes, that does indeed make sense now. Thank you.

Chris: So I guess it's my turn then. Hmm, I would like to build off Angela's fact and make a link between the mega-corps and the genetically engineered servant race. The planet's atmosphere is unpleasant and the colonists are not suited to manual labour, so they made a slave race to do the grunt work.

Angela: Um, I am not comfortable with a slave race. Could we make them more like peasants or serfs instead?

Chris: Peasants? Oh, yeah! That's perfect. **The mega-corps created a race of genetically engineered peasants and imposed a feudal Japanese social structure on them.**

Dave: I do like your suggestion of a metal-corroding and unpleasant atmosphere. I propose a link between anachronistic science fiction and the feudal Japanese structure; **The human colonies are built on the high mountain tops, while the peasants labour in the harsh low lands near the corrosive seas.**

Angela: Very cool. I think that the aliens are the only thing left over at this point. I would like to link them to the genetic engineering and say **Humans are the alien colonists to this world, and the natives are unhappy being invaded.**

Chris: So wait, the humans are the aliens? Neat!

Angela: And I think that's all of the facts we need. Let's pull this together.

## Step 4: Title and Tag-line

Look at your list of facts and try to discover the common thread between all of them. Suggest 1-3 word titles for the game and select the best of those. If you can, try to produce a follow up tag line that elaborates on the mood and motifs of the setting. This step helps you discuss all of the facts and come to a common understanding of what the setting is all about.

### Example

Angela: Ok. This step is quick and should help us get a more coherent setting. Each of us creates some title for the setting that describes the world in broad, followed by a tag line that expresses some of the major issues in the setting. I will start by throwing in Bushido Colony.

Brian: Ok, how about NeoNippon?

Chris: The storms corrode metal, right? How about Ruststorm

Dave: Ok. I propose Samsung Prefecture

Angela: Great. Let's make some tag lines and then chose from both lists. I propose The War of Writhing Blossoms

Brian: Cool. How about a Babylon 5 vibe by making a tagline of Our Last, Best Chance for Peace

Chris: Does The Lost Colony work?

Angela: Absolutely. Dave?

Dave: I propose The Silicon Shogunate.

Angela: Sounds good. So we all need to pick which title and tagline we want for our particular setting. Honestly, I think NeoNippon sounds great. The mix of a Greek prefix and a Japanese name, roughly translated as New Japan? Sounds fun.

Brian: Thanks! Obviously, I prefer my own idea, though Samsung Prefecture makes me laugh.

Chris: NeoNippon is fine by me.

Dave: Certainly. Out of our taglines, I find The War of Writhing Blossoms to be both poetic and evocative.

Brian: Yeah, let's go with that.

Chris: I did love the Silicon Shogunate, but let's go with the war.

Angela: Ok. Our setting is now NeoNippon: **The War of Writhing Blossoms**

## Step 5: Create Setting Beliefs

Games can help us explore and understand ideas in meaningful ways. Beliefs announce which concepts, opinions, and dramatic themes we want to explore during play. The GM is rewarded for challenging the three Beliefs that define the setting. These setting Beliefs express the biggest concerns and problems of the society. Each of the Factions created in the next step are rooted in one of these Beliefs.

Go around the table twice, proposing Beliefs based on the setting title, tag line and facts. As Beliefs are proposed, the other people ensure that they follow all the principles and don't cross any Lines. Write these candidate Beliefs on the setting worksheet.

Setting Beliefs need to follow the following principles:

A good Belief should be a simple, **declarative** statement. Assume that the Belief is the kind of thing that someone could blurt out in a heated argument.

A good Belief should be **subjective**, and preferably philosophical. The basic assumption of the game is that overwhelming evidence is enough to convince someone to change their Beliefs. Things that are obviously true or false don't make for good Beliefs.

A good Belief should have meaning and be **controversial** to a significant number of people. Players should be able to influence society on a whole, and Beliefs that others care about helps.

The GM picks her three preferred Beliefs, writing them on the GM Sheet and the Belief Sheet. Any Player can use leftover Beliefs during Character Creation if any of them are suitable. There is more in-depth discussion on Beliefs in Character Creation. [Pg. XX]

### Example

Angela: Ok, now that we know what the major elements of the setting are, we need to come up with the themes that we will focus on in this world. Each of these should be a short, subjective, and controversial statement. They have **The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few** as an example here. I will start with that one, just to get the ball rolling.

Brian: Ok, how about **Technology will tame this world?**

Chris: Sounds good to me. Hmm. How about **Emotional displays are a sign of weakness?**

Dave: Very stoic Chris. I propose that **The greatest honour is to be of service to your clan.** I suspect the peasants consider the megacorporations to be feudal clans.

Angela: Great! How about **We are nothing without our traditions?**

Brian: Ok. **The natives must be destroyed.**

Chris: Ouch. We don't have a line on genocide, but that's evil. I propose a more down-key **The secrets of this world will destroy us.**

Dave: The last proposed Belief is **The will of the kami must be obeyed.**

Angela: Perfect. Now I get to choose any three of those. Let's go with:

**We are nothing without our traditions**

**The greatest honour is to be of service to your clan.**

**The secrets of this world will destroy us.**

## Step 6: Create Factions

This step is where you collaboratively create one Faction for each person in the game. Do this by going around the table twice. Each person gets to create either a name or a mandate for one of the Factions. Write these down on the Faction Sheet.

The Faction Name will inspire the rest of the faction and will become an integral portion of the experience. Consider the setting facts, the title, and the tagline to make evocative and flavourful names. Try to use names like “The Black Hand, The League of Nations, or Freemasons Incorporated.”

Every Faction has a mandate that describes their common purpose; why they exist and what they hope to achieve. Mandates are written as broad mission statements which either confirm or refute part of a setting Belief.

For instance, if the setting's Belief were “The aliens seek to destroy our society,” some good mandates might be “To capture and study the aliens” or “To assimilate the aliens into our society.”

This step creates the major organizations that influence the story. The PC's may be part of one or more of the Factions, or they may be independent. In any case, the actions of the Factions will shape the story.

### Example

Angela: Now that we have our three setting Beliefs, we can start to create the Factions. Each of these is a major group that you will have to deal with regularly. At this point, we need to create four factions; one per person in the game. At this point, we go around the table twice, with each person getting a chance to either create an evocative name for a Faction, or to create their mandate.

I will start. One of the Factions is named **The Hostile Natives**.

Brian: Cool. I am drawing a blank, so I will just create a name. Um, how about the **Peasant Mercantile Guild**.

Dave: We should give them an actual name, if they are a different species.

Brian: Ok. How about the **Henomin Mercantile Guild**? If I remember my rusty Japanese, that translates to something like “Mutant Peasant”

Chris: Sure. I will give the Hostile Natives a mandate to **Destroy the Invading Two-legs**.

Angela: That implies they don't have two legs normally. Very nice, I can work with that.

Dave: I believe we need some peacekeepers for political intrigue. I propose a mandate of **To maintain a peaceful state of human civilization**.

Angela: Fine with that. How about the Mercantile Guild has a mandate to **Ensure the henōmin are granted equal rights to true humans**.

Brian: So we have the civil rights movement, at least when the hostile natives aren't eating the activists? Weird. Um, a mandate of **To survive at any cost** sounds appropriate.

Chris: So we have two mandates without names? Ok. I will say that it's the **Village of Kanata** driven to survive at any cost.

Dave: Makes sense. I will call the peacekeeping Faction **Shiraine Colony**. I think that that is all for this step.

## Step 7: Create Ties



Factions interact with each other as they pursue their agendas. Ties represent the relationship between any two Factions and are tracked on the Faction Sheet. Ties may be mutual or one-way. You can only have one tie between any specific pair of Factions.

At this point, each player creates one relationship between two different factions. Here are a few sample ties, but you are encouraged to make up your own based what you have created so far.

- Faction A **is funding** Faction B.
- Faction A **is infiltrating** Faction B
- Faction A **has betrayed** Faction B
- Faction A **is violently subjugating** Faction B
- Faction A **is subtly manipulating** Faction B.
- Faction A and Faction B **are close allies.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are bitter enemies.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are at war.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are ambitious rivals.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are strange bedfellows.**

### Example

Angela: This step has us creating the diplomatic ties between each of the Factions. To make it easy, there is a list of suggested ties we can use. We can only have a single tie between two specific factions, so if we already have one between Kanata and Shiraine we can't make another. I will declare that the Henomin Mercantile Guild **is funding** the Village of Kanata.

Brian: Ok, that makes sense. The Hostile Natives are **bitter enemies** with Shiraine Colony.

Chris: I can make these up, right? How about the Shiraine Colony **is interfering** with the Henomin Mercantile Guild

Dave: Let us make this interesting. The Village of Kanata are **strange bedfellows** with the Hostile Natives.

Brian: Wait, so the natives and the peasants are collaborating against the human colonists? Cool!

## Step 8: Create Agendas

Now that you know the long-term goals of the Factions and their ties, it's time to come up with their agendas. Agendas are one-sentence statements of intent, describing a major but short-term goal they hope to achieve. They must be based the Faction's mandate and their ties. No two Agendas can be mutually exclusive, since they can all succeed. Factions achieve these things off screen between sessions.

Take a new Index card, write a #1 in the top right corner and write the names of each of the Factions. Beside each name, write down the relevant agenda.

Give the GM the Initiative marker and one Fate per player. You are ready to move on to Character Creation in the next chapter. (Pg. XX)

### Example:

Angela: Here is the last step. We get to collectively create the agendas, goals that each of the factions is trying to achieve. We go around the table one more time, with each of us creating an agenda. I have some guidelines, but generally it's the kinds of things that a company or political party could achieve in a couple of months. The Agendas have to agree with the mandate and ties for that Faction. For example, I would start by saying that the Village of Kanata has an agenda to **Repel Saika bandit attacks**.

Brian: Ok. Let's deal with the aliens. A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, missing the tops of their skulls.

Chris: Very nice and creepy. How about the Shiraine Colony aka. Planetary Board of Directors passes a motion to **declare the Saika mercenaries to be enemy combatants in the eyes of the law**.

Dave: That is unfortunate for the Saika. I believe that the Guild wants to **create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations**.

Angela: All of that sounds great, and now we have a completed setting. I would start with four Fate and the Initiative marker. Next stop would be Character Creation.

# Using Published Settings

The published settings are great if you want to start playing almost immediately. Over the span of about 15 minutes, you **Give the Introduction**, explaining what the setting is all about. **Select your Setting Beliefs** from the four provided, and then use those Beliefs to **select your Factions**. **Create Ties** of relationships between the different Factions and then **Select Sample Agendas** that each of the Factions work towards in the first session of the game.

When you use a published setting, the GM can do all of the preparation ahead of time if she would like. Alternatively, you can work together as a group to make these decisions.

## Step 1: Give the Introduction

Each published setting will have a short description of the setting's history and current events. Either read it aloud, or share the text ahead of game. This will give you the context so that you can make your decisions in character creation.

### Example

Angela: If we used a published setting, like maybe the one for "The Republic of the Elements," we would start by reading out this couple of paragraphs of text. You should have already read this earlier.

This setting is fundamentally an ancient Greek human republic, surrounded on all sides by monsters. Elemental magics infuse the setting, so the humans have the ability to create effects that are symbolically linked to one of the elements. For example, some people can use their Fire magic to "burn" out poisons, while water magic helps you understand emotions. Only the monsters can actually directly create or manipulate the elements themselves; the Orcs wield flame, the Dwarves move stone, the Elves whisper with the air, and the snatchers travel the waters.

## Step 2: Select your Setting Beliefs

Each of the published Settings has four potential Beliefs. You will need to pick any three of them for your particular game, so that you can focus gameplay on what you find most interesting. This means that every published setting has four different interpretations and each game can focus on different Beliefs. Copy these Beliefs down on the GM sheet and the Belief sheet.

### Example

Angela: So the next step is to select three of the four potential setting Beliefs. The potential setting Beliefs are:

- The Elements will corrupt humanity
- The Elements will steal our land
- The Elements will sow chaos and destruction
- The Elements will infiltrate society

Since I'm not in the mood for corruption, I will reject that one, which means we are playing in the **The Invasion** version of this setting.

Brian: Sounds good to me. Is it just me, or does that sound like a Title and Tagline?

Angela: I never thought of it that way, but you have a point. **Republic of the Elements: The Invasion** does have a nice ring to it. Anyways, this gives us the following setting Beliefs.

- The Elements will steal our land**
- The Elements will sow chaos and destruction**
- The Elements will infiltrate society**

## Step 3: Select your Factions

The Setting will have a dozen different Factions, each of which is associated with a particular Belief. Since you selected three Beliefs, you have nine different Factions to choose from. Select one of those Factions for every person in the game, and you need to have at least one Faction that is associated with each of your Beliefs.

### Example

Angela: Perfect. Each of those Beliefs has three pre-made Factions that we need to choose from. We need to select one for every person in the game. Either I could pick them all, or we can go around the table choosing them. The key thing is that we should have at least one Faction associated with each of the Beliefs. Since we have four people in the game, this means we will need to pick four Factions.

Brian: Ok. So what's our list to choose from?

Angela: Ok, for the Belief that "The Elements will steal our land" we have

- The Resilient Order
- The Mountain-herders
- The Imperial Court

For the Belief that "The Elements will sow chaos and destruction" we have

- The Radiant Order
- The Charred Ones
- The Refugees

For the Belief that "The Elements will infiltrate society" we have

- The Whispering Order
- The Tempting Winds
- The Assembly of Citizens

Brian: And the copy of the setting explains their mandates, history, npc's, and all that stuff? Handy. How about I start this time? I want to see **the Resilient Order**, since they are all about delving into dungeons to stop mountain-herding dwarves.

Chris: If we have Dwarf-killers, let's make sure we also include the dwarves. The second faction is **the Mountain-herders**.

Dave: I believe I cannot choose from that first Belief then. I propose that **The Refugees** are making things interesting.

Angela: Ok. Hmm, we have the inscrutable Fae-like elves, but I think one oppressive race is enough. The Whispering Order is nice too, but let's go for **the Assembly of Citizens** instead for political intrigue.

## Step 4: Create Ties

Factions interact with each other as they pursue their agendas. Ties represent the relationship between any two Factions and are tracked on the Faction Sheet. Ties may be mutual or one-way. You can only have one tie between any specific pair of Factions.

At this point, each player creates one relationship between two different factions. Here are a few sample ties, but you are encouraged to make up your own based what you have created so far.

- Faction A **is funding** Faction B.
- Faction A **is infiltrating** Faction B
- Faction A **has betrayed** Faction B
- Faction A **is violently subjugating** Faction B
- Faction A **is subtly manipulating** Faction B.
- Faction A and Faction B **are close allies.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are bitter enemies.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are at war.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are ambitious rivals.**
- Faction A and Faction B **are strange bedfellows.**

### Example

Angela: This is the only step that is identical to the custom setting creation step. I will say that the Resilient Order **is at war** with the Mountain-herders.

Brian: I will make one up this time. The Resilient Order **is recruiting** the Refugees. They never have enough men and women to hold the line.

Chris: Ok, this should be interesting. The Assembly of Citizens **has betrayed** the Refugees. They withheld military support when it mattered for political reasons, and it destroyed that province.

Dave: Very interesting. Let us say that The Mountain-herders **are secretly funding** the Assembly of Citizens, which is why that support was withheld.

Angela: Great. We have our Ties.

## Step 5: Select Initial Agendas

Agendas are one-sentence statements of intent, describing a major but short-term goal that Factions hope to achieve. Each Faction has three sample agenda, and you need to select one of them for the first game.

Take a new Index card, write #1 in the top right corner and write the names of each of the Factions. Beside each name, write down the relevant agenda.

### Example

Angela: This is the last step. Each of these Factions has three sample agendas and we need to select one for each of them.

Chris: So we don't even need to create the agendas? We just pick one of the three options?

Angela: Exactly. Once again, I could do it myself before the Game or we could go around the table. I will start by picking the Agenda for the Mountain Herders; **Raise a new mountain in the path of the main trade route.**

Brian: Ok. One of the Refugee agendas seems fun; **Create a shanty town around a major city.**

Chris: The Resilient Order will Delve into the great mountains and steal the dwarven forge.

Dave: The Assembly of Citizens will Offer citizenship to provincials who serve one of the great Orders.

Angela: And that's it. If we were using this, I would start with 4 Fate and the Initiative marker.

## Extra Content in Published Settings

Published settings may also have additional material that can be helpful.

**Sample Talents and Conditions:** Settings will often have lists of genre-appropriate Talents and Conditions. These may describe at how races, cultures, professions, or supernatural abilities act in the setting.

**Faces:** Each Faction will have at least one premade NPC's who could represent them. These include names, descriptions and an indication of their capabilities in conflicts.

**Threats:** The setting may describe certain threats that may affect the society on a whole and bring chaos into the world.

**Illustrations:** The setting may have illustrations or art about the world and those beings within it, so you can get a better sense of what the setting looks like.

**Maps:** They often provide a geographic map, showing the locations of significant settlements and major landmarks.

**Fiction:** Some settings may also have poems or short fiction.

## Finishing Touches

Give the GM the Initiative marker and one Fate per player. You are ready to move on to Character Creation in the next chapter. (Pg. XX)

# Chapter 3 - Characters

## How to make a Character

### Overview

Once you have a setting, each player needs to create a Protagonist Character (PC). The group works together to make a group of dynamic, passionate characters who can work together or apart. The players play the roles of their characters, take risks, and stand up for their Beliefs. This chapter shows you the process for making those kinds of characters.

Characters are be motivated to challenge their **Beliefs** during play. When pursuing their goals, the PC's might enter into a conflict with the GM or with another player. You resolve those conflicts by rolling dice based on their **Attributes**, considering their respective **Conditions** and adding in a bonus based on their **Talents**.

Grab a Character Sheet to keep track of your PC's Beliefs, Attributes, Conditions, and Talents. You can find a copy of the character sheet at the end of the book or on the website. In this chapter, we explain what each of the different traits represent and help you create your characters. The process should take about an hour from start to finish.

### The Character Creation Summary

1. Everyone to come up with initial concepts, focused on one specific agenda. Create character concepts
2. You work together to help each player create **3 Beliefs** that drive their respective characters
3. Each character starts with one level in their Body, Heart, Mind, and Spark attributes, and you add **7 Attribute** levels.
4. You create **2 Rise** Conditions that help the character in certain circumstances, and **1 Fall** Condition that makes their lives more difficult.
5. Create **7 Talents** that represent their skills, knowledge, and experience in certain kinds of subjects, each of which is ranked as Broad (T1), Common (T2) or Narrow (T3).
6. Name your characters
7. Answer **2-5 Baggage** questions about the character's personal history, earning Fate for each.
8. Narrate a short prologue for your character

# Initial Concepts

## The Focus Agenda

You have a broad setting, full of interesting factions and complex motivations. Before you can start creating a character, you need to find a central focus for characters. As a group, look at the Faction agendas that you have generated. Figure out which single Faction agenda you collectively find most interesting. Circle that Agenda on the index card.

When you create character concepts, make sure that all of your PC's have some reason to interact with either that agenda or Faction. Maybe they want to stop the agenda, or interfere with the Faction's efforts. Maybe they are working for the Faction and want to support the agenda. The only thing that matters is that the characters care about it. This helps bind the characters together and works as a kind of group template.

This agenda will be resolved, one-way or the other, in the second game session. This is just the inciting incident that brings the PC's together.

### Example:

Angela: Ok, the first step is that as a group, we pick one of the Agendas that we want to focus on. All of the PC's will have to have some reason to interact with that Agenda in some way.

Brian: Ok. How about the focus Agenda is that A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, missing the tops of their skulls.

Chris: Fine by me.

Dave: I can handle that.

Angela: Ok. Now that you have that step ready, you need to create your concepts. There's a list of questions here.

Brian: My concept is an ex-Sesei Ronin who is cursed with love.

Chris: Cursed?

Brian: Love interests are very inconvenient for a stoic wandering Ronin.

Chris: Nice. I am thinking of a one of those Henomin peasants, but that doesn't seem to be enough.

Angela: Is your character defined by their profession? How do you interact with that agenda?

Chris: Hmm. How about he is the headsman for Kanata village? That Faction and the Hostile Natives are strange bedfellows, so he might have a hand in this.

Dave: That sounds interesting. I believe that my character will be a Shinto Android.

Angela: Shinto? An Animist android? Why?

Dave: It is a quick of the artificial intelligence process; they always pick up some kind of religious inclination. Mine believes in the Ghost in the Machine.

Chris: That is hilarious. Ok. That's everyone I think.



## Character Concepts

Every character starts with a concept, a quick sentence that describes them. It might help to consider some of these questions.

- Is your character defined by their profession?
- Is your character defined by their relationships?
- Is your character defined by a particular personality trait?
- Is your character defined by challenging a particular setting Belief?

If you are having a tough time, consider adapting a character from another piece of media. Modern fiction, ancient epics, television shows, movies, video games, and even music can offer interesting characters. Imagine what one of the existing characters would be like if they grew up in your setting.

Once you have a concept, tell it to the group. Write it down on the top of the character sheet before you move onto to the next step.

## Beliefs

### What are Beliefs?

Games can help us explore issues that matter to us. Beliefs announce which perspectives, opinions, and dramatic themes we want to examine during play. This is the core of the Spark RPG, to “Challenge your Beliefs”.

Every PC needs three Beliefs. Each Belief is a statement that the character agrees with, and that the player wants to explore. Beliefs should be the three most important ideas, questions, or themes that motivate your characters. By creating a Belief, you are telling the GM that you would like to see it challenged during play.

When you enter into Conflicts that directly confirm or refute a Belief, you might gain Fate. You will be able to spend this to succeed in other conflicts or to exert more influence over the story. During the course of the play, these beliefs will evolve and change.

### Principles for Good Beliefs

A good Belief should be a simple, **declarative** statement. Assume that the Belief is the kind of thing that someone could blurt out in a heated argument.

A good Belief should be **subjective**, and preferably philosophical. The basic assumption of the game is that overwhelming evidence is enough to convince someone to change their Beliefs. Things that are obviously true or false don't make for good Beliefs.

A good Belief should have meaning and be **controversial** to a significant number of people. Players should be able to influence society on a whole, and Beliefs that others care about helps.

## Bad Beliefs

- My faith is ironclad; I will overthrow the king and seize his throne for my own purposes.

(Not a simple, declarative and subjective statement; goals are not Beliefs)

- Puppies are cute.

(While it's a simple subjective statement, it's not meaningful or controversial)

- The world is flat.

(While a declarative and potentially controversial at times, this is objectively incorrect.)

## Good Beliefs:

### *God is dead*

- *The ends justify the means*
- *You can only depend on yourself*
- *Information wants to be free*
- *Mankind is inherently good*

## The Process of Creating Beliefs

You need to work together to create your Beliefs. A player states the Belief aloud, so other people at the table can give feedback. Work together to ensure you follow the principles and respect Boundaries. Try to keep the Beliefs strong and snappy!

Sometimes it's better to ask someone else to examine a subject on your behalf. Other people might be happy to respectfully explore a given idea, subject or theme with their own character Beliefs.

When you are happy with the Belief you chose, write it down on your Character Sheet and on the Belief sheet. The GM also writes this down on her own sheet at the same time, so she can keep track of all of the different Beliefs. Go around the table clockwise three times, repeating the process. When everyone has three Beliefs chosen, the Belief sheet will be complete.

Consider picking a Belief that...

- Challenges the setting
- Clashes with a Faction's mandate
- Supports another character's Belief
- Refutes another character's Belief

## Player's Beliefs – At your own risk

I find that the most meaningful games of Spark happen when you bring your personal issues and perspectives into the game. If you make a character Belief that supports or refutes one of your personal Beliefs, you can explore it and learn a bit more about yourself.

For instance, let's say that as a player, I thought that nationalism was problematic. I could make a character whose Beliefs were "Nationalism always leads to tyranny" or "Patriotism is the greatest virtue." During play, I would get a chance to explore those perspectives and consider my perspectives.

Use this option sparingly; dealing too much with sensitive subjects can sap the fun from the game.

### Example

Angela: Ok. Here is where we make three Beliefs for each of the characters. We go around the table three times with each of you proposing a Belief for your own PC's. We just vet them to make sure they are short, subjective, and controversial statements. You can grab any of those proposed setting Beliefs for your character if you would like.

Brian: Makes sense. So long as we are the ones picking our own character beliefs. I propose that my stoic ronin has that setting belief that **Emotions are a sign of weakness.**

Chris: Nice. My village headsman is annoyed by his lot in life. His belief is that **My people deserve respect.**

Dave: My android thinks that Emotions are more important than facts.

Brian: That is going to challenge my character right off the bat. Very nice. My second Belief will be that **We are nothing without our honour.**

Angela: That seems awfully close to the setting Belief.

Brian: Ok, true. Let's go with The honourable life is the only one worth living.

Chris: Let's make this personal. Your samurai is cursed with love, right? Well, I'm her brother and **Men will never hurt my little sister Suki again.**

Brian: Ouch. That's going to cause conflict.

Dave: Let us go for some expressions of faith. **The will of the Kami must be obeyed.**

Brian: Ok, if you are going to be the defensive brother, I should match you. **Suki, my love, is worth any sacrifice.**

Chris: That's great. My third is straight from The Seven Samurai. **Danger always strikes when everything seems fine.**

Dave: Ando's last Belief is that **Respect must be earned.**

Angela: Perfect. I have written those down on my sheet and the Belief sheet, so I can use these easily.

# Attributes

## What are Attributes?

Attributes represent character's natural capabilities. Each of the four types of Attributes (Body, Heart, Mind, and Spark) applies in different situations.

Each Attribute is ranked at a certain level and associated with a size of die. Every Attribute starts at level 1 and can be raised up to a maximum of level 5. Athletic characters should have high Body Attributes, social characters should have high Heart, and scholars should have high Mind Attributes.

- **D20:** A twenty-sided die is **Epic**, representing superhuman capabilities.
- **D12:** A twelve-sided die is **Excellent**, representing maximum human capability.
- **D10:** An eight-sided die is **Great**, well above average capability.
- **D8:** An eight-sided die is **Good**, slightly above average capability.
- **D6:** A six-sided die is **Poor**, slightly below average capability.
- **D4:** A four-sided die is **Terrible**, representing minimal capability.

A level 6 (D20) Attribute is epic, superhuman in scale. PC's can't buy any Attributes at level 6, though Conditions can allow you to roll them. The GM will have a Spark Attribute at this level.

## What does the Body do?

The Body represents you in all physical conflicts. Any acts of strength, dexterity, or constitution will normally use the Body Attribute. Harm to the Body attribute is usually in the form of physical injuries or wounds. If a PC's Body attribute suffers enough harm to be reduced to zero, they might die and be retired from play. Athletic characters will typically have high Body scores.



## What does the Heart do?

The Heart represents you in all social and emotional conflicts. Any acts of presence, manipulation, or composure will use the Heart Attribute. When a character suffers emotional abuse or commits social blunders, they mark harm on their Heart Attribute. If a character's Heart suffers enough harm to be reduced to zero, they might go insane and be retired from play. Social characters typically have high Heart scores.



## What does the Mind do?

The Mind represents you in all mental and perceptual conflicts. Any acts of intelligence, wit, or perception will use the Mind Attribute. When the character suffers confusion or mental strain, they usually mark harm to their Minds. Sufficient harm to the Mind might drive the character comatose and retire them from play. Scholarly characters typically have high Mind scores.



## What does the Spark do?

The Spark attribute represents the indescribable powers of luck, destiny, and greatness of vision. Higher Spark scores helps a player shape the story, rather than necessarily succeed as a character. If you prefer storytelling over roleplaying [Pg. XX], then you might want a high Spark.



A high Spark will increase your chances of acting first in the Factions Phase. [Pg. XX]

A high Spark will increase your chances of framing scenes [pg. XX], helping you create interesting situations that favour your character's capabilities.

A high Spark Attribute let you purchase better Influence dice with Fate. You can spend those Influence dice to participate in conflicts that don't involve your Character. When you are directing NPCs in conflicts, your Spark die will influence how effective they are. [Pg. XX]

Lastly, you can absorb harm to your Spark instead of any other attributes. Be careful of using this option though, since you may be retired from the story if you lose your last level of Spark. [Pg. XX]

## The Process of Choosing Attributes

Attributes at Character Creation. Every Attribute begins at a D4, which is why the Die outline is filled in on the character sheet. You get seven points to improve your attributes. When you do so, fill in the outline of the next larger die in that track. Leave the circle in the middle blank, since that is reserved for marking harm. If you spend your first point on improving your character's Body, fill in the outline of the D6 with pen.

No Attribute can be larger than a D12 and you can't save any Attribute levels for later.

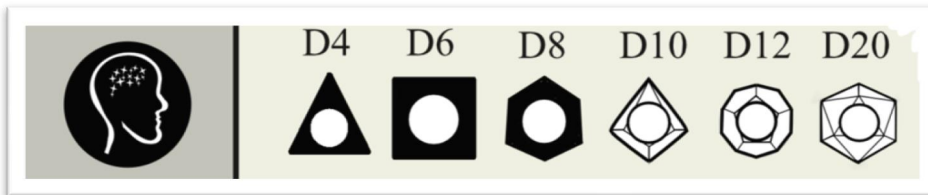


Figure 1: An example of a D8 Mind Attribute

### Example

Angela: Now you create decide where you allocate your Attributes. You all start with the D4 level in your Body, Heart, Mind, and Spark. You have another 7 points to allocate between them, to a maximum of D12. I get it easy and just have a Spark of D20.

Brian: Body is physical, Heart is social, Mind is mental and Spark is... what again?

Angela: Spark is a bit of a metagame stat. It lets you do more storytelling, helps you influence NPC's, and generally makes you more like a GM than a player.

Brian: Sounds interesting. I get seven levels? I assign three levels in Body, one in Heart, one in Mind and two in Spark. That should give me a total of **D10 Body, D6 Heart, D6 Mind, and D8 Spark.**

Chris: For me, I assign no levels in Body, two in Heart, one in Mind and four in Spark. That should give me a total of **D4 Body, D8 Heart, D6 Mind, and D12 Spark.**

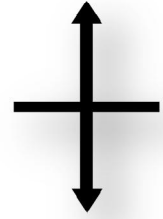
Brian: My android will be rather different. I assign two levels in Body, two in Heart, two in Mind and one in Spark. That should give me **D8 Body, D8 Heart, D8 Mind, and D6 Spark.**

Angela: Sure, that looks good to me.

# Conditions

## What are Conditions?

Conditions represent external factors that help or hinder a character. They can represent items (“*My Father’s Sword*”), places (“*The Vanjar Hills*”), events (“*Jarna Rebellion*”), or people (“*My Wife, Marja*”). These conditions change the size of the dice you will roll during conflicts. Conditions are prone to changing during play; An item can be lost, a person angered, a place made distant, or an event forgotten.



## What does a Rise Condition do?

Rise Conditions are situations that are favourable toward your character. Rises are represented on the character sheet by an upward pointing triangle. When a Rise applies to a PC's actions during a conflict, increase the size of Attribute die being rolled by one-step. If multiple Rises apply, you can increase the size of die multiple times.



Note that a Rise increases the size of a D12 to a D20, the largest possible die.

## What do Fall Conditions do?

Fall Conditions are situations that are unfavourable for your character. Falls are represented on the character sheet by a downward pointing triangle. When a Fall applies to a PC's actions during a conflict, decrease the size of attribute die being rolled by one-step. If multiple Falls apply, you can decrease the size of die multiple times.



Note that a Fall can decrease the size of a D6 to a D4, the smallest possible die.

## The Process of Creating Conditions

At character creation, each PC begins with two Rises and one Fall. Use a pencil to draw a triangle pointing up on the conditions icon for a Rise, and a downward pointed triangle for a Fall. Characters can have a maximum of six different Conditions at any time, divided between Rises and Falls.

The best Conditions are proper nouns, such as the capitalized name of a person, geographic feature, or historical event. “*The Varnja Wastes*” or “*my wife Marja*” are examples of proper nouns as conditions.

The other way to make a good Condition is to describe a class of person, place, or thing with an adjective. “*My father’s sword*” or “*Drunken samurai*” are also quite acceptable.

Avoid any duplicate Conditions by making them as distinct as possible. Consider adding an extra adjective, allowing things like “*My loyal husband Milo*” or “*My mother’s oaken crossbow*”

### Example

Angela: Ok, now each of your characters has three conditions. Two of them are Rise conditions that help you in conflicts and one of them is a Fall that makes your life more difficult. Specific people, places, and things are good for this.

Brian: Ok. How about my Rise conditions are **My Father's Daisho** and **Helpless Peasants**.

Angela: The Daisho is the set of paired swords, right? You do realize your second Rise condition would help you in dispatching or aiding helpless peasants?

Brian: Yes and yes. As for my Fall condition, I will call it **Clan Sesei Traitor**.

Chris: Sounds good. I will get the Rise conditions of **Acid-tolerant skin** and **The villagers of Kanata**. The Fall condition will be **Clan Embei Nobles**.

Dave: As for me, I believe that **Evasion Algorithms** and **The Shinto Trail** are my Rise conditions. My Fall condition is the **Three Laws**.

Angela: Which three laws?

Dave: The Three Laws of Robotics.

Angela: Ooooh, makes sense.

## Talents

### What are Talents?

Talents represent skills and abilities that a character has gained during their life. These can include specific fields of knowledge or particular types of tasks. Talents are internal to the character and permanent.

### What do Talents do?

Talents add a bonus to a character's die during a conflict:

- If a Broad Talent (T1) applies to the conflict, add 1 to the result of your roll.
- If a Common Talent (T2) applies to the conflict, add 2 to the result of your roll.
- If a Deep Talent (T3) applies to the conflict, add 3 to the result of the roll.

This means that the bonus from talents will vary from +0 (if no Talents apply) to +6 (if one Broad Talent, one Common Talent and one Deep Talent apply).



## Broad Talents (T1)

Broad Talents represent general understanding of a wide-ranging topic. Someone might acquire these talents through book learning or general life experience.

Examples of Broad Talents: English, Science, Politics, Law, Engineering, Melee, Thaumaturgy



## Common Talents (T2)

Common Talents represent a focus on a particular subject matter. A common Talent is usually enough to make a living in that field. Acquiring this normally requires either formal training or years of practical experience.

Examples of Common Talents: Literature, Biology, Elections, Civil Law, Infrastructures, Swords, Conjuraton



## Deep Talents (T3)

Deep Talents represent a specialization on a particular sub-discipline or application of skill. Usually unique and limited in scope, they provide significant advantages. They require a high level of formal training or some specialized experience.

Examples of Common Talents: Golden Age Science Fiction, Genetic Analysis, Voter Suppression, Small Claims Court, Bridge Repair, Scimitars, Drakkar Imps



## The Process of Creating Talents

There is no set list of Talents, though some published settings will provide recommendations. Players propose Talents that fit their characters and the GM will judge if they are broad, common, or deep in scope. You need to create a total of seven different Talents.

The first time playing, try to answer these questions to create your Talents:

- What specific action is your character best at? Choose one broad talent, one common talent and one deep talent that would help you.
- What is your character's fallback option? Choose one common talent and one deep talent that would help you.
- What is the character's hobby or personal interest? Choose one relevant broad talent and one common talent.

This will lead to characters having 2 broad, 3 common and 2 deep talents.

### Example

Angela: Now you know your natural capabilities and the circumstances that help you. Here is where you figure out your trained skills and experiences. These are internal things that help you out in conflicts.

Brian: Ok, so how does this work?

Angela: You need to create seven Talents. You propose them and I will tell you if they are broad, common or deep. Broad Talents help you a little bit in a variety of different circumstances. Deep Talents help you a lot on rare occasions, and common Talents are somewhere in the middle. You can combine one Talent from each of the categories, so you can stack one broad, one common and one deep together on a single roll.

Brian: How do we get started then?

Angela: He recommends that you figure out one specific activity that your character is best at, then get one Talent of each category that would suit that.

Brian: Ok. So cutting people to ribbons with my Daisho?

Angela: Yes. **Daisho** sounds like a deep Talent, since it's specific.

Brian: So would **Swords** be the common?

Angela: Yes, that sounds about right. In what context were you trained to use your swords?

Brian: I was trained by the Sesei military. Wait, can I just have **Military** as a broad Talent?

Angela: Yup. It will cover everything from your melee combat to military etiquette.

Chris: My turn then. How about **Villages, Leadership, and Confidence-Building**?

Angela: Villages as Broad, Leadership is common and Confidence Building as a deep? Sounds good to me. Your pep talks must be impressive.

David: For my turn, I believe my Broad would be **Observation**, followed by **Emotions** then **People-watching**.

Angela: Sounds good! You think you can take it from here.

Brian : I think so. **Literature** and **Haiku**?

Angela: I think that literature is broad and Haiku is a deep. We can change it later on if we need to.

Brian: I'm thinking Reconnaissance and Environmental Suits.

Angela: Both are common, so you can combine them with your Military and Daisho skills if appropriate. I think that comes to seven in total.

Chris: I think **Trade** would be a broad. **Storms** and **Improvised Weapons** sound like common Talents.

Angela: Sure!

Chris: Then let's finish that off with **Wayfinding** as a deep Talent.

Dave: I think my Android is a messenger. He has **Athletics** as a broad and **Running** as a common.

Angela: That makes sense.

Dave: What would **Aikido** and **Shinto Shrines** be?

Angela: Aikido is a common, Shinto Shrines are deep.

Dave: Excellent. I believe that is my last Talent.

## Finishing Touches

### Naming

Create an evocative name for your character. Consider what culture your character comes from. Try to use a name that reflects your character concept. Some published settings will have lists of names in them for your use. Have fun with it!

### Baggage

Your character has some lingering history with the other characters and Factions that make up the setting. These questions give you a chance to establish your character's personal back-story. You are determining exactly what your character thinks about the other PC's and the Factions at the very start of the game.

Go around the table, taking turns explaining your Baggage. You will need to answer at least one question from each of the two lists and tell the group. Each player will start the game with one Fate per personal history question they answer, to a maximum of 5 Fate.

Often Baggage relates to actions on the part of other PCs. The other player gets to approve any such Baggage, ensuring that it fits the character concept and that the player is comfortable with that having happened in the past.

#### PC Baggage

- Why do you feel hurt by a PC's actions?
- Why do you trust a PC with your life?
- Why do you hate another PC?
- Why are you afraid of another PC?
- Why do you disagree with another PC's Belief?
- How did a PC's inspire you to take up one of your Beliefs?
- What favour did another PC do for you?

#### Faction Baggage

- Why do you hate a Faction?
- Why do you trust a Faction with your life?
- Why do you unfailingly obey a Faction?
- Why have you vowed to destroy a Faction?
- Why are you afraid of a Faction?
- Why are you passionate about a Faction's mandate?
- How did a Faction inspire you to take up one of your Beliefs?

## Prologue

The last step in character creation is the prologue. The GM picks a catalyst; a single person, place, event, or thing that the group will converge on. The GM always chooses something or someone related to the focus agenda that you chose earlier. During the prologue, each player creates a reason why the character would try to interact with the catalyst.

Each player gets to use this time to show off their character's expertise without dice getting involved. The GM may portray NPC's, but the player has full narrative control. Try to make brief action sequences, quickly expressing the character's capabilities and personality. Each little prologue scene ends just before the character actually reaches the catalyst.

After you finish all of these scenes, the GM recaps everything that was established during the prologues. If you have time left in the session, you can move directly into framing your first scene in the next chapter.

### Example

Angela: Ok, here is the hardest step. You need to tell me your character's names.

Brian: Hmm. I'm thinking **Shimura**. Shimura the Samurai has a nice ring to it, even if he lost his master.

Chris: By lost, you mean betrayed? Yeah. **Gisaku** the Village Headsman.

Dave: And this unit is **Ando357**, Ando for short.

Angela: Ok. Now that you have that out of the way, you get to figure out your personal baggage. Really, think of each of these key parts of your character's backstories. You are figuring out exactly what your character thinks about the other PC's and the Factions at the very start of the game.

Brian: Let's try it out. How many do we get?

Angela: You need to answer one of the "PC Baggage" questions and one "Faction Baggage" question. Answering more will give you more Fate, to a maximum of 5 Fate if you answer 5 questions.

Brian: Ok, how about this. Shimura is afraid that Gisaku will find out that Suki has stolen his heart.

Chris: Gisaku is afraid of the heavily armed and dangerous Shimura.

Dave: Ando trusts Shimura implicitly. It's in his programming.

Brian: Shimura adopted his Belief that the honourable life was the only one worth living, when Sesei ordered him to slaughter the village of Kanata.

Chris: Gisaku unfailingly obeys the Henomin Mercantile Guild because it is the only route to power for his people.

Dave: Ando is passionate about Shiraine Colony because he cannot allow humanity to come to harm.

Brian: How about this. Shimura trusts Ando, because the android rescued him from a horrible storm.

Angela: That's fine, but since you are declaring what Ando does, Dave gets a veto.

Dave: I have no problem with that.

Chris: We can do that? Shimura did a favour for Gisaku by slaying a band of Sesei soldiers.

Brian: Veto. Shimura might stop them, but wouldn't kill his former comrades in arms.

Chris: Ok. Shimura intimidated the band of Sesei soldiers and kept them away from Kanata village, as a favour for Gisaku.

Dave: Ando has is passionate about the Henomin Mercantile Guild's mandate, because that might lead to rights for other artificial forms of life.

Angela: Everyone has three pieces of Baggage. We could go longer, but I am eager to hear your prologues. Each of you gets to quickly narrate a scene where you try to reach some catalyst, which relates to the agenda. You need to figure out why you are heading there and show off a bit as you travel there. The catalyst will be the mountain shrine where the Sesei band was last spotted.

Brian: Let's go with this. Shimura is sitting there with a calligraphy brush in hand, surrounded by half-written love poems to Suki. That is when he receives a coded Sesei broadcast on his suit. The message is that the Kitsune Band has gone missing near the Shrine of Shattered Mountains. Shimura goes still for a moment to think. He realizes what he needs to and plans his visit to the shrine, strapping on his father's swords. Just as he starts to head out, he turns back and brushes all his half-formed haiku into the hearth.

Chris: Gisaku sees Shimura heading to the shrine and gestures at some of these trappers to follow the Sesei warrior. Rubbing his creaking knees, he starts ordering villages about and gathering his gear. Something is up, and the ronin needs to be followed for the safety of the village.

Dave: Ando is racing along the Shinto Trail, only slowing to give offerings to the small shrines that dot the path. He runs along the tops of a stand of black bamboo and scrambles up the sheer cliff. You see him pausing to watch Kanata Village intently, with his optics systems honing in on the two figures departing. Ando remarks to his internal records that this is unexpected and is hot in pursuit.

Angela: Perfect! That is character creation.

# Chapter 4 – Gameplay

## How to play the Game

### Overview

The players and the GM roll dice to frame the scene, creating a Platform, Tilt, and Question. Everyone in the scene cooperates to tell the story, making bold declarations of what happens next. If someone disagrees with a declaration, they can challenge it and pull out the dice for a conflict.

In a conflict, people in the conflict get to either to support the declaration or interfere with it. Everyone determines what dice they are rolling, adds their bonus and compares the totals. The person with the highest number wins the conflict and can pick resolutions.

When everyone is satisfied that you have answered the scene's Question, you can end the scene and start framing the next one. The group continues to tell scene after scene, collaborating and entering into conflicts.

This chapter starts by explaining the six phases of play: **Advancing the Factions**, **Framing the Scene**, **Collaboration**, **Conflict**, **Closing the Scene** and **End of Session**. The chapter follows up with the rules for PC **Harm and Retirement**. The rules for **Influences** are available, used by both the GM and any players in Storytelling mode. **Fate and Initiative** are explained after that, followed by a list of **Key Phrases** that you use in the game.

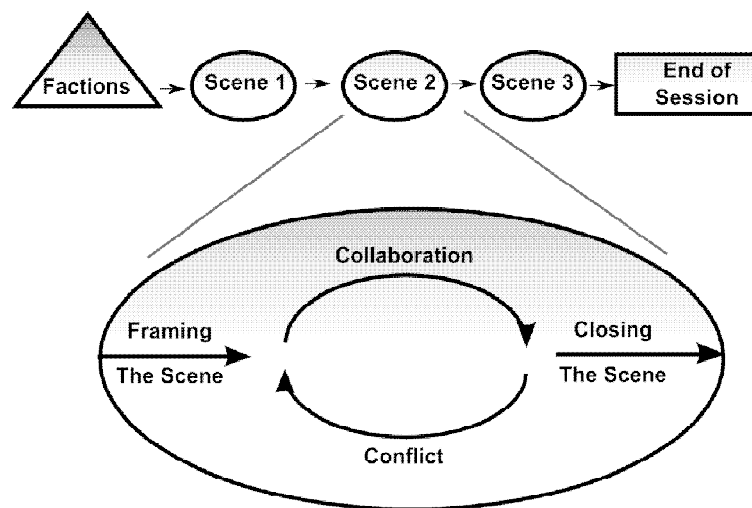
## The Structure of the Game

Start each game session by **Advancing the Factions**. They will have their own agendas and goals that they're trying to accomplish. Each player influences which agendas are fulfilled, before the first scene. This step helps drive play, since the PC's need to react to these major events. You should skip this step in a one-time or in the first game session.

From then on, you will collectively play through a series of scenes. The group continues to tell scene after scene, collaborating and entering into conflicts.

The first step is **Framing the Scene**, determining how it starts and what it will be about. Next is **Collaboration**, where everyone cooperates to tell the story by making bold declarations of what happens next. In some scenes, someone may disagree with declarations. If that happens, they pull out the dice to resolve their conflict. **Conflict** is where people pick sides, rolls their dice, add bonuses, and compare results to determine the outcome. After they finish the conflict, they get to move back to collaboration.

When the question of the scene has been answered, you **Close the Scene**. During this phase, characters can heal, retire, or be rewarded with Fate for addressing their Beliefs. Once the scene is closed, either frame another scene or move to **End the Session**. This last phase gives the players a chance to inspire each other to take up new Beliefs. You can skip the End of Session phase also skip this step in a one-time game.



## Storytelling Mode vs. Roleplaying Mode

During the Framing the Scene phase, each player chooses to focus on roleplaying or storytelling.

In roleplaying mode, you portray your PC. Think of yourself as an actor playing the role of your PC. You speak for them, describe what they do, and explain what they realize. Immerse yourself in the character and explore their Beliefs.

In storytelling mode, you use your Influences to shape the story. This means that you can control NPC's, direct natural events and establish events. The GM is always in Storytelling mode, while players can choose to do so in any scene.

# Phase 1 – Advancing the Factions

The Faction map describes the most significant major organizations in the Setting. Each Faction has an evocative **name** and exists to fulfill their **mandate**. Factions can also have diplomatic or historical **ties** with each other. Each session, Factions will attempt to achieve short-term goals known as **agendas**.

The GM will normally create all of the agendas for the factions between sessions. If a player uses a Claim action on a faction last session, they get to create the agenda instead. Each session will have its own unique and numbered index card with the faction names and their associated agendas written on it. Over the course of the campaign, the GM will collect a series of these cards that will form a part of the historical record of the setting.

Agendas are one-sentence statements of intent, describing a major but short-term goal they hope to achieve. They must be based the Faction's mandate and their ties. No two Agendas can be mutually exclusive, since they can all succeed. Factions achieve these things off screen between sessions.

Each player roll their Spark dice and chooses, in descending order, one of these three options:

**Block:** Prevent a Faction from fulfilling their agenda. You get to quickly narrate how and why the faction doesn't achieve their goal. Strike out the agenda on the faction card.

**Claim:** Claim the right to choose a Faction's next agenda between sessions.

**Tie:** Create a new tie between two Factions, or alter an existing one. You get to quickly narrate exactly how this tie is established. Write the new tie on the faction card.

Every agenda that isn't blocked is accomplished. The GM quickly narrates how each of those Factions succeeds. When a player blocks an Agenda, they get the opportunity to describe how that effort fails.

## Example: Simplified for Beta

Angela: Now that we are in the second game session, we need to determine what happened with the Agendas. Remember that these are the factions.

**The Village of Kanata** - Repel Saika bandit attacks.

**The Hostile Natives** - A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, missing the tops of their skulls.

**The Henomin Mercantile Guild** - Create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations.

**Shiraine Colony** - The Planetary Board of Directors passes a motion declaring the Saika mercenaries to be enemy combatants in the eyes of the law.

Brian: I will block the Henomin Mercantile Guild's agenda. I would rather not deal with trade tribunals at this point. Can you cross out that on the Agenda card Angela?



Angela: Sure. Chris?

Chris: I think I will claim The Hostile Natives' next agenda. Always nice to have control of an alien race.

Dave: I will create a tie between the Henomin Merchant Guild and the Village of Kanata. The Merchantile Guild becomes patrons of their client state of Kanata. I believe this also gets marked on the card.

Angela: The village of Kanata sends out a few peasants to Matsue Colony, begging for aid. A young samurai, Shimura, and his companion, Ando, agree to travel with the peasant and they fend off the Saika bandit attack.

A group of Sesei troops stopped reporting after a particularly nasty acid storm struck their encampment. When a recovery team was dispatched, they found the troops brutally murdered with their skulls partially removed.

Brian: Apparently, the Planetary Board of Directors was too busy dealing with the slaughter of Sesei troops do deal with lowlands affairs.

Angela: The Planetary Board of Directors blames the murders on the Saika mercenaries. On the urging of Sesei, the mercenaries are declared enemy combatants in the eyes of the law. Sesei quickly declares a bounty of 200 credits per Saika returned alive to their custody.

## Phase 2 – Framing the Scene

The first step of any Scene is to create the initial situation. The group will start by generating a **Platform**, describing where, and when the scene is taking place. Next up, the **Tilt** will define some event or action that will force the characters into action. Third, determine what **Question** you wish to answer with the scene. Lastly, each player chooses between **roleplaying** and **storytelling** modes.

Some general advice for framing is to cut right into the action and try to end scenes as quickly as possible. This keeps the scenes short and snappy by cutting out the boring bits.

### The Process of Framing the Scene

First, Roll Spark dice and compare, rolling off if necessary. The highest roll gets to choose between the Platform, Tilt, or Question. The second highest gets the next pick one of the two remaining options. The third highest roll gets what remains. Other people can give suggestions, but the person who won this dice roll who gets the final say.

Secondly, the person framing the Platform describes where and when a scene takes place in 2-3 sentences. By creating the Platform, they can control the pace of play and how much time passes between scenes.

Thirdly, the person framing the Tilt uses 2-3 sentences to describe what event or action forces PC's to interact with the scene. By creating the Tilt, they can guide the general types of actions are encouraged in the scene. The Tilt needs to be logical and consistent with the Platform.

Fourth, the person framing the Question states what you are trying to answer with the scene in one sentence. This scene is important to the story because you answered this specific question. The best Questions are ones that challenge many different Beliefs. The question must be related to the Tilt.

Fifth, each player chooses either to roleplay their PC in the scene, or to focus in the storytelling mode of play. This will affect what kinds of declarations they can make in Collaboration, and how they gather their dice in the Conflict.

Move on to Collaboration

Now the group is ready to start a Scene. Everyone rolls their Spark Attributes, and they have the following results.

- Angela rolls her D20 and gets a value of 14.
- Brian rolls his D8 and gets a 6
- Chris rolls his D12 and gets a 9
- Dave rolls his D4 and gets a 2

Angela has the highest number, so she gets the first choice between Platform, Tilt, and Question. She claims the Platform.

Chris has the second highest number, so he chooses between the Tilt and the Question. He doesn't have a good idea yet, so he decides to claim the Question.

Brian has the third highest score, so he gets the Tilt.

Angela: The scene is set in the rubble of Koru Village, at dusk. Its three days after you repelled the Saika attack.

Brian: And in the distance, you see a corrosive storm that threatens to destroy the village and any clues in the rubble.

Chris: The Question; who is responsible for the destruction of Koru Village?"

Brian, Chris, and Dave each declare that they will roleplay their PC's in the scene. They move onto collaboration.

## Phase 3 - Collaboration

Most of gameplay consists of collaboration, where the group works together to narrate what happens in the story. This is where freeform role-playing occurs, speaking in character and declaring actions.

Collaboration really consists of a series of declarations. When you make a declaration, you are announcing that you want something to occur in the fiction. If another person doesn't want that to be established, they can trigger a conflict. Once a declaration is made and isn't blocked by a conflict, it becomes an objective truth about the setting that can't be contradicted.

A good technique for making your declarations is to consider reincorporating any facts or details from earlier in the story. Similarly, should consider saying "Yes, and" to elaborate on someone else's declaration with one of your own.

If you want to prevent someone else's declaration, say, "*We are in conflict.*" and move to the Conflict Phase.

If the Question of the scene has been answered, you may say, "*And we move on.*" to move to the Closing the Scene phase.

### Roleplaying Declarations

Players who are in roleplaying mode and portraying their PC usually make declarations about their PC's Actions, their PC's Dialogue or their PC's Realizations.

**PC Action Declarations;** In the first person, describe what your character is doing physically. If a conflict arises, you are likely using your Body attribute.

"I open the door" or "I leap over the chiasm."

**Dialogue Declarations;** Speak in the voice of your character, interacting with other PC's or with NPC's. If you use dialogue to suggest something to an NPC's, the NPC will do either what you recommend or resist you in a conflict. If a conflict arises, you are likely using your Heart attribute.

"Borthwick, do we really need to exterminate these goblins?" or "You know, you should let us through the gates just this once."

**Realization Declarations;** In the first person, declare some fact about that world that is true. If a conflict arises, you are likely using your Mind attribute.

"I remember that the Vishani are afraid of the colour yellow as their death goddess favours that colour." or "I realize we should be able to travel along the edge of the glacier without being noticed since the melt water will cover our tracks."

## Storytelling Declarations

The GM and players in storytelling mode usually make declarations about NPC's Actions, NPC Dialogue, or a Setting Truth.

**NPC Action Declarations;** In the third person, describe what an NPC is doing physically. The Body Attribute is usually used if a conflict arises from this kind of declaration.

"Bob closes the door" or "Brenda shoots you with her bow."

**NPC Dialogue Declarations;** Speak in the voice of an NPC in the third person, interacting with the PC's or with other NPC's. If they suggest a course of action that the other character strongly disagrees with, a conflict might start.

"Bob asks Borthwick if you need to exterminate the goblins" or "The guard explains that the gates are closed due to pestilence and will not be opened for any reason."

**Setting Truth Declarations:** In the third person, describe something in the setting that either occurs or is established as true.

"A storm is gathering, with a rumbling thunder" or "The valley is miles to the east and beyond your reach".

### Example: Simplified for Beta

Angela: Looking at Chris; Gisaku, you are the first to notice the threat, thanks to your genetic adaptations and your Common Talent with the storms, you are the first to notice. You smell the acid on the wind, see the darkening mountains to the east, and feel the change in the winds.

Chris: Ando, could you please search the rubble as fast as you can, looking for tracks?

Dave: Certainly, Headsman.

Chris: Lord Shimura-san, could I beg your favour and ask for your tactical expertise to try to figure what caused this destruction? Your noble weapons are beyond my humble knowledge.

Brian: In an out-of-character voice, Chris, are you planning on telling our characters about the storm? Not all of us are acid proof!

Chris: Also, out-of-character. Nope, don't want to worry you yet.

Brian: In the voice of Shimura. "Why should we waste the time Gisaku? We know it's the Saika that did this foul deed. I will help find the tracks with the android, so we can track down and end those dishonourable dogs."

Angela: Does Gisaku want to allow Shimura to do this?

Chris: No he doesn't. I don't want to assume that these are mere bandits. We are in Conflict.

# Phase 4 - Conflict

When someone in the game wishes to block someone else's declaration, they enter into the Conflict phase. You start by **picking sides**, followed **gathering dice**, then you roll the dice and lastly you **choose resolutions**.

## Picking sides

Whenever a conflict starts up, each person needs to declare if they are participating in the conflict or for which side.

If you would like the original declaration to occur, say "Yes." If you want to block that declaration, you say "No" If you want to abstain from the conflict, you can remain silent.

All of the people who said Yes will be working together to support that declaration, while all of the people who said no will cooperate to block it. Your respective characters may want to support or block the resolution for different reasons, but you will work together for this single conflict.

## Gathering Dice

When you enter into conflicts in **roleplaying** mode, you use your Attributes, Conditions, and Talents from your character sheet.

- For physical conflicts, you would use your Body Attribute.
- For social conflicts, use your Heart Attribute
- For mental conflicts, use your Mind Attribute.
- Every Rise Conditions that would apply in this situation will increase your die type by one-step, to a maximum of D20.
- Every Fall Condition that would apply in this situation decreases your die type by one-step, to a minimum of D4.
- If you have a Broad Talent that applies, gain +1 to your bonus.
- If you have a Common Talent that applies, gain +2 to your bonus.
- If you have a Deep Talent that applies, gain +3 to your bonus.

When you enter into conflicts in **storytelling** mode, you take one of the Influence dice from your pool. These influence dice represent your ability as a player to shape the story through NPCs or natural events.

You will use that die for the conflict, then discard it afterwards. There are six different levels of Influence that you can use if you have them in your pool.

**Epic** Influences use a **D20+6**, representing a superhuman force or a horde of NPCs.  
**Excellent** Influences use a **D12+5**, representing a major force or a large gang of NPC's.  
**Great** Influences use a **D10+4**, representing a significant challenges or a group of NPC's.  
**Good** Influences use a **D8+3**, representing a moderate challenge or a couple NPC.  
**Poor** Influences use a **D6+2**, representing a minor challenge or a single NPC.  
**Terrible** Influences use a **D4+1**, representing trivial obstacles or a weak NPC.

## Rolling Dice

First, everyone in the conflict rolls their dice and identifies any 1's that come up.

If a player in the conflict is in roleplaying their PC and he's challenged one of his Beliefs, he can **Struggle**. He states "This confirms/Refutes of my Belief \_\_\_\_\_." and if everyone agrees that the Belief is being challenged, he spends one Fate and sets the die he already rolled to its maximum possible result.

Each person adds their bonus to the number on their die roll to get their scores. The person on the highest score on each side of the conflict gets to lead their respective sides.

Compare the scores of the two leaders and calculate the difference. The leader with the higher score wins the conflict for their side. If the winning side supported the original declaration, it occurs. Otherwise, that declaration is blocked.

You now know if that original declaration happened or if it was blocked. Now you get to find out what else the conflict has led to. Each side can get resolutions based on the differences between their two scores.

**Difference of 0-3:** Each side chooses 1 resolution

**Difference of 4-5:** The winning side chooses 1 resolution

**Difference of 6-7:** The winning side chooses 2 resolutions

**Difference of 8-9:** The winning side chooses 3 resolutions

**Difference of 10-11:** The winning side chooses 4 resolutions

**Difference of 12+:** The winning side chooses 5 resolutions

Beyond that, every die that shows a value of 1 gives the opposing side another resolution. Now that you know how many you have, let's talk about how they work in play.

## Choosing Resolutions

It's somewhat likely that each side in the conflict get at least one resolution. Starting with the winning side, choose resolutions one at a time in alternating order.

When your side is picking a resolution, you should work together to try to make your choice. Negotiate with each other and try to find a resolution that would make all of you happy. If you can't agree come to some kind of agreement, the leader gets the final decision. When you choose a resolution, you state the name of the resolution first, followed by a brief narration of what that means in the fiction.

There are four different kinds of resolutions, each with their own effects. The resolutions can target any other players in the conflict or the GM. Anyone targeted a resolution can reject it by saying "I would rather suffer harm." When they do so, they take a level of harm to their appropriate attribute or their Spark instead.

**Compel:** This is the most commonly used resolution in the game. Target someone and force them to perform some action. You can compel a player to declare that their PC does some action. You can compel the GM to establish some new fact about the setting. Lastly, you can compel someone to have an NPC they controlled removed from play.

### Examples

"Compel, Bob falls to his knees"

"Compel, the wall collapses"

"Compel, Bob is crushed by the falling wall."

**Query:** Force someone to answer a question with honesty and in good faith. The question is asked to the GM or player, not necessarily to the characters. That person uses their character to provide the answer either through direct dialogue or indirect actions.

### Example

"Query, Why is Bob so angry?" Bob's player replies, "I look down at my shaking hands and rubs the finger that used to hold my wedding ring."

**Bolster:** Offer another player either to add a new Rise condition or to remove of one of their Fall conditions. If they accept, you spend 4 Fate and they make the change on their sheet. One of the best ways to encourage someone to act in your favour is to give them a Bolster condition that supports them doing what you want.

### Examples

“Bolster, Bob gains a new Rise condition of “Bob’s Ex-Wife Mara”

“Bolster, Bob gains a new Rise condition of “Betraying the Koru rebels”

**Hinder:** Offer another player either add a new Fall condition or to remove of one of their Rise conditions. If they accept, they gain 4 Fate and they make the change on their sheet. The best use of Hinder resolutions is to add mechanical weight to something already established in the fiction.

### Example

“Hinder, Bob gains a new Fall condition of “The Santa Monica Boulevard”.

While the sides are choosing resolutions, anyone with a PC in a conflict may **Push** once. He states, “I push for a \_\_\_\_\_ resolution.” and then spends one Fate to choose a resolution to apply immediately in this conflict. When you push for a resolution, you are the one with the final say on the outcome, though the people on your side might have suggestions.

Discard any Influence dice you used for the conflict and move back over to the Collaboration Phase.

### Example: Simplified for Beta

#### Declare Sides

Shimura (the PC) is defending his original declaration by saying “yay.” Gisaku (The PC) is trying to block the declaration, so he says “Nay.” Ando and the GM are observing from the sidelines.

#### Determine Attributes

Shimura uses his Heart Attribute of D6 to maneuver socially. This increases to a D8 as he uses the intimidating Rise Condition of *My Father’s Daisho*.

Gisaku is also using his Heart Attribute, though his is D10. He doesn’t have any relevant Conditions.

#### Determine Talent Bonus



Shimura uses his *Military* Broad Talent (+1) and his *Reconnaissance* Common Talent (+2) on the roll, for a total of +3.

Gisaku uses his *Villages* Broad Talent (+1), *Leadership* Common Talent (+2) and his *Confidence-Building* Deep Talent (+3) for a total of +6.

### Roll the Dice

Shimura rolls his D8 and gets a 2 and adds his bonus for a total score of 5.

Gisaku rolls his D8 and gets a 7, adding in his bonus for a total score of 13.

### Compare Scores

Gisaku's score of 13 beats Shimura's score by a margin of 8 points. Gisaku wins the conflict on behalf of his side and gets to choose three Resolutions.

### Choose Resolutions

Chris: "Question. Shimura, why don't you want to investigate more closely into the villager's destruction?"

Brian: "Shimura looks down the Sesei insignia on his environmental suit, with an expression of guilt."

Chris: "Bolster. I am offering a new Rise of *Destroyed Villages*."

Brian: Nods, takes four Fate from the supply, and writes in the new Rise Condition on his Character Sheet.

Chris: "Compel. Shimura, I know you have the skills necessary to find the truth. I am certain that there is more behind this than mere bandit attacks. I am confident you will do the right thing."

Brian: Spending 1 Fate. "I push for a Compel resolution. You make good points, but your disrespect for me and for my station is unbecoming. I await your sincere and abject apology for your impertinence."

Chris: "I would rather suffer harm." Marks down an X in the circle on the D8 die on his Heart Attribute. He will use a D6 for future Heart tests.

End the Conflict, back to Collaboration.

## Phase 5 - Closing the Scene

When someone says *“And we move on”* during collaboration, you stop making declarations. Instead, you move on to examining Beliefs.

Examine each of the Beliefs of the people who were in the conflict. Go through each of the Setting Beliefs on the Belief Sheet and ask if the GM has directly challenged them during the scene. If everyone is confident, that is the case, give the GM the Fate off that entry on the sheet. Repeat the process for each of the players and their character Beliefs.

You will usually challenge your Beliefs by entering into conflicts that support or refute them. That said, sometimes they will be examined during collaboration and this can count, if the group agrees.

Whenever a someone takes the last Fate from their section of the Belief sheet, everyone in the conflict takes one additional Fate from the supply. At that point, refill their portion of the Belief Sheet with Fate.

Once you are done with the Fate, each player can remove one harm from one of his attributes. The GM can likewise remove one harm from her Spark attribute. This represents the natural recovery process and is the only way to remove harm during play.

## Phase 6 - End of Session

When you finish the last scene, move on to the End of Session Phase

Each person at the table gets a chance to **Inspire** another player or **Reform** a Faction. Using either of these options costs you 12 Fate.

### Inspire

You can propose a new Belief for another PC. If they accept it, they change one of their Beliefs and gain a new Talent related to their previous Belief. If they reject the proposed Belief, they gain a level in one of their Attributes instead (Max D12). This new Belief can't be changed until the end of this story, at the earliest.

### Reform

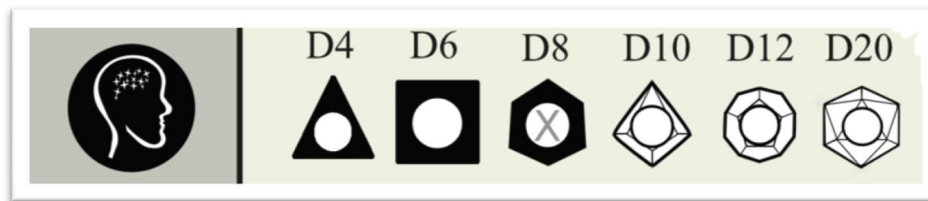
You can propose a new Mandate for a Faction. If the GM accepts, she will change it on the Faction sheet. If the new mandate no longer matches one of the setting Beliefs, she has an opportunity to change one of the setting Beliefs as she wishes. Her only guideline is that each Faction mandate needs to confirm or refute one of the setting Beliefs.

# Harm and Retirement

## Rejecting Resolutions

You may reject any resolution by saying “I would rather suffer harm,” When you use this option, you will mark harm to the Attribute you used in the conflict or to your Spark Attribute. When you suffer harm to an attribute, locate the largest die of that attribute without a damage mark. Place a harm mark within that circle, indicating that die is unavailable.

**Figure 2: Example of one harm to a D8 Mind Attribute**



## Taken out or Retired

If the D4 level in any attribute is filled with Harm, the player must choose either to be taken out of the scene, or to permanently retire from play.

If your character is taken out, they survive and are temporarily incapacitated. You cannot make declarations or participate in conflicts for the remainder of the scene. At the beginning of the next scene, you will remove the Harm marker on the D4 level of your attributes and will be able to participate again.

If you decide that your character will Retire, erase all harm for your character sheet. Your character will be removed from play at the end of the scene, but you can act at full capacity until that point. Here are some general guidelines on how characters retire.

- Losing your Body Attribute means your character dies or irreparably crippled.
- Losing your Heart Attribute means your character has gone mad or into permanent exile.
- Losing your Mind Attribute means your character is comatose or brain-dead.
- Losing your Spark Attribute means your character has surrendered their destiny and have given up their agency. They gave up being a hero and their story is done.

You can make a replacement character for the next session with the same number of Attributes levels, Rise Conditions, Fall Conditions, and Talents. You can keep all of your Fate.

# Influences

When you enter into a conflict in Storytelling mode, you use your **Influence dice**. These tend to represent the power of a given NPC or natural event in that conflict. If there someone wishes to participate in a conflict and they aren't using their own PC, they use Influence instead.

There are six different levels of influence, each of which is associated with a die and bonus.

- **Epic** Influences use a **D20+6**, representing a superhuman force or a horde of NPCs.
- **Excellent** Influences use a **D12+5**, representing a major force or a large gang of NPC's.
- **Great** Influences use a **D10+4**, representing a significant challenges or a group of NPC's.
- **Good** Influences use a **D8+3**, representing a moderate challenge or a couple NPC.
- **Poor** Influences use a **D6+2**, representing a minor challenge or a single NPC.
- **Terrible** Influences use a **D4+1**, representing trivial obstacles or a weak NPC.

Each person has their own pool of dice that represents their Influences. When they want to use an Influence in a conflict, they pull the relevant die out of their pool and roll it, discarding the die afterwards.

Anyone can spend a Fate to buy a single Influence die at the same level as your Spark Attribute. Players can only buy Influences when their PC suffers harm, while the GM can purchase them at any time.

Anyone can exchange one Influence die in their supply for two more Influences that are a level smaller. You can keep doing this process as much as you would like, doubling the number of smaller dice each time. You can also go in the opposite direction, combining any two Influence dice into a single die, which is one-step larger.

Example: The GM has a Spark of D20, so she will normally spend one Fate to get a single D20+6 Influence. Since she is planning to accost the party with a lovable street urchin, she decides she decides to split her D20 into 2D12. She keeps one of them, and splits the second D12 into 4D8. Lastly, she splits one of the D8 into 2D6.

Her final Influence pool looks like this; 1D12, 3D8, 2D6 which means she can present two Poor, three Good, and one Excellent Influence Dice in different conflicts. This allows her to participate in six different conflicts, without spending any additional Fate to replenish her Influence pool.

## The limits of Influences

- Neither Talents nor Conditions will alter their roll; that's baked into the dice already.
- You cannot Struggle, spending Fate to maximize your die roll when you challenge one of your Beliefs in a conflict.
- You cannot Push, spending Fate to buy an additional resolution.
- Any Influence can be compelled to die, though the GM/Player can take harm to their Spark instead to preserve that NPC.

# Fate and Initiative

Spark is a game about taking risks and challenging your Beliefs. When you play with that in mind, you get rewarded in **Fate**. You can spend those tokens to gain more influence over the story, to get your way in Conflicts, or to help others evolve and grow.

## Gaining Fate

The normal way of gaining Fate is by challenging your Beliefs. While **Closing the Scene** phase, you get 1 Fate for each of your Beliefs that you supported or refuted in that scene. When someone has challenged all three of their Beliefs, everyone in the conflict earns 1 Fate.

When you enter into a conflict and someone applies a hinder resolution on you, you gain 4 Fate. The more risks you take and conflicts you join in, the more Hinder resolutions you might receive.

When you takes risks or portray a character convincingly, another player might give you the Initiative marker. You can give the Initiative to anyone else who is acting convincingly or taking risks and when you do, you gain 1 Fate.

## Spending Fate

If a player in challenges one of his Beliefs in a conflict, he can **Struggle**. If everyone agrees that he is challenging his Belief, he spends one Fate and sets the die he already rolled to its maximum possible result.

During a conflict where they are roleplaying their PC, they can also **Push** to spend 1 Fate and gain an additional resolution.

When you are in conflict, you can spend 4 Fate to Bolster another PC, giving them a Rise condition or removing one of their a Fall conditions.

At the end of the session, you can spend 12 Fate to Inspire another PC to change their Belief. They gain an Attribute if they accept the Belief and a Talent if they don't. Alternatively, you can Reform a Faction for the same cost and change their Mandate.

Lastly, anyone can spend 1 Fate to buy a single Influence die at the same level as their Spark Attribute. Players can only buy Influences when their PC suffers harm, while the GM can purchase them at any time.

## The Initiative

One person at the table will always have the Initiative marker. This marker gives the wielder the right to make the first declaration of every Collaboration phase, helping them start the story as they wish.

Once per scene, someone with the Initiative marker can give it to another player at the table. They can only give the token when a player portrays his character convincingly, or if he takes risks. When someone gives The Initiative marker, they receive 1 Fate.

# Chapter 5 – Guidance

## Why Guidance Matters

It's remarkably hard to teach roleplaying games. The last chapter focused on showing you the structure and the processes you need to follow to play the game. This chapter gives you the tools, techniques, and advice you need to make the game really shine. This isn't just for the GM either; there's plenty of advice for players as well.

The first part of is an explanation of **the Principles** that were mentioned in the introduction chapter. This elaborates on the GM and player's principles, and provides some handy tools for following them.

The second part of the chapter, **How to GM Spark**, teaches the Game Moderator how to fulfill her role and guide the setting. It explains how to use Factions in play, how to manage NPCs and gives her a host of techniques to manage the flow of play.

Lastly, there are a handful of **General GM techniques** that I use when I run the game. While optional, these are often helpful.

## The Principles

### Keep the Story Moving

You need to keep everyone engaged in the story. When you run the game, you need to accept player input and build off it to keep things exciting and dynamic.

When players make declarations or suggest something, try to run with it. When you react, build on their ideas by saying, "Yes, and..." Alternatively, you can offer them what they want for a price just high enough that it's a real choice to accept or reject the offer.

When things slow down too much for your liking, you can always blow things up. It doesn't have to be physical; an emotional outburst, men with machine guns or impossible evidence are equally good at getting people moving. Sometimes you do need the pace to slow. For everything else, there's ninja!

### Say yes, or roll the dice

The default assumption is success. A declaration made will always succeed, unless someone blocks it by starting a conflict. Your responsibility is to only start conflicts that would help further the story or develop the characters.

When you do start a conflict, use your Influence sparingly. While the GM can use Epic Influences to win each conflict, you only have a limited supply of Influence dice.

When you do pull out the dice, Spark asks you to roll all the dice in public and listen to them. You never need to alter a die roll, because you can always choose how to interpret or change it during play.

## Ask Them Questions

Learning and play are closely related. This is why it is important to always ask questions. Whenever a player acts in a way that you don't expect or understand, ask them why they are doing so. Don't block them, but feel free to enquire on their intent, reasoning, and motivations. You might want to ask a question in this format: "Why are you doing X, given that Y?"

Leading questions are also incredibly useful. They let you propose some fact about the story, and give them a chance to interpret or modify it.

Examples of leading questions might include:

- Why did you abandon the Church?
- Why were you so angry with Kevin?
- How did you feel when Luke ran away from home?

## Challenge their Beliefs

The game asks you to challenge your Beliefs, and those held by others. When you do so, either by supporting or by refuting any given Belief, you earn Fate.

Find the two other Beliefs around the table that your character or your setting would disagree with. Confront them and try to change them. Stand up for your Beliefs, and try to convince others to follow what you believe.

Remember to look at the Fate tokens on the Belief sheet. When someone only has one Fate left on their portion of the sheet, try to guide the story to challenge that Belief. See if you can engineer situations that will challenge multiple Beliefs at the same time; it will make the game more rewarding for all involved.

## Share your energy and creativity

Share your ideas. They are not a limited commodity and the more you share, the more you will come up with. Trust me.

Share your plots and keep open secrets. You may want to hide secrets from the other characters, but you should share them with the other players at the table. The reason why secrets are so interesting is that they are discovered during

play. Help the other players reveal their secrets. Help them trigger their plots. It will drive the story forward and your characters will learn in the process.

## Take a principled position

Be decisive and bold by playing your Beliefs to the hilt. Play chicken with the other people at the table and dare them to accept your declarations. It doesn't matter if you make a good decision or a bad one; so long as you challenge Beliefs and take risks, you will earn your Fate.

## Take risks and escalate conflicts

Be vulnerable. Try to let your guard down and push your boundaries. The story will be more personally meaningful that way and it can help you learn more about yourself.

Be daring and take risks. Every risk you take can earn you Fate and you can never be forced to retire your character against your will. Push the envelope, escalate the conflicts, and go big.

# How to GM Spark

The Game Moderator has a lot to do in Spark.

- She needs to use the Setting to challenge the PC's Beliefs.
- She guides the major factions that influence society.
- She shapes the flow of history of the world and the growth of societies.
- She portrays dozens of minor characters (NPCs) who interact with the players.
- She help the players immerse themselves in the fictional world.

Fortunately, the GM also has a set of tools at her disposal. Here are the ways that she can guide the group and foster fun.

- She is an epic storyteller
- She sets the agenda
- She helps frame the scenes
- She Collaborates using NPC's
- She influences Conflicts



- She controls the spotlight

## The GM is an epic storyteller

Like the Players, the GM has a Spark Attribute. She uses her Spark to gather Influence, to frame scenes and to reject resolutions. Her Spark Attribute is set at a D20, though harm can temporarily decrease it.

## The GM sets the agenda

The GM has the most control over the setting by declaring what agendas each of the factions are pursuing every session. She can guarantee that at least one agenda will be accomplished every session and shape the story.

The GM usually creates the agendas for each of the Factions between sessions. These goals can be anything, so long as they work toward the mandate and they consider the Faction's ties. She needs to ensure that no two agendas are mutually exclusive, since they could all potentially succeed.

Agendas usually allow a Faction to accomplish one of these types of goals.

- Pass a law
- Take control of territory
- Make an important discovery
- Build something new
- Destroy something important
- Protect something under threat

She can create agendas that threaten the status quo and force the players to make meaningful choices. This is how she can build the context for interesting stories.

### **The GM helps frame the scenes**

Spark has competitive scene framing. Everyone rolls their Spark die and the three people with the highest results create the scene together. Since the GM always has a Spark Attribute of D20, she is likely to frame a part of every scene and often gets first choice.

By creating the **Platform**, she can control the pace of play and how much time passes between scenes.

By creating the **Tilt**, she can guide the general types of actions are encouraged in the scene. She can encourage the kinds of situations that will challenge multiple beliefs. Likewise, she can make the Tilt something appropriate for the PC's Talents.

By creating the **Question**, she can focus the scene on exploring and challenging certain specific Beliefs. The best Questions are ones that challenge many different Beliefs.

### **The GM Collaborates using NPC's**

The GM interacts with the players via Non-Protagonist Characters (NPCs). She makes declarations about the NPC's actions and dialogue.

Most new NPCs, when first encountered, are **Figures**. Each figure has a unique description, but doesn't have a name yet.

Consider the wiry and jittery cop versus the proper police officer with fine muttonchops.

When a player likes a Figure, they can name them. **Names** are important and reoccurring NPC's that the GM can play during scenes. The GM writes down that name on her sheet and any other useful information like a character description or their typical actions. If a player wants to make a declaration with a Name, they need the GM's permission first.

Consider Robert, the wiry and jittery Chicago cop who specializes in "Gang Violence" (D10+5) and has a hard time to "Keep calm" (D6+2)

The third type of NPC are **Faces**; Names who represent a given Faction. The GM either creates these Faces at the start of the game, or promotes a Name into a Face during play. Each of the published factions has premade Faces to represent them. The GM has exclusive control over the Faces.

Consider the prim and proper Johnathan Black with fine mutton chops. As the Face of the Chicago PD faction, Johnathan specializes in "The Chicago Beat" (D12+5) and is weak at "Resisting Bribery" (D6+2)

**Creating NPCs:** Before you invent a new Figure, ask yourself if there is an existing Name or Face that could fulfil that role. Minimize the number of characters that you use, so that you can establish stronger connections with a smaller number. If you need to create a character on the fly, try to imagine an individual who would be defined by the clash of two different character beliefs.

## The GM influences Conflicts

When the GM enters into Conflicts, she uses her **Influence dice**. There are six different levels of influence, each of which is associated with a die and bonus. If she wants to present a major challenge, she could pull an Excellent D12 or an Epic D20 out of her dice pool. For minor situations, she might only use a Poor D6 or even a Terrible D4.

**Epic Influences** use a D20+6, representing a superhuman force or a horde of NPCs.

**Excellent Influences** use a D12+5, representing a major force or a gang of NPC's.

**Great Influences** use a D10+4, representing significant challenges or a few NPC's.

**Good Influences** use a D8+3, representing a moderate challenge or a single NPC.

**Poor Influences** use a D6+2, representing a minor challenge or a weak NPC.

**Terrible Influences** use a D4+1, representing trivial obstacles or minimal NPCs.

The GM has full control over the amount of challenge she wants to give to the PC's. If she doesn't have enough dice, she can spend a Fate to purchase a D20 for her pool. She can also split each die into two more dice that are a step smaller; that D20 can turn into 2D12, 4D10, 8D8, 16D6 or 32D4.

## The GM controls the spotlight.

One of the most important duties for the GM is to give every player about the same amount of attention in the game. She needs to pay attention to the amount of time that each player is acting and try to give everyone time to shine. She also needs to try to give players some time to relax and recover after particularly intense scenes or conflicts.

There are two useful techniques to move the focus of the game.

She can ask questions to a player to give them the spotlight. Here are a few standard questions that I like to use:

- So what do you do?
- So how does that make you feel?
- What do you think about that?

Alternatively, she can use her body language to give the spotlight to a particular player. If you stare and make eye contact with a particular person, the other people at the table will often reflexively follow your gaze. It can be a way to prompt a specific person to make declarations and seize the spotlight. This is particularly handy for the quiet players who might normally be overlooked.

## General GM Techniques

Here are a number of useful GM techniques that I tend to use when I run the game. None of these are necessary to run the game, but they tend to make the session richer.

**Don't Plan:** No plan survives contact with the players, so avoid creating complex plans, or premade solutions to problems. Be ready for stuff to happen that you weren't prepared for and try to roll with it as much as you can.

You could prepare a handful of pre-determined events between NPC's, without accounting for actions PC actions. "Joe and Bob are fighting. What do you do?"

**Leave Gaps:** By leaving a few questions unresolved and hinting at nebulous threats, you give yourself more ingredients for your improvisation. Try to set up potential Platforms, Tilts, and Questions for future scenes.

**Think Offstage:** Think about what is happening in the background and the consequences of the Player's actions. That mugger they killed last session probably has a family looking for justice.

**Detail.** Focus on explaining small details realistically and people will assume that broad massive things are equally detailed. Tell them the origin of the silk cloth and how much a desert trader would charge for it. It's a small detail, but it implies a large interconnected world, full of rich detail.

**Show, don't tell.** Context is critical. Elaborate how the environment reaches each of their senses. Describe exactly how the characters are expressing their emotions with body language. Show, don't tell.

**The Love letter:** Look at the Beliefs of each of the player Characters to learn what kinds of conflicts they are interested in. Look at their Conditions to see what situations would benefit or hinder them. Look at their Talents to see what kinds of tasks they are capable of performing.

**Guest Star:** If players aren't doing anything for more than five minutes, draw them in again by offering them minor NPC's to play. Just because their character isn't there, doesn't mean the player should be bored!

**Body Language:** Try to sit back straight for important or arrogant characters. You can lower your shoulders and avoid eye contact for shy or submissive ones. It's surprisingly effective.

**Relationship Map:** Consider creating a relationship map for all of your NPC's so you can keep track of their opinions of the other characters. You don't need to bring it to the table, but it can help you establish their motivations and perspectives.

# Chapter 6 – NeoNippon



## Overview

The Japanese colonization ship landed on the extra-solar planet of Shi Tateyama in 2236. The planet seemed a paradise from the remote surveys. It had abundant water, signs of native life, and a temperature in the habitable range. Once the colonists awoke from their cryo-freeze, they found it was far less pleasant than expected. It was a planet of extreme mountains, nearly boiling sea-level temperatures and harsh corrosive tempests. The rain corroded most metal and unusual electromagnetic characteristics at sea-level fried most electronics. The Colonial Board of Directors made the decision to settle on the cooler, dryer, and safer mountain peaks, with each corporation founding their own colony.

The planet was poor in metals, with the rain dissolving most of the natural ore deposits. Earth-born livestock couldn't survive and the only arable land was in the harsh lowlands. The scientists got to work, producing genetically engineered humans called Henōmin to labour for the colonies. These henōmin were sent down to the lowlands to grow rice, extract protein from the seas, and grow iron-hard black bamboo. They were taught their roles of feudal peasants, modelled after the idealized imagery and stories of Japan on old earth. Wandering, devout androids delivered messages between village, shrine, and great colony.

**The Colonies** are modern cities built into the cool and dry mountain peaks, where the humans can live safely. Each of the four colonies is led by one of the biggest corporations from earth with shares in the initial expedition. Each corporation holds dominion over a swath of territory and rule over dozens of smaller settlements, outposts and henōmin villages. The henōmin consider the corporations as noble families or clans.

**The Lowlands** are nearly inhospitable for humanity. The average temperatures and humidity levels are equal to the most oppressive tropical jungles on old Earth. Worse still, acid storms ravage the landscape on a frequent basis. The local life forms, being bizarre fungal-animal hybrids, are toxic without extreme chemical processing.

Clan Embei designed the henōmin to overcome each of these challenges. They were engineered to be comfortable in the 45C temperatures, to resist the acidic rain and to digest the local flora. Dozens of henōmin villages have been founded in the lowlands to support the colonies demands.

**Independent Outposts** are scattered across the landscape. They are diverse and widespread; smaller human corporate laboratories, Shinto shrines, Buddhist monasteries, secluded dojos and trading posts.

INSERT MAP 1: Colonies

INSERT MAP 2: Lowlands

## Interpretations

## 1 - The War of Writhing Blossoms

We are nothing without our traditions.

The greatest honour is to be of service to your clan.

The secrets of this world will destroy us.

## 2 - Our Last, Best Chance for Peace

Technology will tame this world.

The greatest honour is to be of service to your clan.

The secrets of this world will destroy us.

## 3 - The Lost Colony

Technology will tame this world.

We are nothing without our traditions.

The secrets of this world will destroy us.

## 4 - The Silicon Shogunate

Technology will tame this world.

We are nothing without our traditions.

The greatest honour is to be of service to your clan.

# Setting Beliefs



## Belief 1: Technology will tame this world.

- Moto Bio-Engineering Incorporated (Clan Embei)
- Shakura Environmental Systems Incorporated (Clan Sesei)
- The Dreamers

## Belief 2: We are nothing without our traditions.

- The Village of Kanata
- The Kensei
- The Shrine Tenders

## Belief 3: The greatest honour is to be of service to your clan.

- The Village of Ottawa
- The Henomin Merchant Guild
- Tateyama Colony (Clan Tateyama)

## Belief 4: The secrets of this world will destroy us.

- Nakumura Sensors (Clan Nakumura)
- The Saika Mercenaries
- The Hostile Natives

# Sample Fractions

## Moto Bio-Engineering Incorporated (EMBEI)

**Mandate:** To Terraform Shi-Tateyama via genetic engineering.

**Brief:** Moto Bio-Engineering Incorporated based out of Fukuoka Colony, specializes in genetic engineering and the biological sciences. They are responsible for the creation of the henōmin servants, the iron-hard black bamboo, and the cultured rice necessary for human survival on Tateyama-4.

Sample Agendas:

Create the first vat-bred henōmin with additional improvements.

Engineer new servitor race, the Kappa, to better fish the seas.

Send an expedition to gather new samples of indigenous life forms for study.

---

**Face:** Embei Yukiko Mikisama

**Description:** A bitter and cynical scientist, trying desperately to feed Fukuoka.

**Actions:** Indigenous Botany (D12+5), Henōmin Negotiations (D6+2)

## Shakura Environmental Suits Incorporated (SESI)

**Mandate:** To enable human access to the inhospitable lowlands.

**Brief:** Shakura Environmental Systems Incorporated, based out of Matsue Colony, specializes in fabricating environmental suits and vehicles capable of surviving the storms.

Sample Agendas:

Initiate peaceful trade deals with the Henōmin Merchantile Guild.

Seize the prosperous Baku hills from Clan Embei.

Protect the village of Kanata from attack, for a price.

---

**Face:** Shakura Commander Kurosan

**Description:** A weathered, scarred solder clad in an ornate prototype environmental suit.

**Actions:** Conquering Territory (D12+5), Resisting Bait (D6+2)

## The Dreamers

**Mandate:** To help synthetic life in their search for enlightenment.

**Brief:** A quirk of the artificial intelligence process has resulted in faith being instilled in all artificial intelligences as they gain sentience. The majority embrace the Shinto faith, identifying as Kami embodied in android forms. A strong minority remain as disconnected AI systems following the noble eight-fold path of Buddhism.

Sample Agendas:

To soothe the angered Kami of Mt. Fujan.

Convert the faithless citizens of Matsue Colony to the Shinto faith.

Improve the legal standing of artificial intelligences in the colonies.

---

**Face:** Rinzei531 Bodhisattva

**Description:** A disembodied intelligence, re-purposing communication technologies to speak in a soothing yet rational tone.

**Actions:** Insightful Philosophy (D12+6), Tangible and concrete solutions (D6+2)

## The Village of Kanata

**Mandate:** To survive at any cost.

**Brief:** The henōmin village of Kanata is the primary source of the genetically modified iron-hard black bamboo for Embei Prefecture. As one of the few sources of building materials capable of surviving the lowland storms.

Sample Agendas:

Acquire desperately needed medical supplies from Fukuoka.

Repel Saika bandit attacks.

Barter a portion of the lumber to the Henōmin Mercantile Guild for legal representation.

---

**Face:** Headsman Gisaku

**Description:** A weary yet defiant henōmin leader, driven by duty to his village and family.

**Actions:** Leading Villagers (D12+5), Standing up to Clan Embei. (D6+2)

## The Kensei

**Mandate:** To wield the honourable sword in service.

**Brief:** The Kensei were originally the policing forces for the early colonies, whose duties included enforcement of laws in the lowlands. Unfortunately, harsh corrosive rain tended to degrade firearms and another alternative was sought. They took up swords, fashioned from dwindling supplies of exotic Terran alloys. They took up bushido and have to this day served with honour. They are equally respected and feared by the henōmin.

Sample Agendas:

Hunt down the warlord Koryna and bring her to justice.

Exact ruinous taxes from the village of Ottawa.

Investigate the destroyed village of Yakirana

---

**Face:** Kensei Shimura

**Description:** A stoic ronin cursed with love for a village headwoman.

**Actions:** Honourable Duels (D12+5), Political manoeuvring (D6+2)

## The Shrine Tenders

**Mandate:** To maintain the roads and shrines for travellers.

**Brief:** A network of roadside Shinto shrines dot the countryside where travellers might pay respects to the Kami. The caretakers, known as the Shrine Tenders, maintain and expand this network to bring good fortune to human colonist, android, and henōmin alike. The Shrine Tenders double as a mail service, connecting the lowlands to the colonies through couriers.

Sample Agendas:

Build a new grand shrine in the ruins of a disused communications tower.

Forge diplomatic letters between two different clans.

Pass along secret, coded messages between henomin villages.

---

**Face:** Ando1573

**Description:** One of many messenger-androids, seeking wisdom on the roads between villages.

**Actions:** Observing human emotions (D12+6), Shedding human blood (D6+2)

## The Henōmin Mercantile Guild

**Mandate:** Ensure the henōmin are granted equal rights to true humans.

**Brief:** The first henōmin merchant cooperative was formed twenty years ago in response to a particularly intense famine. Since that time, it has grown into a social safety net for the disenfranchised villagers. Recently established as a formal guild, they have begun to wield their little economic power to support equality and respect for the peoples of the lowlands.

Sample Agendas:

Create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations.

Establish a Black Market.

Convince the colonists that torturing henōmin is dishonourable.

---

**Face:** Speaker Sakhalin

**Description:** Sakhalin is a henōmin grandmother, pleasantly plump with wise eyes.

**Actions:** Subtle persuasion (D12+6), Social Intimidation (D6+2)



## The Village of Ottawa

**Mandate:** Become respected and invaluable to the colonies.

**Brief:** Ottawa is a coastal village, with the women tending the rice and the men fishing the wild seas. The Council of Ottawa has pronounced that they need to curry favour with each of the noble Clans. They seek the approval, attention, and affection of the various colonies so they might improve their lives.

Sample Agendas:

Increase farming yields through some risky experiments.

Domesticate the local wildlife to help in fishing efforts.

Uncover a conspiracy of dishonourable henōmin on the colonies behalf.

---

**Face:** Headwoman Suki

**Description:** Suki is a henōmin woman with defiance shining in her eyes and scars marring her once-beautiful face.

**Actions:** Gain sympathy (D12+6), Resist colony demands (D6+2).

## Shirane Colony (Clan Shirane)

**Mandate:** To maintain a peaceful state of human civilization.

**Brief:** Shirane Colony was the first to be founded, resting on the summit of the highest mountain. It was made to be the capital of the new civilization, a bastion of education, of culture and of law. Shirane Colony care for the Great Library, the Archive, the Planetary Board of Directors and the Supreme Court. As a result, Shirane has also become a hotbed for political intrigue and corporate espionage.

Sample Agendas:

The Supreme Court rules against Clan Nakumura for theft of Clan Sesei schematics.

An obscure text from great library hints that earth knew about the inhospitable nature of Shi-Tateyama prior to sending the colony ship.

The Planetary Board of Directors passes a motion declaring the Saika mercenaries to be enemy combatants in the eyes of the law.

---

**Face:** Chuganji Ryoko, Chief Negotiator

**Description:** A middle-aged woman with shocking blue hair, multiple facial piercings, a Nakumura X 31-Cybereye implant, and a soothing voice.

**Actions:** Trade political favours (D12+6), Intentional provocation (D6+2).

## Nakumura Sensors (Clan Nakumura)

**Mandate:** To establish open communications and information gathering.

**Brief:** The Nakumura Sensors Corporation was originally a telecommunications start-up on old earth which diversified to computer systems and remote sensing technologies. They manage the massive communication relay and satellite systems necessary to interact with old Earth. They are the eyes and ears of the colonies and use their expertise to try to see through the storms.

Sample Agendas:

Forges fake messages from Earth when the real ones cease.

Establish a relay in the unexplored territories to found new henōmin villages.

Determine the precise source of the anomalous electromagnetic interference.

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**Face:** Nakumura Atsushi, Sensor Technician

**Description:** A short and heavysset human male, with a dozen different kinds of electronic devices strapped to him.

**Actions:** Modify a sensor system (D12+5), Resist lowlands storms (D6+2)

## The Saika Mercenaries

**Mandate:** Achieve complete military dominance of the planet.

**Brief:** Some call them mercenaries. Others call them bandits, killers, and criminals. In any case, the Saika are spread across the lowlands with tendrils of influence extending into the colonies. For those with credits or in need of a scapegoat, they are just what you need.

Sample Agendas:

Seize control of several mining villages.

Commit an atrocity on a village that refused to pay the protection money.

Defend a village from an attack, in exchange for new recruits.

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**Face:** Kikuchiyo the Cruel

**Description:** Exactly what you would expect from a half-starved boy, raised by blackmailers, who got his hands on a pulse cannon. Kikuchiyo is a lean hedonist with several cybernetic augmentations.

**Actions:** Ambush with overwhelming force (D12+5), Long-term planning (D6+2)

## The Hostile Natives

**Mandate:** Destroy the Invading Two-legs.

**Brief:** These sentient beings are native to Shi Tateyama and are fighting back against the two-pillar “alien invaders”. Fortunately, for them, they are unknown to the human population.

Sample Agendas:

A village is destroyed, with acidic burns left on the rubble.

A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, missing the tops of their skulls.

A shrine-tender has located a bizarre purple artifact, seemingly shaped out of some entirely unknown material.

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**Face:** The Alien

**Description:** A swarm of tentacles, bound together like tumbleweed.

**Actions:** Slaughter a human or henōmin (D12+6), Communicate (D6+2)

# Sample Talents

## Human Colonist (Broad):

Science, Politics, Military, Engineering, Computers, Law, Observation, Economics, Arts, Philosophy, Persuasion

## Henōmin Villagers (Broad):

Farming, Fishing, Logging, Village, Wilderness, Weather, Trade, Evasion, Religion, Athletics

## Human Colonist (Common):

Stealth, Biology, Swords, Reconnaissance, Rhetoric, Electronics, Implants, Energy Weapons, Aikido, Sensors, Tactics, Medicine, Henōmin, Education

## Henōmin Villagers (Common):

Oratory, History, Emotions, Construction, Storms, Shrines, Brawling, Leadership, Carpentry, Herbalism, Improvised weapons, Humans, Barter

## Human Colonist (Deep):

Native Ecosystems, Resource Scarcity, Daisho, Plasma Pistol, Wrist-locks, Cybernetic Prototypes, Human Genecrafting, Henōmin Genetic Tailoring, Sensor Engineering, Communications Relays, Hover Transports, Dueling Etiquette, Trade Logistics, Policy Analysis, AI Systems

## Henōmin Villagers (Deep):

Wilderness Exploration, Confidence-Building, People-watching, Shino Purification Rituals, Amulet-Crafting, Listening to Kami, House Construction, Moral Instruction, Storm Shelters, Dirty fighting, Poisons, Appraising Goods, Historical Rebellions

# Sample Conditions

## Rise:

Defiant Henōmin  
Shirane Librarian  
Omamori Protection Amulet,  
Dorei Bells of Good Fortune  
My Father's Daisho  
The Green Sea  
The Oni's Tooth  
The Memory of my daughter, Miki  
Wired Reflexes  
Alloyed bones  
Henōmin gills  
Acid-tolerant skin  
IR Cybereye  
Cortical Implant  
The Village of Kanata

## Fall:

Corrosive Storms  
Clan Sesei Traitor  
Clan Embei Experiment  
Clan Shirane Scapegoat  
Clan Nakumura Spy  
Saika Collaborator  
Shed human blood  
Malfunctioning cyberarm  
My missing hand  
The vengeful Kami Horon  
The seductive Kami Kiko  
Agoraphobia  
Technophobia  
Artificial life  
Slave collar implant  
The Village of Kanata  
The Whispering Shores  
The First Shrine  
The Mountain Witch

# Chapter 8 - Old, Cold, City

This is the second of three settings in the book. Old, Cold, City is a modern police procedural setting in an old city with even older secrets. (NOT IN BETA)

# Chapter 9- The Republic of the Elements

This is third setting in the book. Stoicheion is a fantasy republic under siege by elemental passions and monsters. (NOT IN BETA)



# Your First RPG

## Time

You need to schedule some time when your group would be available. Discuss what day of the week you will be playing on and how frequently you plan on meeting. Try to determine when you plan on starting and finishing each session as well; I prefer 3-4 hour long sessions.

Every group has its own expectations on attendance at games. Some people can reliably block off game night, while others may have personal responsibilities or erratic work schedules. The system can accommodate players who only participate infrequently but it's up to you to figure out what's comfortable for your group.

## Play Space

You need fixed and dependable space to play the game. It could be the home of one of the players, the GM's apartment, a gaming club, or even an online environment. Discuss what the best play space might be for the group. If you are playing in someone else's space, be polite and help clean up after the game.

## Food and Drink

I find it helpful to talk about food and drink before I start playing a game. Try to discuss any meal arrangements, snack foods, allergies, or beverage preferences. Games are much more enjoyable on a full stomach!