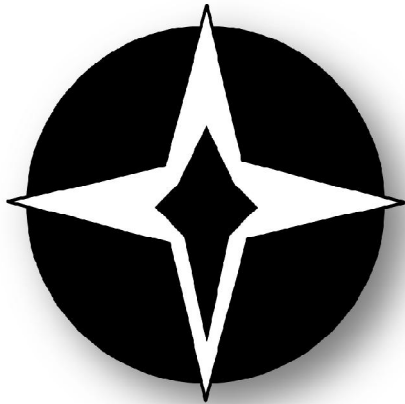# Spark RPG
Open Beta V3.5

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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 Gameplay chapter explains how you actually get to playing. This is followed by Guidance helps you have more fun while you play the game.

Lastly, there is a series of three premade settings (NeoNippon, Old Cold City & The Republic of the Elements) that 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.

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 Influence you gain and the more conflicts you can win 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) 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 player will need their own character sheet.
- A few spare pieces of paper and some index cards
- A pen, and a few pencils with erasers.
- About 50 tokens of some kind to represent Influence.
- A standard set of polyhedral gaming dice for each person. 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 a 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. She will:

- v

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]

Example

In the example text, Angela is the Game Moderator.

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. He will:

- Create a character and their three Beliefs that drive the game.
- Portray that character, deciding what they say and do.
- Portray minor and occasionally major NPC's
- 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]

Example

In the example text, Brian, Chris and Dave are the players.

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.

Before you start playing, you need to establish your common expectations. There's two common ways to play the game: Soft and Hard.

Soft games

When a group chooses to play in a Soft game, it's roughly equivalent to a PG-13 US movie rating. This teen-friendly mode of play works well in a gaming convention environment or in local game stores. Mild profanity, abstract violence, or sensual behaviors are fine, but no sex, drugs or rock-n-roll.

Hard games

When a group chooses to play in a Hard game, it's roughly equivalent to a US movie Rated R. These are adult games dealing with mature subject matter, usually better for private situations with friends. Harsh profanity, consensual sex between adults (off camera), explicit violence, and illicit drugs are fine in hard games.

Example

Angela: How would people feel about playing a Hard game? We are in private and I'm comfortable with all of you.

Brian: Adult subject matter is fine by me.

Chris and Dave agree.

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Opting In

Spark is designed to help you explore Beliefs and perspectives. Sometimes the best way to do that is by dealing with potentially sensitive or triggering subjects in fiction. This may involve sensitive topics like:

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

Before you start play, anyone at the table can request permission to deal with a specific sensitive topic during the course of the game. As a group, you can discuss your relative comfort levels and determine if you could play in a game addressing this kind of content. If everyone in the group permits it, you can proceed.

Example

Dave: I would personally be interested in dealing with the sensitive topic of slavery. Would each of you be comfortable with this?

Chris: So long as it's a story about slaves fighting for their freedom, that's fine by me.

Angela and Brian agree, and they move forward.

Please Try Another Way

Sometimes during play, people make decisions that make others uncomfortable or detract from the fun of the game.

In response to any declaration, anyone can say, "Please try another way." When this happens, the other person must make a different declaration so you can move forward with the game. You don't need to justify or explain why you might use that key phrase, just acknowledge it, and move forward. If you want to chat about it, that works well after the game.

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The Fundamentals

The Influence Economy

Spark is a game about challenging and examining your Beliefs, either by supporting them or acting against them. When you do challenge your Beliefs, you get influence. You can then spend this influence to win conflicts, or to inspire others to change their Beliefs.

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 2-3 hours 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 in about 20-30 minutes. You can find published settings on our website, or at the end of this book.

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 Influence. 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. These factions are also represented by major NPC's known as Faces. 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 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 about 2-3 hours of the first session. You will go around the table often, and it's very useful to follow that process.

1. You start by listing your favourite Media
2. Next you explain the Inspirations from your media
3. Use those inspirations to Describe the Genre for your game.
4. You Establish Facts about the setting
5. Create a Title and Tag Line to help focus your vision.
6. Create a list of potential Setting Beliefs and choose three.
7. Select your GM attributes that represent your new setting.
8. Create Factions based on those Beliefs
9. Create Ties of relationships between the Factions.
10. Create Faces that represent your faction
11. Create Agendas which those Factions will start to work towards in the first session of the game.

Step 1: List your Favourite Media

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 if other people don't know the media, so try to make them unique.

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: 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.

Step 2: Gather Inspirations

Go around the table again, giving everyone a chance to explain what they like the most about their choice. Just write these down concisely 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.
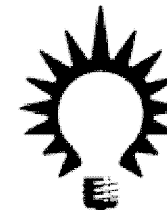
This step is all about gathering ideas and brainstorming. You assemble a list of ingredients that you would like to include in the setting. The more ingredients, the more material you have available for you to define the world. You aren't obliged to use all of your inspirations later on if you can't come up with a way to include one or more of them.

Angela: 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 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. Add in some **aliens** and I think we are done!

Step 3: 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 "Graphic Violence" isn't appropriate for your game, don'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 4: Establish Facts

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.

The best facts are concise and specific. Don't feel obliged to come up with names for organizations, since you do that in step 7. Try to make up evocative names for places, events or things.

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.

As a gentle reminder, try to be considerate of the quieter members of the gaming group. This process is very engaging and exciting, which can lead to some people dominating the conversations.

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 but still associated 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 5: Title and Tagline

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? Cool!
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. **NeoNippon: The War of Writhing Blossoms**

Step 6: 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.

First, you establish a list of potential Beliefs that fit the setting. The GM will then get a chance to select any three of those and set them as the Beliefs of the Setting.

Go around the table twice, with each person proposing two different 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 violate and of your boundaries. 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.
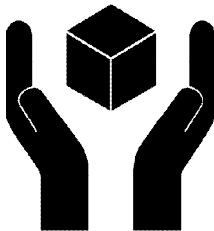
The GM picks her three preferred Beliefs, writing them on the GM Sheet and the Belief Sheet. While she can choose the Beliefs that she proposed, she should show discretion and only choose the three that best express the Setting.

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. That doesn't violate any boundaries, 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.
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 7: Select the GM's Attributes

The GM has four attributes that she will use to portray the setting. The Body attribute will represent physical aspects of the setting, the Heart representing the social, the Mind representing the intellectual and the Spark representing the dramatic. In specific, the GM's Spark helps her frame scenes and gives her a static bonus in all conflicts.

Every setting has one Attribute that is particularly strong and one that is particularly weak. As a group, you get to make suggestions to the GM, but she will have the final say on the setting attributes.

How she assigns her attributes helps her adjust the style of game play; a strong Heart might mean that the setting is full of courtly drama, while a weak Body might mean that the society does not demand or reward physical capabilities.

When she has made her decision, she marks the setting's strong attribute at Great (D10) on the GM sheet. She then marks the weak attribute at Poor (D6) and the two remaining attributes at Good (D8). More information on these attribute levels on Pg. XX.

Example

Angela: Ok, at this point I get to assign my attributes to each of those attributes. I get to decide which kinds of conflicts I want to emphasize.

Chris: Could I ask for lots of social conflicts?

Dave: I would rather have physical conflicts deemphasized.

Angela: Thanks for your advice. I will say that the Heart is strpmg and Body is weak. That means that Heart is set at Great (D10), Body is set at Poor (D6) and the other two are set at Good (D8). Expect that most of the major NPC's will tend to be more powerful socially and physically weak.

Step 8: 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 so that everyone has a chance to contribute to creating these groups. The first time around the table, each person gets to create a name for one of the Factions and write these down on the Faction Sheet. The second time around the table, each person gets to create a mandate for one of the previously named factions.

The Faction's name will give you a sense of the faction's Identity and resources. 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.

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 and name one of Factions as **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 **Become respected and invaluable to the colonies** sounds appropriate.

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

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

Step 9: Create Faces

This step is where you collaboratively create some major NPCs to represent each of the Factions in the game. These characters, known as Faces, are the way that the GM portrays the setting and the factions during play.

Each Face will have a name, two strengths, and one weakness. When the GM has a conflict, she can increase the GM attribute she rolls if a strength applies, or decrease it if a weakness applies.

Each person can claim one of the NPC faces. They get to create a name, two strengths and one weakness for their NPC. You can write these onto Index cards and pass them along to GM for her use. When this is done, she will copy these onto her GM sheet.

Angela: Ok, we have four Factions and we need to make NPC's that I will use to interact with your characters. I want to make the face of The Hostile Natives! **The Envoy** has a strength in "Slaughter", and in "Acid Storms". It has a weakness in "Human Communication."

Brian: Ok, The Henomin Mercantile Guild is mine! The Face is **Speaker Sakhalin**. She has strengths in "Subtle persuasion" and in "Networks of contacts," with a weakness in "Physically frail."

Chris: Shiraine Colony for me. **Chief Negotiator Chuganji Ryoko** Suki. She has strengths in "Political favours" and in "Nakumura X 31-Cybereye implant," with a weakness in "Drug abuse."

Dave: The Village of Kanata remains for me. Ok. I am picturing the scarred **Headswoman Suki**. She has strengths in "Sympathetic" and in "Spotless Reputation", with a weakness in "Haunted by her traumatic past"

Step 10: 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. Don't worry about creating the perfect Ties, you will each have the opportunity to modify them or create new ones during play.

- 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. We have a list of suggested ties we can use. We can only have a single tie between two specific factions, so Kanata and Shiaraine only have one tie between them. 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.

Step 11: 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.

The Faction's Name will affect what kinds of agendas they may have. "The US Army" can have an Agenda to take control of a city, while "The Hillboro Community Association" would be lucky to purchase a community garden.

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 one Influence 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 work together to create the short term goals, called agendas, for each of the factions. 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: That's it for Setting Creation. I would start with four Influence and we move on to 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.
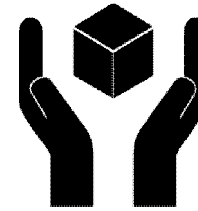
Example

Angela: If we used a published setting, like maybe the one for "The Republic of the Elements," we would start be 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 potentials 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 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. This gives us the following setting Beliefs.

1) **The Elements will steal our land**
2) **The Elements will sow chaos and destruction**
3) **The Elements will infiltrate society**

Step 3: Select the GM's Attributes

The GM has four attributes that she will use to portray the setting. The Body attribute will represent physical aspects of the setting, the Heart representing the social, the Mind representing the intellectual and the Spark representing the dramatic. In specific, the GM's Spark helps her frame scenes and gives her a static bonus in all conflicts.

Every setting has one Attribute that is particularly strong and one that is particularly weak. As a group, you get to make suggestions to the GM, but she will have the final say on the setting attributes.

How she assigns her attributes helps her adjust the style of game play; a strong Heart might mean that the setting is full of courtly drama, while a weak Body might mean that the society does not demand or reward physical capabilities.

When she has made her decision, she marks the setting's strong attribute at Great (D10) on the GM sheet. She then marks the weak attribute at Poor (D6) and the two remaining attributes at Good (D8). More information on these attribute levels on Pg. XX.

Example

Angela: Ok, at this point I would assign my attributes to each of those attributes. I get to decide which kinds of conflicts I want to emphasize. I feel like trying something different. This is a setting of corruption and violence, so Body is Great (D10), Heart is Poor (D6), with both Mind and Spark at Good (D8). The NPC's will be weak socially, so you can easily convince others to help to help you fight off the fearsome Mountain Herders.

Step 4: 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 from a list of 9 options.

- The Resilient Order   (Belief 1: Steal our Land)
- The Mountain-herders   (Belief 1: Steal our Land)
- The Imperial Court   (Belief 1: Steal our Land)
- The Radiant Order   (Belief 2: Chaos and Destruction)
- The Charred Ones   (Belief 2: Chaos and Destruction)
- The Refugees   (Belief 2: Chaos and Destruction)
- The Whispering Order   (Belief 3: Infiltrate Society)
- The Tempting Winds   (Belief 3: Infiltrate Society)
- The Assembly of Citizens (Belief 3: Infiltrate Society)

Brian: And the copy of the setting explains their mandates, history, npc's, and all that stuff? Handy. 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 a bit of political intrigue.

Step 5: Record the Faces

Each of the Factions in the game are represented by major NPCs called Faces. to represent each of the Factions in the game. These characters, known as Faces, are the way that the GM portrays the setting and the factions during play. You can copy these from the published setting onto the GM sheet.

Example

Angela: Ok, we have four Factions, each of which has their own face.

The Resilient Order is led by **Eternal Agis**, the ancient leader who has strengths of "Immortality" and "Dwarven Treasures", with weaknesses in "Human Empathy".

The Mountain-herders are represented by the young dwarf **Stonetender Thomek**; his strengths are of "Speaking Stones" and "Moving Mountains," with a weaknesses under "Open Skies".

The Refugees are represented by **Demetrius Chalcus**, who has strengths of "Angry Mobs" and "Subtle Spies", with a weakness of "Homeless"

Lycurgus Elea, speaker of the Assembly of Citizens, has strengths in "Body Language" and "Grain Prices," with a weakness in "Illicit Drugs."

Step 6: 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 (at war), asymmetrical (Betraying/Betrayed) or independent (Funding / Betraying) . 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.

- 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. The Refugees are **being recruited**.

Chris: The Assembly of Citizens **has betrayed** the Refugees. They withheld military support when it mattered for political reasons, and it destroyed that province. The refugees are **plotting revenge** on the Assembly, for that reason.

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

Step 7: 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.
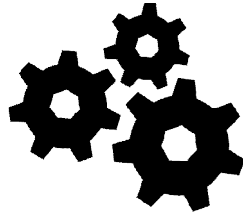
Take a new Index card, write#1 in the top right corner and write the names of each of the Factions. Beside each name, write down the relevant agenda.

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

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. I would start with 4 Influence.

Extra Content in Published Settings

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

Sample Talents; Settings will often have lists of Broad, Common, and Deep Talents which are appropriate in the setting. These may help define some aspects of the races, cultures, professions, or supernatural in the setting.

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.

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 and adding in a bonus based on their Talents.

Grab a Character Sheet to keep track of your PC's Beliefs, Attributes 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. 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).

5. Name your characters

6. Answer 2-5 Baggage questions about the character's personal history, earning Influence for each.

7. 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, at the beginning of the second game session. This is just the inciting incident that brings the PC's together.

Character Concepts

Every character starts with a concept, a quick sentence that describes them.

- Are they defined by their profession?
- Are they defined by their relationships?
- Are they defined by a particular personality trait?
- Are they 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 those 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.

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. 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.

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 Influence. You will be able to spend this to succeed in other conflicts or to inspire others to change their Beliefs. 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.*

This is not a good Belief, because It is 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. No interesting story will emerge by challenging a Belief that isn't important to individual characters or society.

- *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. 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.

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 the Belief sheet.

Attributes

Attribute Levels

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 during character creation. Athletic characters should have high Body Attributes, social characters should have high Heart, and scholars should have high Mind Attributes.

A twenty-sided die (D20) is Epic, representing superhuman capabilities. Characters can't start at this level.

A twelve-sided die (D12) is Excellent, representing maximum human capability.

A ten-sided die (D10) is Great, well above average capability.

An eight-sided die (D8) is Good, slightly above average capability.

A six-sided die (D6) is Poor, slightly below average capability.

A four-sided die (D4) is Terrible, representing minimal capability. Every character starts with their attributes rated at terrible.

The Body Attribute - Physical

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.

The Heart Attribute - Social

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.

The Mind Attribute - Intellectual

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.

The Spark Attribute - Dramatic

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.

A high Spark will help you act 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.

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]

Attributes at Character Creation

At character creation, you get 7 attribute levels that you can divide between your Body, Heart, Mind and Spark. When you add an attribute level, you fill in the outline of the appropriate die with pen, leaving a white circle in the middle.

Remember that you can't have an Epic Attribute in character creation, and you can't save any Attribute levels for later.
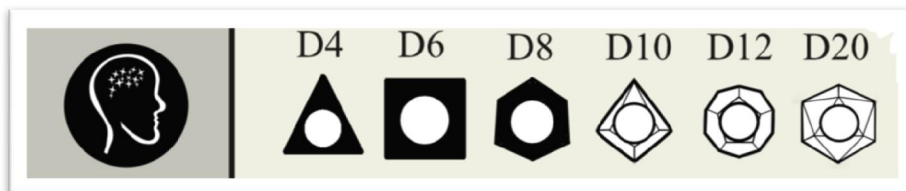

Figure 1: An example of a D8 Mind Attribute, which would cost you two Attribute levels.

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 then a player.

Brian: Sounds interesting. I get seven levels? I assign three levels in Shimura's 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 Gisaku a total of **D4 Body, D8 Heart, D6 Mind, and D12 Spark.**

Dave: 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.

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.

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).

Talents at Character Creation

Each player gets to choose seven individual Talents that represent their characters, and the GM will judge if they are broad, common, or deep in scope.

To start the process, determine what specific kind of action your character is best at. Choose one broad talent, one common talent and one deep talent that would help you in doing that thing

Once you have that, you have another 4 Talents which represent other kinds of actions that your character is capable of performing. These could represent technical skills, academic knowledge or even physical training. Because you can mix and match your Talents in conflicts, try to make them as diverse as possible. We recommend you choose 1 more Broad Talent, 2 more Common Talents and 1 more Deep Talent.

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, Conjuration

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

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 you 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 choosing one of the questions from the Character Baggage or the Faction Baggage lists. You will need to answer at least one question from each of the two lists and explain it to the group. You may want to write down your answers on the back of your character sheet. Each player will start the game with one Influence per personal history question they answer, to a maximum of 5 Influence.

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.

Character Baggage Questions

- 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 Questions

- 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?

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 Influence, to a maximum of 5 Influence 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 comerades 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.

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: Everyone has three pieces of Baggage. We could go longer, but I want to hear what you come up with for 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 finishes 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.

The person who made the original declaration repeats what why wish to declare happens in the fiction. The person who challenged proposes an alternative declaration. Anyone else in the conflict can either support an existing declaration, or create one of their own. Everyone determines what dice they are rolling, adds their bonus and compares the totals. Everyone rolls their dice, and the person who rolls the highest wins the conflict. The winner pays an Influence and gets their chosen declaration.

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 Taking Out Characters and for Influence.

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 make declarations of what they want to happen and roll dice to see who gets their way. 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 Influence 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 Factions and the End of Session phases in a one-shot game.
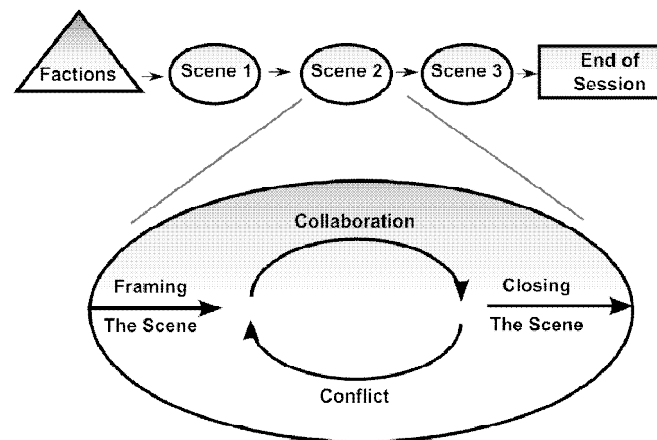
Phase 1 – Advancing the Factions

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 will succeed. The GM quickly narrates a short vignette that shows exactly how those Factions get what they want.

Example

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 - Uncover a conspiracy of dishonourable henōmin on the colonies behalf.

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 Mercantile Guild becomes patrons of their client state of Kanata. I believe this also gets marked on the card.

Angela: While hunting the local fauna, a pair of Kanata villagers encounter a band of revolutionary Henomin who are building a settlement in one of the Shinto shrines. After a frantic escape, they report to headswoman Suki.
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.

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 Roll

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.

Create the Platform

The person framing the Platform will describe 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.

Create the Tilt

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.

Create the Tilt

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.

Move on to Collaboration

Example: Simplified for Beta

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?"

Phase 3 - Collaboration

Spark is about collaboration. Each person adds their own contributions to the story, building off what has come before. It's a process of asking questions and building off the answers. The players will control their individual PC's, as they seek to uphold their Beliefs and challenge the others. Meanwhile, the GM will control the NPC's

Collaboration is where you can roleplay freely. You speak in the voice of your character, sharing your thoughts. You can ask questions of other characters to learn more about their perspectives. The GM can also narrate or explain something that is true about the setting or the current situation. Periodically, you will make bold declarations of actions that could affect other characters.

During the collaboration phase, you can also make declarations; important actions that may affect other characters. When you make a declaration, you are announcing that you want something to occur in the fiction. Declarations may include:

- A physical action that may affect other characters
- Compelling other characters to do something
- Forcing someone an answer to a question in the fiction.
- Taking out a character, removing them from the scene.
- Establishing a new fact about the setting

If someone else doesn't want that declaration to happen, they can say, *"We are in conflict."* and move to the Conflict Phase.

Once a declaration is made without conflict, it becomes an objective truth about the setting that can't be contradicted. Conversely, if a declaration is blocked in a conflict, then you can't repeat the same specific declaration again this scene.

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 are making declarations about your PC, try to speak in the first person.

- I leap over the chiasm.

- "You know, you should let us through the gates just this once."

- I remember that the Vishani are afraid of the colour yellow as their death goddess favours that colour.

- 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.

If you are making declarations that are not about your PC, such as NPC actions or explanations of fact, speak in the third person.

- Brenda shoots you with her bow.

- The guard explains that the gates are closed due to pestilence, and will not be opened for any reason.

- Bob asks Borthwick if you need to exterminate the goblins

- The storm overwhelms you, and you are forced to stop travel for the evening.

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

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 declarations, followed gathering dice, and then you roll the dice to see who got what they wanted.

The person who made the original declaration repeats what why wish to declare happens in the fiction. The person who challenged proposes an alternative declaration. Anyone else in the conflict can either support an existing declaration, or create one of their own. Everyone determines what dice they are rolling, adds their bonus and compares the totals. Everyone rolls their dice, and the person who rolls the highest wins the conflict. The winner pays an Influence and gets their chosen declaration.

Picking Declarations

The first step of every conflict is to figure out what people would like to happen, if they win the conflict. You will always have at least two different Declarations to choose between; the one originally proposed and the alternative declaration made by the person who started the conflict. Each other person can choose to support an existing Declaration, or make one of their own.

If they make their own Declaration, they will roll dice to see if they achieve their goal. If you support another person's Declaration, you won't need to roll at all.

Gather Dice

When you provide your own Declaration in a conflict, you gather your Attributes die

- For physical conflicts, you would use your Body Attribute.
- For social or emotional conflicts, use your Heart Attribute
- For mental or abstract conflicts, use your Mind Attribute.
- For every person supporting your declaration, increase the side of your die by one step.
- If you are portraying an NPC and one of their Strengths applies, increase the size of die by one step.
- If you are portraying an NPC and one of their Weaknesses applies, decrease the size of die by one step.

Determine Bonus

- If a PC has a Broad Talent that applies, add +1.
- If a PC has a Common Talent that applies, add +2.
- If a PC has a Deep Talent that applies, add +3.
- The GM gets a static bonus on all of her rolls equal to the number of levels of Spark she has. If she has a Spark Attribute of D8, all of her rolls have a +3 bonus.

Rolling Dice

Everyone in the conflict with their own Declaration rolls their dice. They add their Bonus to the number they got on their die to get their score. Anyone can boost their result be choosing to suffer harm. For each level of harm they take, they gain a +2 to their score.

The outcome

The person with the highest score gets their Declaration while the others don't. The winner of the conflict must immediately pay 1 Influence or suffer 1 harm.

Example: Simplified for Beta

Pick Declarations

Brian: I will find the tracks of the Saika so I can dispatch the dishonourable dogs.

Chris: Shimura will determine what actually caused the destruction in this village.

Dave: I support Gisaku.

Angela: Well, I will also participate. My declaration is that the storm strikes you in the village.

Gather Dice

Shimura is in a conflict involving his perception and understanding, so he selects his Mind of D6.

Gisaku is using his Heart Attribute of D8. Since Ando is supporting, he increases that by one step to a D10.

Angela is using her Body Attributes, since the storm is a physical phenomena and threat. Her Body is at a D6, so she selects that die.

Determine 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.

Angela uses her Spark Attribute of D8, which gives her a +3 bonus since that is the third level of her attribute.

Roll the Dice

Shimura: He rolls his D6 and adds his bonus for a total of 5.

Gisaku: He rolls his D10 and adds his bonus for a total of 7

Angela: She rolls her D6 and adds her bonus for a total of 8

Gisaku chooses to suffer 1 harm to his Heart, which increases his score by 2 and brings it up to 9. This means that Gisaku wins the conflict and Shimura is convinced of the error of his ways. Chris spends 1 Influence from his supply, but he gets his way.

Phase 5 - Closing the Scene

When someone says *"And we move on"* during collaboration, you stop making declarations and start considering who has challenged their 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.

Examine each of the entries on the Belief Sheet that have Influence markers on them. If someone thinks they have directly confirmed or refuted one of their Beliefs, state it aloud to the rest of the group. If everyone at the table is confident that Belief was indeed challenged, that person takes the Influence token off the sheet and puts it in their personal pool of Influence.

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

Once you finish that step, each person can remove one harm from one of their attributes. This represents the natural recovery process and is the only way to remove harm during play.

Example

Angela: Now that we are done with the scene, we need to figure out which of the Beliefs have been challenged during play, Remember that this can mean either supporting your Belief with your actions, or working against it. We will go through each of the Beliefs with Influence markers on the sheet here, and announce if we think that we have challenged any given Belief.

For instance, I have supported my Belief that **The secrets of this world will destroy us**. If you all feel confident that I did act in a way that supported that, I get to take this Influence token off the sheet and put it in my pool.

Chris: Sounds fine by me.

Brian: Ok. Shimura refuted **Emotional displays are a sign of weakness.**

Dave: I don't think that really applies. You did that indirectly, but your character was still rather stoic.

Brian: Curses. Well, I think that I confirmed that **We are nothing without our honour**, since I was trying to hunt down the honourless mercenaries.

Angela: Certainly. You can take the Influence off that entry.

Chris: I only have one Belief with an Influence token on it, that **My people deserve respect.** I think I confirmed that by trying to find out what really happened to the village.

Dave: I believe you are right. If I understand the rules correctly, you would take the Influence off that Belief, then everyone gets one Influence from the supply.

Brian: Sweet! I get paid out because he challenged his Belief?

Angela: You helped set it up by framing the scene and you supported him examining his beliefs, so sure!

Chris: I'm fine with that! Now we get to put Influence from the supply on each of his entries on the Belief sheet, so he can get paid out for each of them again.

Angela: Once we are done with Dave's Beliefs, each of us can remove one harm from one of our attributes.

Phase 6 - End of Session

When you finish the last scene of the session, you go through this last step. Each person at the table gets a chance to spend influence to Inspire another person at the table and offer them a new Belief.

Inspiring Others

During this phase, each person gets a chance to Inspire someone else at the table to change one of their Beliefs. Identify one of their existing Beliefs and propose what you would like to replace it with. These replacement Beliefs need to follow the same principles; they still need to be declarative, subjective, and controversial.

If the person you inspired agrees to replace one of their Beliefs, you spend 12 Influence. They remove their old Belief and write in a new one on their sheet and on the Belief sheet.

Growth

You can only grow by challenging your Beliefs. When a player inspires someone or changes their Belief, they gain a new Talent.

If the GM inspires a player, she can add another Strength to one of her major NPCs.

If a player inspires her to change a setting Belief, then she changes one of the Faction's mandate. The new mandate needs to confirm or refute the new setting Beliefs. She will then upgrade one of the existing Major NPC's into a second Face for that Faction.

When everyone has changed their Beliefs once, everyone in the game gains one Attribute level permanently. This can happen multiple times over the course of a campaign, when everyone changes one of their Beliefs.

Example

Angela: That was a good session guys. I know that you all have a lot of Influence stored up over the last few sessions, so you can get a chance to spend that by Inspiring people to change their Beliefs.

Chris: I have a good one. I inspire Shimura to drop his Belief that **We are nothing without our honour**. I think that he falls prey to his inner romantic and should adopt the Belief that **Love conquers all**.

Brian: Hmm, it's a good Belief and all, but I want Shimura to continue grappling with his issues of honour. I decline the inspiration.

Chris: Curses. Oh well, at least it didn't cost me anything.

Angela: What about I inspire Shimura to replace that Belief with Honour is the weapon of the tyrant.

Brian: Sure! That means I get a Talent and you get a Strength on one of your major NPC's, right?

Angela: Yes, which means I spend 12 Influence. I will give Yoshi a Strength of propaganda.

Brian: And I get a common Talent of "Servitude". I think I will Inspire Ando to drop his fascination on emotions and take up the Belief that Conflict is the best teacher.

Dave: I accept. You spend the 12 Influence and we can decide on our Talents between games. I believe that the Setting should lose the Belief that **the secrets of this world will destroy us,** replacing it with **The Natives shall serve or perish**.

Angela: Ok, I can accept that. You can spend your Influence and get another Talent. I will change the mandate of the Hostile Natives to **Defend our people from the alien colonizers**. Venerable Yumi will become a Face of the natives and speak on their behalf in Shiraine Colony. Now that everyone has changed one of their Beliefs, we all get an Attribute level. If each of us changes another Belief, we will get another one. Good game and I will see you next week!

Consequences

Suffering Harm

You can always choose to suffer for your Beliefs. During conflicts, you can choose to suffer harm and get a +2 to your score after you roll. If you win a conflict, you can also choose to suffer harm rather than pay Influence.

When you suffer harm, you make a mark in the attribute you used in the conflict. When you suffer harm to an attribute, locate the largest die of that attribute with an empty circle. Place a harm mark within that circle, indicating that die is unavailable. Each level of harm effectively drops your attribute by one-step.

If you ever fill the D4 level of any attribute with Harm, you must immediately choose to be Taken Out of the scene, or to permanently Retire from Play.

You heal one level of harm at the end of each scene. If you are Taken Out by harm, you need start by removing the harm from your D4 attribute.

Example

Angela: So the Saika bandit got a score of 7 and you only got a 6. He is going to find and kidnap your little sister Suki.

Chris: I would rather suffer harm! I suffer harm to my Mind, because I absolutely exhausted myself trying to find a way to sneak past the bandits. That boosts my score to a 8, which means I win.

Angela: Ok, I won't take harm. You win this conflict, but you need to mark an X in the highest level of your Mind attribute. Since you have a D8 in Mind, that means you are effectively reduced to a Mind of D6 until that heals.
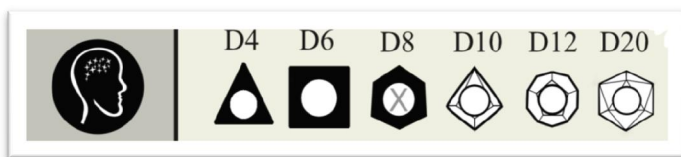

Figure 2 Gisaku takes one harm to his D8 Mind Attribute

Being Taken Out

In some scenes, characters might Taken Out of play. Typically this is because of a successful declaration that describes them being dispatched, or just by taking too much harm.

If this happens to your PC, they are temporarily incapacitated and return to play in the next scene. You can't make declarations or participate in conflicts for the remainder of the scene.

Retiring from Play

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 and Talents. You can keep all of your Influence.

Example

Angela: So the Alien tried to force Ando to flee and you took harm to your Heart attribute instead. That filled your D4, so you can choose to be removed from play or to permanently retire your character from the game.

Dave: I think that I have completed the arc for Ando the Android. I will retire him from play and go out in a blaze of glory. I already have a concept for my next character.

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. You should only start conflicts that help further the story or develop the characters.

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

We learn by playing, and we play to learn. Asking questions in the game helps us establish common expectations and lets us explore more about the story. 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?"

Consider asking leading questions that have heavy implications. These questions 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 Influence.

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 Influence tokens on the Belief sheet. When someone only has one Influence 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 Influence.

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 Influence 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 has to:

- Portray most Non-Protagonist characters (NPC's)
- Create the agendas of the major Factions.
- Express the character of society, based on setting Beliefs.
- Shape and control the setting directly during play.
- Interpret and explain the rules of the game
- Make judgments and arbitrate when appropriate.
- Manage the logistics of when and you play the game.

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 helps frame the scenes
- She sets the agendas
- She establishes truths about the Setting
- She portrays and wields NPC's
- She controls the spotlight

The GM helps frame the scenes

Spark has competitive scene framing and the GM often has a chance to establish part of each scene.

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 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 establishes truths about the Setting

The GM has the final say on what is true in the setting. She has the power to establish things in the world that can't be blocked by players. These facts let her portray the setting convincingly and give more context for the characters.

Remember that the GM can also declare things about the environment using this tool. She can declare that a wall collapses, that a storm approaches or that the river is fast-running. The setting is her character, to use as she sees fit.

The GM wields the NPC's

The GM interacts with the players via Non-Protagonist Characters (NPCs). She makes declarations about the NPC's actions and dialogue. There are three different types of NPC's available to her.

Minor NPC's

If this game was a movie, Minor NPC's are the extras. Both the GM and Players have the ability to use minor NPC's in conflicts. Each of these characters has a unique description, but doesn't have a name yet. These are your shop keeps, your foot soldiers, and your innocent bystanders.

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

Major NPC's

When a player likes a minor, they can name the character and upgrade them to the status of Major NPC. These are the supporting, reoccurring characters with their own personalities and goals.

The GM writes down the names of each Major NPC on her sheet, along with a character description and one Strength that the character has. Normally the GM is the only one who can portray Major NPC's, though she can delegate it to players if she would like.

Consider Robert, the wiry and jittery Chicago cop who specializes in **Gang Violence**.

Faces

The third type of NPC is a Face; Major NPC's who represent a given Faction. These characters are the way that the GM portrays the setting and the factions during play. She has exclusive control over these characters

Each Face will have a name, two strengths, and one weakness. When the GM has a conflict, she can increase the attribute that she rolls if a strength applies, or decrease it if a weakness applies.

The GM starts the game with a set of Faces, either created by the group (pg. XX) or found in a published setting (pg. XX). During play, she may promotes a major NPC into a into a Face if she is inspired to change one of the Setting Beliefs. (pg. XX)

Consider the prim and proper Johnathan Black with fine mutton chops. As the Face of the Chicago PD faction, Johnathan is strong at dealing with **The Chicago Beat** or **Junkies** and has a weakness for **Resisting Bribery**.

General NPC Advice

Before you invent a new Figure, consider reusing an existing Major NPC or a Face. 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 defined by the clash of two different character Beliefs.

If players aren't doing anything for more than ten minutes, try to draw them in again by offering to let them play any spare minor or major NPC's. Just because their character isn't there, doesn't mean the player should be bored!

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 rich and interconnected world.

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 Talents to see what kinds of tasks they are capable of performing.

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 Otawa
- 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

Setting Factions

Moto Bio-Engineering Incorporated (EMBEI)

Setting Belief: Technology will tame this world.

Mandate: To Terraform Shi-Tateyama via genetic engineering.

Profile: 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.

Face: Embei Yukiko Mikisama

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

Strengths: Indigenous Botany, Bioengineering Technology

Weaknesses: Henōmin Empathy

Initial 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.

Shakura Environmental Suits Incorporated (SESI)

Setting Belief: Technology will tame this world.

Mandate: To enable human access to the inhospitable lowlands.

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

Face: Shakura Commander Kurosan

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

Strengths: Military Strategy, Prototype Environmental Suit

Weaknesses: Civilian Etiquette

Initial Agendas:
- Initiate peaceful trade deals with the Henōmin Mercantile Guild.
- Seize the prosperous Baku hills from Clan Embei.
- Protect the village of Kanata from attack, for a price.

The Dreamers

Setting Belief: Technology will tame this world.

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

Profile: 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.

Face: Rinzei531 Bodhisattva

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

Strengths: Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence

Weaknesses: Tangible Solutions

Initial 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.

The Village of Otawa

Setting Belief: We are nothing without our traditions.

Mandate: To survive at any cost.

Profile: The henōmin village of Otawa 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.

Face: Headsman Gisaku

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

Strengths: Village Hardship, Defiance

Weaknesses: Low Social Status

Initial 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.

The Kensei

Setting Belief: We are nothing without our traditions.

Mandate: To wield the honourable sword in service.

Profile: 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.

Face: Kensei Haruka

A fearless and brash ronin, dangerously eager to prove himself.

Strengths: Honourable Duels, Reconnaissance

Weaknesses: Politically naive

Initial Agendas:

- Hunt down the warlord Koryna and bring her to justice.
- Exact ruinous taxes from the village of Otawa.
- Investigate the destroyed village of Yakirana

The Shrine Tenders

Setting Belief: We are nothing without our traditions.

Mandate: To maintain the roads and shrines for travellers.

Profile: 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.

Face: Ando1573

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

Strengths: Human Emotions, Messenger

Weaknesses: The Laws of Robotics

Initial 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.

The Henomin Mercantile Guild

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

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

Profile: The first henomin 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.

Face: Speaker Sakhalin

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

Strengths: Subtle persuasion, Network of contacts

Weaknesses: Physically frail

Initial Agendas:

- Create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations.
- Establish a Black Market.
- Convince the colonists that torturing henomin is dishonourable.

The Village of Kanata

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

Mandate: Become respected and invaluable to the colonies.

Profile: Kanata is a coastal village, with the women tending the rice and the men fishing the wild seas. The Council of Kanata 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.

Face: Headwoman Suki

Suki is a henōmin woman with pride shining in her eyes and scars marring her once-beautiful face.

Strengths: Sympathetic, Spotless Reputation

Weaknesses: Haunted by her traumatic past

Initial 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.

Shirane Colony (Clan Shirane)

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

Mandate: To maintain a peaceful state of human civilization.

Profile: 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.

Face: Chuganji Ryoko, Chief Negotiator

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

Strengths: Political Favours, Nakumura X 31-Cybereye implant

Weaknesses: Drug abuse

Initial 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.

Nakumura Sensors (Clan Nakumura)

Setting Belief: The secrets of this world will destroy us.

Mandate: To establish open communications and information gathering.

Profile: 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.

Face: Nakumura Atsushi, Sensor Technician

A short and heavyset human male, with a dozen different kinds of electronic devices strapped to him.

Strengths: Sensor Systems, Jury-rigging

Weaknesses: The lowland acid storms

Initial Agendas:
- Fake messages from Earth are forged by Nakumura when the real ones cease.
- Establish a relay in the unexplored territories to found new henomin villages.
- Determine the precise source of the anomalous electromagnetic interference.

The Saika Mercenaries

Setting Belief: The secrets of this world will destroy us.

Mandate: Achieve complete military dominance of the planet.

Profile: 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.

Face: Kikuchiyo the Cruel

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.

Strengths: Banditry, Atrocities

Weaknesses: Long-term thinking

Initial 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.

The Hostile Natives

Setting Belief: The secrets of this world will destroy us.

Mandate: Destroy the Invading Two-legs.

Profile: These sentient beings are native to Shi Tateyama and are fighting back against the two-pillar "alien invaders". Fortunately, for them, they are all but unknown to the human population.

Face: The Envoy

A swarm of tentacles, bound together like tumbleweed.

Strengths: Slaughter, Acid Storms

Weaknesses: Human Communication

Initial 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.

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

Chapter 7 - 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 8- The Republic of the Elements

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