Spark Roleplaying System Reference Guide

The Spark Roleplaying Game was the first complete game designed by Jason Pitre, and it was published by Genesis of Legend Publishing in the summer of 2013. As publishers, we wanted to make the game available for other designers and therefore declared the game text would be released into the Public Domain after ten years elapsed. To that end, we have produced the following system reference document to help you adapt the Spark RPG system for your own purposes.

Everything in this guide is released into the public domain (CC-0), and we hope this toolkit will help you in your own design journey. If you want to refer to the game system, consider using the term "Spark Inside" in the credits section, and you can use the following little logo as well if you like.

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Spark Designer's Guide

When adapting an existing game system for your own creation, it is vital to understand the assumptions made by the original designer. Certain games are ideally suited for gritty stories of lasting consequences and hard choices. Others allow for bombastic, dynamic stories of Big Damn Heroes saving the day. It's important to understand the nature of the system to determine if it aligns with the story that you want your game to tell. Here's what Spark is about.

What Came Before

Every game is built upon the shoulders of metaphorical (or literal) giants. The Spark RPG has an extensive ludography, but here are three particularly key design inspirations.

Fate Core

Fate Core System, by Leonard Balsera, Brian Engard, Ryan Macklin and Mike Olson. Evil Hat Productions, 2013)

This game by Evil Hat Productions LLC. took the world by storm after a blockbuster Kickstarter campaign in January 2013. Fred Hicks, Rob Donoghue, and a cast of others had built this game system from the foundation of the FUDGE system and earlier editions of FATE powered such games as Spirit of the Century, Diaspora, and the Dresden Files Roleplaying Game. Here's what Fate Core brought to the Spark System.

Aspects: Fate presented the idea that you could describe certain *aspects* of characters, locations, or fictional circumstances using natural language. For instance, a character could be *Stronger than a Bull*, or a building could be *Shrouded in Shadows*. Aspects were either descriptive of the fictional situation (fiction to game) or could be modified mechanically to prescribe changes to the fiction (game to fiction). The GM could create an aspect of "*Hunted by Wolves"* to make it clear what's going on to the players, and those players could try to remove that aspect if they would rather not be eaten in the woods. The Spark RPG adapted the idea of aspects into Beliefs.

World-building: Many of the established games Powered by Fate presented dynamic worldbuilding tools which directly inspired the approach taken in Spark. The Fate Fractal essentially posits the idea that the character-level mechanics can be used to model things at multiple scales. This means that vehicles, families, factions, or even entire worlds can be modeled using the same aspects, approaches, stunts, stress, and/or conditions. Each game offers their own worldbuilding procedures, such as creating locations and the associated face characters who represent them.

Burning Wheel / Empires

Burning Empires, by Luke Crane. (Burning Wheel, 2006); Burning Wheel Gold, by Luke Crane. (Burning Wheel, 2011)

These games were originally designed by Luke Crane in the early 2000s with a robust life-path based character creation system that modeled the classical Lord of the Rings style fantasy genre particularly well. In 2006, the company released Burning Empires, a game licensed from the Iron Empires comics from Christopher Moeller. Here's what these two games brought to the Spark System.

Beliefs: Beliefs are at the core of each player character in these systems. Each character will have an actionable, ongoing statement about the character's fundamental motivations. A Belief might be, *"I will hunt down the Avatar to restore my honour so my father will love me."* Not only did these Beliefs define key aspects of the character's nature and motivation, but they also allowed the players to signal what kind of stories they wanted to tell. Character Beliefs would naturally evolve and change as play progressed, which became the core ethos of Spark.

Artha Cycle: Burning Wheel & Burning Empires relied on a complex web of incentives, which is referred to generally as the Artha Cycle, where various currencies manage character advancement. You can only advance by creating problems to further your beliefs, to face obstacles, to make bad decisions based on your instincts, and by taking on challenges which are beyond your skill. The use of metacurrency to shape the story and inspire dramatic conflicts is baked deep into the bones of Spark.

Microscope

Microscope, by Ben Robbins (Lame Mage Productions, 2011)

The third major inspiration for Spark was the game Microscope by Lame Mage Productions which was published in 2011. This small, diceless and GM-less game presented a broad toolset for telling epic stories using no more than index cards. There are both obvious and subtle contributions that Microscope made to Spark.

Scene Framing: Microscope has you creating a timeline with large periods of time, medium-scale important events, and individual scenes. The game establishes each scene based on some kind of question you are trying to answer, and this central question stands at the heart of Spark's scene procedures.

Restrained Collaboration: One of the more unsung virtues of Microscope is that the procedures intentionally work to build space for everyone's equitable participation. One player at a time is given the hot seat and the narrative authority rests with them. The rest of the group are meant to listen actively, build upon the preceding answers, and reincorporate narrative elements. Many different procedures in Spark were designed to replicate this experience.

The Philosophical Heart

Spark was originally designed from an empirical perspective, closely resembling the theories of Scottish Philosopher David Hume [1]. The game posits that each person has to come up with their own, individualized understanding of the world based on their experiences. They will discover certain patterns and associations which lead them to come to certain internal theories about how the world works. All together, this forms a paradigm or worldview that will inform how they will behave.

The essence of compelling stories is that they show how characters change and grow based on their experiences. Bilbo Baggins goes from being a simple hobbit to an adventurer, a ring-bearing, spider-slaying adventurer. Walter White begins as a depressed, sympathetic high school chemistry teacher and turns into a ruthless drug kingpin. A stormtrooper takes a stand against a fascist military empire and earns their place as a hero of the Resistance. We are engaged by these stories because we see the evolution of these characters' paradigms as they interact with their respective settings and the other characters within.

Each paradigm is broken down into a small number of Beliefs, which represent the most important ideas or values they hold. Characters are convinced that their Beliefs represent the true nature of things and will seek to defend their perspective against outside influences. This defensiveness arises from the fact that challenging one's closely held Beliefs forces you to re-examine your past decisions through a new lens. While the characters naturally wish to avoid such an emotionally fraught

experience, that is exactly what we want to work towards as players. Players sitting around the table create character Beliefs to highlight the kinds of topics they want to explore during play.

As players sitting around the table, we should create character Beliefs that point towards concepts or ideals that we want to learn about. If I create a character Belief that "The strong must protect the weak", my character will be faced with a series of fictional situations that explore that topic from different directions. I may be faced with situations where my character is forced to expend considerable resources on others at the expense of their own family. Perhaps they are presented with an opportunity to defend someone they find disagreeable from more powerful forces. They may talk around the tavern about how the local nobility refuse to assist the peasantry upon whom they demand.

Over time, my character might become firmly convinced at the rightness of their Belief, and the topic may cease to be interesting to explore. They may instead completely reject that Belief based on their experiences. When either of these come to pass, the player will remove that from the list of open Beliefs on their sheet and replace it with a new one. Changing Beliefs in this fashion allows us to explore new topics during future sessions. In certain implementations of Spark this can furthermore provide some mechanical advantages to the characters

> [1] Morris, William Edward and Charlotte R. Brown, "David Hume", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL =https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/hume/.]

Good Beliefs

As a shorthand, we may say that a good Belief is one which is subjective, controversial, and declarative. What this really means is that they are sentimental and emotional statements about the human condition that drive us to action.

Strong Beliefs are products of sentiment rather than of reason. This premise was proposed by David Hume's An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding. In fact, contemporary psychology has confirmed that emotions are more fundamental to human decision-making than logic, meaning that we often make decisions first on an emotional basis and rationalise said decisions after the fact . The best Beliefs are therefore those which are based on powerful emotions of love, anger, joy, fear, envy, or pride. They will certainly include a rationalization of the underlying sentiment of course.

Strong Beliefs describe the human condition. That said, this definition uses a remarkably generous interpretation of "human" given the variety of settings available. They are also most effective if they take a strong moral stance and make a statement on society. They will speak to issues of justice, law, family, wealth, virtue, and vice. The underlying purpose of Beliefs is to help guide characters in making decisions in line with their paradigm.

Strong Beliefs drive characters to action. Introspective reflections on the nature of things are grand and all, but we learn the most when we see characters take a stand based on their convictions. A strong Belief will drive the conversation and force characters into confrontation over their fundamental values. Players should easily be able to look at their character sheet and determine what kinds of actions their character would want to perform. Beliefs phrased as controversial absolutes are often excellent at filling this role.

Core Assumptions

In order to use the Spark system effectively, it's vital to understand the core reasoning and assumptions behind the design. Only then will you be able to properly determine which elements of the game system will align with your goals and which diverge.

Confronting Beliefs

Spark is designed primarily around the combination of the Beliefs of the characters and the setting. The basic heuristic is that you generate dramatic conflicts by identifying 2-3 Beliefs and then create situations where those Beliefs clash. If Emily believes that *Family is a Chain* and Jamal thinks that *Children are our Legacy*, it's easy enough to come up with situations where those two ideas clash. It is that clash that can lead to discourse, debate, and even fierce dramatic confrontations.

The clashing of Beliefs leads to a deeper understanding of the issues. While Emily might seek to avoid contact with her relatives, she may discover a deeper connection with her father when they are obliged to work together on a project. Jamal might be in a situation that reinforces their importance of guiding the next generation. This understanding can lead to characters changing and growing.

Limited Campaign Play

Spark is optimized for short to medium-length campaign play akin to a mini-series of modern television. These campaigns tend to run for about 20-40 hours of gameplay in total and no more than a dozen individual sessions. This limited campaign format allows for more natural character arcs and an opportunity for Beliefs to evolve. It allows for a mixture of high-intensity dramatic scenes and lower-key reflective moments.

One-shot game sessions of Spark are often cinematic and high-energy affairs where players drive their characters like stolen cars. Players won't have enough playtime to fully explore their character's Beliefs. Beliefs can still be used mechanically and will often help a player understand their character's motivations, but it's not as rich of an experience.

Long campaigns using Spark are challenging for rather different reasons. The core gameplay loop of confronting and changing Beliefs is compelling, but it can become repetitive over time unless there are other procedures in play. The core resolution system is likewise relatively simple compared to those in many longer-term campaign games. If you want to adapt this engine for longer campaign play, you should consider designing additional procedures and sub-systems that work on longer timescales.

Creativity is Communal

One of the greatest aspects of tabletop roleplaying games is they foster a creative environment. Humans have a marvelous capacity for storytelling, for improvising, and for recontextualizing. This capacity increases exponentially as we get more active participants involved in the task. Spark harnesses this incredible power to tell compelling stories based on three core principles.

Storytelling is a group activity. It's challenging to be creative in a void, but it is easy to do so in dialogue with friends. When everyone at the table is encouraged to create new things, they will inevitably inspire their fellows in the process. The best players will make sure to set up opportunities for their

friends by creating dramatically interesting situations or posing insightful questions. When players listen to each other and reincorporate their ideas, they will trigger a virtuous cycle of improvisational storytelling.

Contributing to fiction builds investment. Creating new people, places, events, or ideas is an inherently engaging process that players will be motivated to do. Furthermore, the players will feel a sense of ownership for their creations and will enthusiastically reincorporate those novel elements in the fiction.

Player investment drives powerful stories. Players create Beliefs as a way to flag those ideas and social issues they want to explore during play. By bringing together these character Beliefs at the gaming table, we collectively determine what themes we would like to explore. This means that everything of importance that occurs during the game is going to be interesting to at least one of the humans sitting around the table.

Compromise Beats Conflict

Conflict always has a price in Spark. The defeated party doesn't get their way. The victor has to pay their own price of victory as the effort depletes them. The heavy cost associated with entering into conflicts is a very intentional design choice based on the idea that compromise and good-faith negotiation are better than conflict.

The game tries to impress on the players that they can often get most of what they want by simply listening to others with open minds. A clever player can find a negotiated solution that allows them to avoid conflicts, and everyone will be better off. This is often difficult when the parties disagree on ethical or moral grounds, which is why it's all the more important that we learn how to find common ground if we can.

In game design jargon, the concept of the Fruitful Void by Ron Edwards & Vincent Baker refers to the aspect gameplay that cannot be resolved through application of the mechanics, and must instead be resolved by the players. The Fruitful Void for Spark is determining if you can find a solution through negotiation rather than relying on conflict resolution. Conflict is the easy way out.

Narrative Physics

There is a classical game design theory coined by Ron Edwards that games each have a different mixture of gamist, narrativist and simulationist elements (GNS). In simplified terms, this means that games are designed to empower players to solve problems, tell compelling stories, and immerse them in the fictional setting. The balance between each of these elements will vary based on the creative agenda of the designers and the needs of a given product. Games focused on puzzle-solving tend to reward players who master the game system and find optimal or novel solutions. Those focused on telling a good story concentrate more on dramatic elements such as character growth, hard choices, and emotional realism. Those concentrating on immersion will instead provide rules that produce realistic outcomes from player actions.

Spark is structurally designed with emphasis on narrativist elements. A major portion of the game rules concentrate on character Beliefs, motivations, and growth over the span of a campaign. Spark makes it easy to use dramatic techniques such as foreshadowing, flashbacks, and dramatic irony.

The game rules can be adapted to better serve gamist or simulationist creative agendas, but such adaptations will require deliberate efforts to do so by the designer.

System Matters

If you have decided that Spark provides the correct foundation for your project, the following section will help you adapt the base system to your needs and explain how the various mechanics function under the proverbial hood. I will explain both how it works in the core Spark system and any variants used in subsequent games such as Sig: Manual of the Primes or After the War.

Worldbuilding Procedures

The worldbuilding procedure in Spark is one of the most interesting and appreciated portion of the game. Worldbuilding serves five purposes. ● It provides a fictional context for play, setting the proverbial stage. ● It allows the players to bring the media, such as books, movies, comics, or music that interests them. ● It empowers the players to get invested and interested in the new fiction being established. ● It creates a central thematic core that everyone agrees on. ● It creates non-player characters and/or organizations for the game master.

The core worldbuilding procedure works by having everyone name one of their favourite pieces of media and pulls out the specific elements of that media that interest them, establishing those as inspirations. You then combine the various inspirations to create new facts about the world that inevitably begin to coalesce into a coherent setting. From that point you work together to create coherent setting Beliefs that represent the themes of play.

Media

Media 1　Media 2　Media 2

Inspirations

Facts

Beliefs

Belief 1　Belief 2　Belief 3
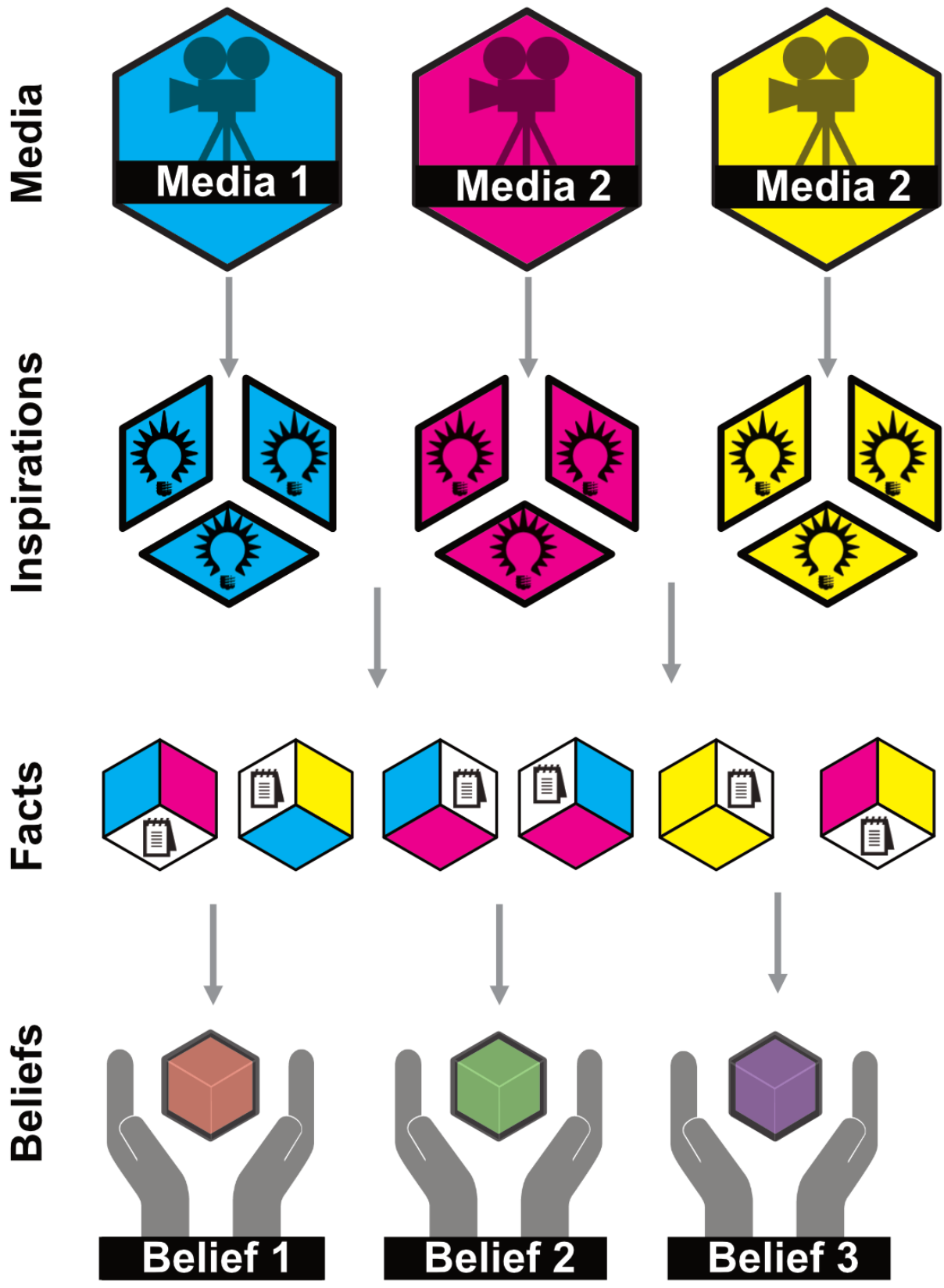
Once you have established the foundational Beliefs, you can then rely on those to build the rest of the world based on your individual needs. In the base version of Spark this looks like creating Factions and the Faces which represent them. You can use those setting Beliefs to create planets, planes, kingdoms, cults, cities, gods, or even distinct magic systems.

Scene Structures

Spark is fundamentally designed using scenes as the unit of play. Scene framing is a potent tool for creating dramatically interesting situations for the players to engage in and relies on collaborative creativity. ● One person creates the **Platform**, determining where and when the scene will occur. ● A second person creates the **Tilt**, the inciting incident in the scene that makes it important. ● A third person creates the **Question**, which is the thing we want to find out in the scene.

In many other games, the Game Master is responsible for creating all three elements, which can involve significant planning or improvisational chops. By dividing it up in three pieces, each person has a smaller creative task and can focus on aligning their contribution to those made by the others. The person creating the Platform choses a context where a Tilt could easily occur, which in turn enables the third person to ask an interesting question. All three people have their own say, but no one voice is overpowering.

The secret sauce of the scene framing process is that it allows the players to create dramatic events that directly target the various Beliefs in play. If someone has the Belief that Family is a Chain, you can expect someone to establish scenes involving familial obligation. Not only does this mean that the scenes are interesting to some of the players at the table, but it also encourages folks to confront their Beliefs for some of that lovely currency.

Normally you will conclude the scene when the question in answered, but that's more of a best practice than anything else. You can easily set a different end condition for your own game without breaking anything. Similarly, you could divide scene framing responsibilities into different parts based on your own needs. The only vital thing is dividing up the creative labour between multiple people.

Attributes and Traits

The core system for Spark uses a combination of four attributes (Body, Heart, Mind, and Spark) which are ranked in dice from D4 to D12, with D20's used in extraordinary situations. Harm or stress reduces the size of the die in a predictable way.

Talents represent certain knowledge, skills, abilities, or even equipment that can give folks a bonus. They vary from broadly applicable and weak, to deeply specific and potent. You are asked to mix and match these talents to gain a total bonus up to +6.

Attributes and Traits are not load-bearing mechanics and could be trivially replaced with any other system you would like. Sig: Manual of the Primes simplifies the attributes down to Spark and Smoke. After the War uses a pool of D6's gained when character origin, war stories, or professions apply. The only important thing is to establish some way for characters to differentiate themselves and participate in conflicts when they arise.

Conflicts

When people at the table disagree, you fall back upon the conflict resolution system to determine who gets their way. In the base version of Spark this is done as a simple competitive roll between the participants with the higher result winning. While there has to be a conflict resolution system of some kind, this can be easily adapted without negative impacts on the rest of the system.

The only vital aspect of a conflict is that there must always be a price for winning a conflict. This serves to deplete resources that can only be replenished by confronting Beliefs. This also acts as a disincentive for entering into needless conflicts, and instead nudges the players towards negotiating mutually acceptable outcomes. So long as there is a price for victory your conflict system should align with the rest of the mechanics.

Confronting Beliefs and Currency

The core purpose of Spark is to encourage characters to confront their Beliefs and help their players explore interesting ideas in the process. Confronting Beliefs can occur where a character acts in a way that aligns with their convictions or when they act contrary to their nature. So long as the Belief is driving them to make decisions, the mechanic is working as intended. With luck, the process of confronting Beliefs will drive character evolution.

Spark rewards players for confronting their Beliefs with some kind of mechanical currency. In the core Spark system this is referred to as inspiration although it has also been called influence, insight, or even luck. This currency can generally be used in five ways:

● To give a player a narrative advantage of some sort; ● To help improve someone's chance of winning a conflict; ● To trigger character growth by offering permanent mechanical improvements; ● To let someone recover the resources they depleted in conflicts; or ● To let a player change one of their character's Beliefs.

The last two elements on that list are mandatory elements of the system, while the first three are entirely optional.

Characters and Relationships

Relationships are the narrative glue that hold the game together. Relationships between player characters give the group an excuse to interact with each other. Positive relationships are typically used to encourage cooperation between characters while negative ones foster dramatic bickering. While it isn't a load-bearing system, it does help enrich the gameplay.

Relationships to NPCs serve a different purpose by connecting the players to the setting. The basic assumption is that any NPC represents some aspect of the broader setting, such as a faction, a location, or a group of like-minded folks. This turns the abstract setting Beliefs into something concrete and actionable. A character who acts in accordance with a setting Belief will reinforce the themes that the group chose in their collaborative worldbuilding.

Lessons Learned

I wrote the Spark RPG from 2009 to 2013 as my first game design. In the intervening time, I am proud to say that I have grown as a writer, designer, human, and member of our society. Only minimal editorial changes have been made to the text provided here, and there are still some minor problematic elements remaining. I recommend some are be taken when incorporating some of the text into your own games.

Firstly, this game was designed on the assumption that I would be producing and publishing a series of settings without fully recognizing that the collaborative setting creation system was one of the game's greatest strengths. In hindsight, the content from pages 18-27 of the core text was quite unnecessary.

In the original text, I spent valuable wordcount trying to differentiate between statements and declarations with the latter consisting of those things that could be challenged via a conflict. This was quite unnecessary in practice, and I have learned to trust players to know when a conflict would be appropriate.

I acknowledge that the **Neonihon** setting presented here had a number of problematic elements including some measure of regrettable exotification of Japanese culture and the inclusion of a genetically-engineered servant class. While the intent was to foster discussions about the power of propaganda and hegemony, it made a number of mistakes and could have benefited from a cultural consultant or three.

The Quiet Revolution setting is less flawed as it pointed to some very real socio-political challenges in contemporary Quebec society; however, the police procedural genre has aged poorly in the 2020's. I largely consider it a missed opportunity, as a game exploring the actual *Revolution Tranquille* of the 1960's could present some fascinating stories.

The Elemental Kingdoms was the one setting that I felt was handled relatively well; although, it did have some bioessentialist aspects of how the monstrous foes were represented.

THE SPARK ROLEPLAYING GAME

A Storytelling Game about building worlds & challenging your beliefs within them.

Designed and written by Jason Pitre

Published by Genesis of Legend Publishing

The Spark Roleplaying Game First Edition, July 2013

Credit

Developmental Editor: David A. Hill Jr.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter 1 – Introduction You have already started reading the Introduction, where I explain in depth what the game is about and what you'll need to play.

Chapter 2 – Setting After that, I show you how you can use a published Setting or collaboratively create your own.

Chapter 3 – Characters Each of the players creates their own Character in that setting who interact with each other.

Chapter 4 – Gameplay

The Gameplay chapter explains the rules and procedures of play, including how you resolve conflicts.

Chapter 5 – Guidance Guidance follows, helping you fill your games with fun. This is full of helpful advice and essential techniques for running the game.

Chapter 6 – NeoNihon This chapter contains the first premade setting. It's Shogunate Science Fiction with great mountaintop human colonies, genetically-engineered peasants and shinto androids.

Chapter 7 – Quiet Revolution This chapter contains the second premade Setting. A gritty, modern Montréal Police Drama set in that city of culture, crime, and contradictions. As members of the Montréal police force, you are asked to with resolve problems within the community.

Chapter 8 – The Elemental Kingdom This chapter contains the third premade Setting. It's a Fantasy under Siege by hordes of elemental monsters. Only the four Elemental Orders, wielding their corrupting magics, can preserve the Kingdom.

We finish off with Contributions where you can find some extra content for your game provided by the generous Kickstarter backers. There's also a ludography, copies of all the sheets you need to play, and an index to help you search the book.

Is this your first time reading a roleplaying game? You can find a great introduction to this type of game online over at: http://www.gregstolze.com/HowtoPlay.zip Check it out and come back here, then we can continue!

What you Need

People

3-6 to play the game

You'll need between three and six people interested in the game, yourself included. One person will fill the role of the Game Moderator (GM), while the others will be Players. The game can easily accommodate missing a player or two for any given episode.

Time

2-5 hours per episode

In Spark, you play through a series of scenes. Each scene occurs in a time and place known as the Platform, where a Tilt forces the players to get involved. In the process of dealing with the Tilt, all of you will work to answer the scene's underlying Question. More about scenes in Chapter 4. Every time your group gets together to play the game it's called an episode. Each episode will typically take 2-5 hours to play, consisting of a series of scenes. A season refers to a short series of 2-5 episodes that focus on a major plot element or narrative arc. A series refers to the total number of seasons that you wish to tell together. Usually, a series will focus on the same characters and the same Setting.

Stuff

Dice, tokens, pencils and sheets

You'll need a few things as well to play.

- The Game Moderator will need a GM Sheet, a Faction Sheet, a Belief Sheet, and a Setting Worksheet.

- Each player will need their own Character Sheet and Overview Sheet.

- A few spare pieces of paper and some index cards

- A pen, and a few pencils with erasers.

- About 50 simple tokens to represent Influence. Coins, flat marbles or poker chips can work well for this.

- A standard set of polyhedral gaming dice (D4, D6, D8, D10, D12, D20) for each person. You can usually find these at local hobby stores or comic book shops.

Our website (www.genesisoflegend.com) has copies of the sheets in PDF format. Alternatively, you can photocopy the ones found in the back of this book at 140% of the size.

The Game Moderator

One member of your group needs to take the role of Game Moderator (GM) who will lead the game and control the Setting. Typically, the person who knows the game best takes this role. The text refers to the GM with the feminine pronouns (she/her) to make the examples more clear, but a GM may be of any gender. As GM, you guide the players into telling dynamic, character-focused stories. The Setting is your avatar, a character with a personality and a history for you to express during play. Think of a game of Spark as a movie; you are the director, producer, and most of the minor characters. Don't worry; the game comes with all the tools you need to moderate the game. You will:

- Portray most Non-Protagonist characters (NPCs).

- 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.

As a GM, these are your guiding principles:

- Keep the story moving.

- Say yes or roll the dice.

- Ask the players questions.

- Challenge their Beliefs.

The Guidance chapter explains these principles in further detail.

> Throughout the text, we will be providing a series of examples showing how the game works. In this, Angela is the Game Moderator.

The Players

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

Each player creates a character with their own Beliefs, histories, personalities and capabilities. They interact with other characters and with the Setting through the eyes of their characters. The players keep the game moving forward and bring drama to the table. If Spark is a movie, each player is both actor and screenwriter. He will:

- Create a character and their three driving Beliefs.

- Portray that character, deciding what they say and do.

- Portray certain other characters, when appropriate.

- Collaborate to build scenes and affect the world.

- Enter into Conflicts to support or refute Beliefs.

As a player, these are your guiding principles:

- Share your energy and creativity.

- Take risks and escalate Conflicts.

- Be good to each other.

- Challenge their Beliefs.

The Guidance chapter explains these principles in further detail.

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

Boundaries

Spark is a game about challenging values and Beliefs; this means its subject matter will take players to vulnerable places, and address very sensitive topics. Some content in a game can trigger discomfort or past trauma, so be considerate. Make yourself aware of everyone's boundaries. Respect them. Before you play, you need to establish common expectations. There are two types of games: Soft Games and Hard Games.

Soft Games

A "Soft Game" is a teen-friendly mode of play that works well in game conventions or in local game stores. Mild profanity, abstract violence, or sensual behaviors are fine, but no sex, drugs or rock-n-roll. A Soft Game is equivalent to a US movie rated "PG-13."

Hard Games

Hard Games deal with mature subject matter and adult topics, better for private situations with close friends. Harsh profanity, consensual sex between adults (off camera), explicit violence, and illicit drugs are fine in Hard Games. A Hard Game is equivalent to a US movie rated "R."

> **Angela:** How would people feel about playing a Hard Game? We're in private and I'm comfortable dealing with this kinds of material with all of you. **Brian:** Adult subject matter is fine by me. Chris and Dave agree.

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 the key phase; "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.

Opting In

Spark helps 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:

- Explicit Consensual Sex

- Slavery

- Sexual Assault (Rape)

- Child Abuse

- Ethnic Cleansing

- Forced Religious Conversion

- Graphic Violence

- Torture

- Animal abuse

> **Dave:** I would personally be interested in dealing with the 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.

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, to avoid the cost of victory, or to inspire others to change their Beliefs.

The Core Mechanic

Conflicts in 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. Discuss the problem and explain your intentions. If everyone agrees that something should happen, it does. If people disagree, everyone rolls the relevant dice and the person with the highest number gets their way.

The Basic Structure

The game consists of a series of scenes. You start by Framing your scene, where you determine which Question you are trying to answer in play.

Collaborate, making bold declarations until a Conflict ensues. During Conflicts, you roll dice to find out who gets their way, then return to Collaboration. When you have answered the Question of the scene, Close the Scene.

Keep framing scenes, collaborating and entering into Conflicts until you are out of time for the episode. Most important of all, have fun!

Starting Up

Running a One-Shot or a Convention Game

I tend to run a lot of one-shot sessions of Spark and I have found two different good formats.

Setting creation sessions usually work for about 2-4 other people in a two-hour time slot. You only need a copy of the setting worksheet, an index card, and a couple of pens for this game.

Single episodes let you dive into normal gameplay. You can either download a quickstart bundle of prepared sheets from our website or make your own characters for one of the published settings. These usually work best in a four-hour timeslot.

Starting a Season or a Series

Ready to start running a longer-term game?

Decide if you want to use a Published Setting, or if you want to make your own Custom Setting. Custom Settings take a bit more work to create, but they can be more rewarding during play.

Each player makes their own Protagonist Character, with some contributions from the other people at the table. Each player narrates a prelude scene for their PC After that, start framing your first scene and continue on from there!

Chapter 2 - Settings

Setting Overview

The first half of the chapter shows you how to use one of our existing Settings in about 20-30 minutes. You can find published Settings at the end of this book and links to other ones on our website.

NeoNihon: Shogunate Science Fiction

The Japanese colonization ship landed on the "idyllic" extra-solar planet of Shi Tateyama in 2236. They found a planet of extreme mountains, nearly boiling sea-level temperatures and harsh, corrosive tempests. That was why they genetically engineered and indoctrinated peasant farmers, capable of surviving in the lowlands and of feeding the mountaintop human colonies.

Quiet Revolution: Montréal Police Drama

A gritty, modern police drama set in a city of culture, crime, and contradictions. As members of the Montréal police force, you are asked to resolve problems within the community. You need to keep culture clashes from turning violent. You are forced to enforce the politicians' laws. You have to keep the city from tearing itself apart.

The Elemental Kingdom: Fantasy under Siege

Once, the kingdom was a place of peace and respect, the capital a gleaming wonder of white marble and golden statues. It was the greatest realm the world had ever known, until the invasion. Now the Kingdom is under siege. Elemental monsters threaten to overwhelm us from every border. Only the four Elemental Orders, wielding corrupting magics, stand between us and total destruction.

Custom Settings

The second half of this chapter walks you through the process of creating your own Setting. Building a Setting is an easy, collaborative, and creative process that usually takes 2-3 hours during your first episode.

Regardless of which process you choose, each Setting will have similar 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's rewarded with Influence. She records the Setting Beliefs on the GM Sheet and the Belief Sheet.

Factions represent the major organizations and groups that act within the Setting. Each Faction upholds a particular mandate, based from the Setting's Beliefs. At the beginning of each episode, Factions have a chance to accomplish certain short-term agendas. During play, you create or modify the ties between Factions. These Factions are also represented by Major NPCs 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 that players can use in character creation. If a setting has supernatural powers or advanced technologies, this is where you'll find them.

Using Published Settings

Published Settings are great if you want to start playing quickly. Over the span of about 20 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. You Create Ties of relationship between the different Factions and then Select Sample Agendas that each of the Factions work towards in the first episode of the game.

When you use a published Setting, the GM can do all of the preparation ahead of time, or you make these decisions as a group during the first session.

Step 1: Give the Introduction

Each published Setting starts with an overview, a short description of what the Setting's all about. You can share the text ahead of time with the group, or you can read it aloud at the table. This will give everyone the context they need to make decisions during character creation.

> **Angela**: If we used a published Setting, like maybe the one for "The Elemental Kingdom," we would start by reading this introductory text: *"The Kingdom is under siege. Elemental monsters threaten to overwhelm us from every border. Only the four Elemental Orders, wielding their corrupt magics stand between us and total destruction. Once, the kingdom was a place of peace and respect. The capital was a gleaming wonder of white marble and golden statues. The provinces were vibrant cultural centers, with each city specializing in unique arts and sciences. It was the greatest realm the world had ever known, until the invasion..."*

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, to focus gameplay on what you find most interesting. This means that each game can involve different themes and Factions. The GM makes this selection and copies those Beliefs down on both her GM Sheet and the Belief Sheet.

> **Angela:** So the next step is to select three of the four potential Setting Beliefs. The potential Setting Beliefs are:
>
>   1. Empathy is weakness
>
>   2. Outsiders are stealing our land
>
>   3. Anger is the ultimate power
>
>   4. Everyone has a price
>
>   > Since I'm not in the mood for corruption and emotional cruelty, I will reject the first Belief. That means we have the three Beliefs leftover for our game.

Step 3: Rank the GM's Attributes

The GM has four attributes with which to portray the Setting. The Body attribute represents physical aspects of the Setting, the Heart represents the social, the Mind represents the intellectual and the Spark represents 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, make suggestions to the GM, but she has final say on her four 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, including how to mark them, is available in Chapter 3.

> **Angela:** Ok, at this point I assign my Attributes. I decide which kinds of Conflicts I want to emphasize. I feel like trying something different. This is a violent Setting so I want a Great Body (D10) that can physically threaten the PCs. I will set the Heart at Poor (D6), with both Mind and Spark at Good (D8). The NPCs will be weak socially, so you can easily convince others to help you fight off the fearsome Mountain Herders.

Step 4: Select your Factions

The Setting has a dozen different Factions; major organizations and groups that interact with a setting Belief. There are three different Factions associated with each Beliefs, which means that you can select from nine different Factions. Select one of those Factions for every person in the game, with at least one Faction that is associated with each of your Beliefs. If the GM hasn't selected these ahead of time, go around the table and let each person make one choice.

Step 5: Record the Faces

Each Faction is represented by a potent NPCs called a Face. The GM uses these Faces to interact with the PC's and express the will of their Factions. Each Face has already been created, so the GM just needs to copy the relevant information onto her GM sheet. Each Face has a Name, two strengths, and one weakness that need to be transcribed in this way.

Step 6: Create Ties

Factions interact with each other as they pursue their Agendas. A tie can bind each specific pair of Factions, if the two organizations have some kind of relationship or interaction.

- In a two-player game, there can be up to 3 ties

- In a three-player game, there can be up to 6 ties

- In a four-player game, there can be up to 9 ties

- In a five-player game, there can be up to 15 ties

These ties will guide the GM's choice of Agendas and how the Faces behave. Most of the time, you will only have a handful of ties written in at the start of the game, but you can create more in play during the Advancing Phase of each session. Here are a few sample ties, but you are encouraged to make up

your own based what you have created. If the GM hasn't created these ahead of time, go around the table and let each person create one Tie. Keep track of the ties on the Faction sheet, like in the example to the right.

Mutual ties are the same for both sides.

- Faction A and Faction B are close allies.

- Faction A and Faction B are bitter enemies.

- Faction A and Faction B are at outright war.

- Faction A and Faction B are ambitious rivals.

- Faction A and Faction B are strange bedfellows.

Asymmetrical ties happen when one side acts on another.

- Faction A is secretly funding Faction B, who is funded

- Faction A is subtly infiltrating Faction B, who is oblivious

- Faction A has cruelly betrayed Faction B, who is vengeful

- Faction A is violently subjugating Faction B, who is subjugated

- Faction A is subtly manipulating Faction B, who is manipulated

> **Angela:** This is one of the few steps that is identical to the one during custom Setting creation. I'll say that the Resilient Order are at war with the Mountain-herders. **Brian:** I'll make one up this time. The Resilient Order and the Mountain-Herders have another tie of … **Angela:** Sorry Brian, you can only have one tie between any specific pair of Factions. You can still create the Resilient Order's tie with another Faction though. **Brian:** Oh, sorry about that. How about the Resilient Order is recruiting the Refugees? They never have enough men and women to hold the line. The Desperate Refugees are being recruited. **Chris:** The Merchant League has betrayed the Refugees. They withheld essential supplies when it mattered, and it destroyed that province. The Desperate Refugees plot revenge against the League, for that reason. **Dave:** Very interesting. Let's say that The Mountain-Herders secretly fund the Merchant League, while the League supports the Mountain-Herders.

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 agendas, so you select one of those for each of the Factions for your first game. If the GM hasn't selected these ahead of time, go around the table and let each person make one choice.

Take a new Index card, write #1 in the top right corner and write the names of each Faction. 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.

> **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 but I prefer to do it as a group. I will start by picking the Agenda for the Mountain-Herders; Raise a new mountain, blocking a major trade route. **Brian:** Ok. One of the Desperate Refugee agendas seems fun; Create a shanty town outside the city of Jerica. **Chris:** The Resilient Order will Delve into the great mountains and steal the dwarven forge. **Dave:** The Merchant League will Deliver a shipment of enchanted weapons to a provincial village for almost nothing. **Angela:** And that's it. I start with 4 Influence, one for each of us.

Extra Setting Contents

Published Settings, like the ones at the end of the book, have some extra content to help you play.

Geography: Settings contain a broad overview of the major geographic areas within the Setting. They often provide a map as well, showing the locations of significant settlements and major landmarks.

Society: While you only need the Setting Beliefs to play, this short section gives you some context about the culture and history of the Setting.

Sample Talents: Settings will often have lists of Broad, Common, and Deep Talents which are appropriate in the Setting. These may help define some of the racial, cultural, professional, or supernatural aspects in the Setting. For instance, if "Tea Ceremony" is a Broad Talent, it indicates that understanding of the ritualized serving of tea is very significant in the setting.

People: Lists of names that are appropriate to the Setting, suitable for PC's and NPC's alike. If you need to come up with a name on the fly, this is a great resource. Places: Lists of place names that are appropriate to the Setting. This is handy for creating agendas or creating Platforms.

Mysteries: Every setting has its own mysteries, questions you can answer through play. If the GM is ever stuck for ideas, these Mysteries are a great place to start.

Art: The Setting may have illustrations or art, so you can get a better sense of what the Setting looks like. Settings may also have poems or short fiction in them as well to help convey their mood.

Creating Custom Settings

Building a Setting is an easy, collaborative, and creative process that usually takes about 2-3 hours of the first episode. You're often asked to go around the table in this process so everyone gets an equal contribution.

1. You start by listing your favourite **Media**.

2. Explain the **Inspirations** from your media.

3. Use those inspirations to **Describe the Genre**. Establish Facts about the Setting.

4. Create a **Title** to focus your vision.

5. Create a list of potential **Setting Beliefs** and choose three.

6. Rank your **GM Attributes**.

7. Create Factions based on those **Beliefs**.

8. Create Ties of relationships between the **Factions**.

9. Create **Faces** that represent your Factions.

10. Create **Agendas** which those Factions will work towards.

> **Angela:** You know, I liked using The Elemental Kingdom, but I would love to try making our own Setting. Are you guys ok with that? **Dave:** Certainly. How much time would this take? **Angela:** It says about two to three hours, more than the published settings, but it's a bit more rewarding. There are eleven steps to this, compared to the seven that we had with the published settings. **Brian:** Let's go for it!

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. It's ok if other people don't know the media, so try to make them unique. Write these down on the Setting worksheet or on a blank piece of paper under the heading of Media.

> **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 the mood for some Shadowrun action, so I will throw that in the mix. **Dave**: Ok, how about a little indie video game called 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'll get to that in this next step.

Step 2: Gather Inspirations

Go around the table again. Now, everyone explains what they like the most about their choice. 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 to define the world. You aren't obliged to use all of your inspirations.

> **Angela**: Now that each of us has contributed a media, 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. It's 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 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, consider all of the inspirations and decide on some single genre for your Setting. Here are a few common genres you can pick from, though this isn't a comprehensive list.

- Alternate History

- Fantasy

- Modern

- Romance

- Mystery

- Horror

- Science Fiction

- Super-hero

Once you have your genre, you get to explain what exactly makes your Setting different from others within the genre. Create a single adjective or noun that describes those differences. The best descriptors are emotional, cultural, or philosophical.

Be sure to consider your boundaries, since they may restrict potential genres. If "Graphic Violence" isn't appropriate for your game, don't pick a genre like "Splatterpunk Horror."

This step provides a common vision to interpret your inspirations and establish Facts. Write the genre and descriptor on the Setting worksheet.

> **Angela**: Now we come up with our 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**: Shogunate Science Fiction appeals to me.

Step 4: Establish Facts

in this step, you establish Facts about the Setting. Each Fact 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 obligated to come up with names for organizations; that comes later. Just work on making up evocative names for places, events or things.

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

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.

> **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.
>
> **Brian**: Then that means Technology is hard to build or maintain. **Chris**: 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? **Chris**: 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 makes sense now. I would like to build off Angela's Fact and make a link between the megacorps 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? **Dave**: Peasants? That works well. The megacorps created a race of genetically engineered peasants called henomin. **Angela**: Ok, then. How about The colonists imposed a feudal Japanese social structure on the henomin. **Brian**: I like your idea 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 arid high mountain tops, shielded from the storms. **Chris**: Then maybe the The peasants labour in the harsh low lands near the corrosive seas. **Dave**: 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. **Brian**: 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: Create a Title

This is a step where you get to step back and look at the setting on a whole. Consider all of the Facts and look to see if any common ideas emerge. This step helps you discuss all of the Facts and come to a common understanding of what the Setting is all about.

Try to express that with a short and evocative Title for the Setting. Suggest one to three word titles for the game and select the best one.

You should be able to express the core concept of your Setting by stating your Title, followed by Genre Description you came up with in Step 3.

Title: Genre Descriptor

Some good examples of titles would be:

- NeoNihon: Shogunate Science Fiction

- Quiet Revolution: Montréal Police Drama

- Elemental Kingdom: Fantasy under Siege

- The Seedlands: Tribal Horror

- Nordpunk: Norse Urban Fantasy

- The Enlightened Man: Renaissance Super Heroes

- The Solar Imperium: Military Science Fiction

- Sig, the City of Blades: Extraplanar Fantasy

> **Angela**: Ok. This step is quick and should help us get a more coherent Setting. Each of us creates some titles for the Setting that describes the world in broad, I will start by throwing in Bushido Colony. **Brian**: Ok, how about NeoNihon? **Chris**: The storms corrode metal, right? How about Ruststorm? **Dave**: Ok. I propose The Sony Prefecture. **Brian**: Not bad Dave, not bad. **Angela**: Those are some good ideas. Now we need to pick which title we think is the strongest. **Chris**: Honestly, I think NeoNihon sounds great. The mix of a Greek prefix and a Japanese name is fun and communicates the cultural blend that I love from good cyberpunk. Cool! **Brian**: Yup, it's roughly translated as "New Japan" if my memory serves. **Dave**: NeoNihon is fine by me. **Angela**: Great. That means our setting is **NeoNihon: Shogunate Science Fiction. ** **Brian**: I'm posting that on Twitter!

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 is rooted in one of these Beliefs.

First, 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's title and Facts. As you propose Beliefs, the other people ensure that they follow all the principles and don't violate any of your boundaries. Write these candidate Beliefs on the Setting worksheet.

Setting Beliefs must follow the following principles:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. A good Belief is **meaningful and 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, with a list of sample Beliefs.

> **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 megacorps 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 chooses
>
> *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: Rank the GM's Attributes

The GM has four attributes with which to portray the Setting. The Body attribute represents physical aspects of the Setting, the Heart represents the social, the Mind represents the intellectual and the Spark represents 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, make suggestions to the GM, but she has final say on her four 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, including how to mark them, is available in chapter 3.

> **Angela**: Ok, at this point I get to assign my Attributes. This lets me decide which of the players' attributes will be more or less effective in Conflicts. **Chris**: Could I ask for lots of social Conflicts? **Dave**: I would rather have physical threats deemphasized. **Brian**: Nah, let's get lots of physical threats out there. If the secrets of this world will destroy us, I want to have some physical challenges. **Angela**: Don't worry Brian, I can threaten you with knowledge just as easily. Thanks for your advice guys. I will say that the Heart is strong 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 NPCs will be more social, but physically weak.

Step 8: Create the Factions

In this step, 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 Faction's name will give you a sense of their identity and resources. Consider the Facts you have established, the genre you have written down and any other cultural references when you come up with the names. Just focus on making evocative names, and worry about the mandates afterwards.

The second time around the table, each person gets to create a mandate for one of the previously named Factions. Every Faction has a mandate that describes their common purpose, why they exist, and what they hope to achieve. Mandates are broad mission statements that either confirm or refute part of a Setting Belief.

Each of these Factions is pursuing their own goals. While PC's may not necessarily be members of any given Faction, they will often be influenced by their actions.

> **Angela:** Now that we have our three Setting Beliefs, we create the Factions. Factions are major groups that you will have to deal with regularly. At this point, we need to create four Factions; one per person in the game. First, we go around the table and each person creates an evocative name. I will start and name one of Factions as *The Hostile Natives*. **Brian:** Cool. 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, Henomin translates to something like "Mutant Peasant" **Chris:** I want more Seven Samurai, so I will name one of the Factions the *Village of Kanata*. **Dave:** Makes sense. I will name the last Faction, *The Shrine Tenders*. What do we do next? **Angela:** Now that we have the names, we need to create their mandates. These are mission statements that confirm or refute one of the setting Beliefs somehow. We go around the table again choosing these mandates, but let's switch directions so that Dave isn't stuck going last again. **Dave:** I wanted to have a Shinto element to the world. Let us give the Shrine Tenders a mandate *To maintain the roads and shrines for traveler*s, which confirms the first Belief.* **Chris:** Sure. I will give the Hostile Natives a mandate to *Destroy the invading Two-legs*, confirming the third Setting Belief. **Brian:** That implies they don't have two legs normally, which is cool. Kanata has a mandate to *Become respected and invaluable to the colonies*, confirming the second Belief. **Angela:** Very nice, I can work with that. Let's finish off the Factions by giving the Mercantile Guild a mandate to *Ensure the henomin are granted equal rights to true humans*, refuting the first Belief.

Step 9: Create Faces

Each Faction is represented by a potent NPCs called a Face. The GM uses these Faces to interact with the PC's and express the will of their Factions.

Each Face has a name, two strengths, and one weakness. When the GM has a Conflict, she can increase the size of her die when a strength applies and must decrease it if a weakness applies.

Each person claims one of the NPC Faces. They create a name, two strengths and one weakness for their NPC. Write these onto Index cards and pass them along to the GM for her use. Since the GM is the one playing the Faces, she gets to veto or reinterpret them as she sees fit. She then copies the approved Faces from the index cards onto her GM sheet.

> **Angela:** Ok, we have four Factions and we need to make NPCs 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 of Physically Frail. **Chris:** The Shrine Tenders for me. Ando1573 is an android with strengths in The Kami and in Messenger with a weakness in The Laws of Robotics. **Dave:** I've got The Village of Kanata! 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. A tie can bind each specific pair of Factions, if the two organizations have some kind of relationship or interaction.

- In a two-player game, there can be up to 3 ties

- In a three-player game, there can be up to 6 ties

- In a four-player game, there can be up to 9 ties

- In a five-player game, there can be up to 15 ties

These ties will guide the GM's choice of Agendas and how the Faces behave. Most of the time, you will only have a handful of ties written in at the start of the game, but you can create more in play during the Advancing Phase of each session.

Here are a few sample ties, but you are encouraged to make up your own based what you have created. If the GM hasn't created these ahead of time, go around the table and let each person create one Tie. Keep track of the ties on the Faction sheet, like in the example to the right.

Mutual ties are the same for both sides.

- Faction A and Faction B are close allies.

- Faction A and Faction B are bitter enemies.

- Faction A and Faction B are at outright war.

- Faction A and Faction B are ambitious rivals.

- Faction A and Faction B are strange bedfellows.

Asymmetrical ties happen when one side acts on another.

- Faction A is secretly funding Faction B, who is funded

- Faction A is subtly infiltrating Faction B, who is oblivious

- Faction A has cruelly betrayed Faction B, who is vengeful

- Faction A is violently subjugating Faction B, who is subjugated

- Faction A is subtly manipulating Faction B, who is manipulated

> **Angela**: Now we are 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 The Guild only have one tie between them. I will declare that the Henomin Mercantile Guild is funding the village of Kanata who is loyal to the guild in turn. **Brian**: Ok, that makes sense. The Hostile Natives are bitter enemies with the Shrine Tenders. **Chris**: I can make these up, right? How about the Shrine Tenders are subtly infiltrating the Henomin Mercantile Guild, who are oblivious to the infiltration? **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; each describing a major but short-term goal they hope to achieve.

Agendas must be based on the Faction's mandate and their ties. No two Agendas in the same session can be mutually exclusive, since they can all succeed. Factions achieve these things off screen between episodes.

The scope of each agenda depends on the nature of the Faction. If you have a Faction named "The US Army", they may be able to take control of an entire city with a single agenda, 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 their relevant Agendas.

Give the GM one Influence per player. We are ready to move on to Character Creation.

> **Angela**: Here is the last step. We'll work together to create the short-term goals, known as Agendas, for each of the Factions. We'll 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. 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, their skulls removed. **Chris**: Very nice and creepy. The Shrine Tenders Build a new grand shrine in the ruins of a disused communications tower. **Dave**: I believe that the Guild wants to Create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations. **Angela**: That's it for Setting Creation. I will start with four Influence, since there are four of us in total, and we'll move on to Character Creation.

Chapter 3 - Characters

Character Creation

Overview

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

Characters are motivated to challenge their Beliefs during play. When pursuing their goals, the PCs might enter into a Conflict with the GM or with another player. 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 this 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 Process

During character creation, each player will:

1. Come up with an initial **concept**, focused on one specific agenda, and name for their character.

2. Create 3 **Beliefs** that drive their respective characters, with the assistance of the other people in the group.

3. Assign 7 **Attribute** levels across their character's Body, Heart, Mind, and Spark Attributes.

4. Create 7 **Talents** that represent their character's skills, knowledge, and experience.

5. Answer 4-6 **Personal History Questions**, describing the characters' relationship with other PCs and with the Factions, earning Influence for each question answered.

6. Narrate a short **prelude** for their 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, find a central focus for the group. Collectively look at the Faction Agendas that you have generated. Try to figure out which Faction agenda you collectively find most interesting. If you have a hard time limiting it to a single agenda, the GM will pick which one to focus on. Circle that agenda on the index card to indicate it's the focus.

When you create character concepts, come up with reasons for your PCs to interact with either the 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 that goal. The only thing that matters is that everyone gets involved. This binds the characters together and works as a group template.

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 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 offer interesting characters. Imagine what one of those characters would be like if they grew up in your Setting. Once you have a concept, explain it clearly to the group and write it on your Character Sheet.

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 include lists of example names that you can refer to.

> **Angela**: Ok, first, we pick one of the Agendas that we want to focus on. All of the PCs will need some reason to interact with that.
>
> **Brian**: Ok. How about the Hostile Natives' focus agenda? *A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, and their skulls removed.*
>
> **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, the one who found the bodies.
>
> **Angela**: Shinto? An Animist android? Why?
>
> **Dave**: It is a quirk of the artificial intelligence process; they always pick up some kind of religious inclination. Mine believes in the Ghost in the Machine. **Angela**: That is hilarious! Ok, here is the hardest step. Tell me your characters' names.
>
> **Brian**: Hmm. I'm thinking Shimura the Samurai.
>
> **Chris**: Gisaku the Village Headsman.
>
> **Dave**: And this unit is Ando357, Ando for short.

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. These are statements that the character agrees with, and that the player wants to explore during play. 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 the game.

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, to reduce the cost of victory, 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 is a simple, **declarative** statement. A Belief is the kind of phrase that your character would blurt out in a heated argument.

- 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 is **meaningful and controversial** to a significant number of people. Players should be able to influence society on a whole, and Beliefs that others care about helps.

What are 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 false. The obvious exception being any Setting that has a world that might actually be flat…

Examples of 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

- Existence is suffering

- \Violence is never the answer

- You only deserve what you can keep

- Beauty is subjective

- Everything has a spirit

- Government can never fix problems

- Healthcare is a right

- Alcohol is a moral poison

- Greed is good

- Love is better than anger

- Hope is better than fear

- Optimism is better than despair

The Process of Creating Beliefs

Work together to create your characters' Beliefs. Each 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. 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 is complete.

Create Beliefs that…

- Challenge the Setting

- Clash with a Faction's mandate

- Supports another character's Belief

- Refutes another character's Belief

Player's Beliefs – At your own risk

The most meaningful games of Spark happen when you bring 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.

Let's say that as a player, I considered nationalism to be a problem with society. I could make a character whose Beliefs were *"Nationalism always leads to tyranny"* or *"Patriotism is the greatest virtue"*. This would help me gain a deeper understanding of the topic, and let me examine other perspectives on the issue.

> **Angela**: Ok. now 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 PCs. 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 believes 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 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. 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

Attributes represent characters' natural capabilities and are used to resolve Conflicts during play. Each of the four Attributes (Body, Heart, Mind, and Spark) are used in different circumstances, but they are fundamentally similar. Athletic characters should have high Body Attributes, social characters should have high Heart, scholars should have high Mind and supporting characters should have high Spark.

Each Attribute has a die rating (D4, D6, D8, D10, D12, D20), meaning that is the size of die you roll during conflicts. Sometimes I refer to them as Attribute levels in the text for ease of explanation, but each Attribute level is equal to one die step.

- A twenty-sided die (D20, level 6) is Epic, representing superhuman capabilities. Characters are unlikely to have Epic Attributes.

- A twelve-sided die (D12, level 5) is Excellent, representing maximum human capability.

- A ten-sided die (D10, level 4) is Great, well above average capability.

- An eight-sided die (D8, level 3) is Good, slightly above average capability.

- A six-sided die (D6, level 2) is Poor, slightly below average capability.

- A four-sided die (D4, level 1) is Terrible. Every character starts with Attributes at level 1.

The Body Attribute - Physical

The Body represents you in all physical Conflicts. High Body attributes are common among athletes, explorers, warriors, and physical labourers. Characters use their Body for acts of strength, dexterity or stamina. The Body lets characters resist violence and endure bodily injury.

The Heart Attribute - Social

The Heart represents you in all social and emotional Conflicts. High Heart attributes are common among politicians, socialites, aristocrats, and artists. Characters use their Heart for acts of charisma, emotional manipulation, or social composure. The Heart lets characters resist social aggression and emotional abuse.

The Mind Attribute - Intellectual

The Mind represents you in all mental and perceptual Conflicts. High Mind attributes are common among scholars, scientists, occultists, and artisans. Characters use their Mind for acts of intelligence, memory, or perception. The Mind lets characters resist mental strain and confusion.

The Spark Attribute - Dramatic

The Spark Attribute represents the powers of luck, destiny, and greatness of vision. Higher Spark scores helps a player shape the story, rather than necessarily succeed as a character. High Spark attributes are common among heroes, companions, innovators, and leaders.

- A high Spark will help you act first in the Advancing Phase.

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

- When you direct NPCs in Conflicts, your Spark die determines how effective those characters are.

- Lastly, you can absorb Harm to your Spark instead of any other Attribute.

Attributes at Character Creation

Every Attribute starts at level 1, which is why the D4 symbol on the character sheet is already filled in. You get 7 additional Attribute levels that you can divide between your Body, Heart, Mind and Spark. When you add an attribute level, fill in the outline of the appropriate die with pen, and leave a white circle in the middle.

You are unlikely to have any Epic Attributes (level 6 – D20) at character creation and you can't save any Attribute levels for later.

Angela: Now you 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. Remember that we already generated the GM Attributes during setting creation. I have a D10 Heart, D8 Spark, D8 Mind and D6 Body. **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 NPCs, and generally makes you more like a GM than a player. **Brian**: Sounds interesting. So 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 include specific fields of knowledge or particular types of tasks. Talents add a bonus to a character's die during a Conflict:

- If you have a Broad Talent that applies to the Conflict, add 1 to the result of your roll.

- If you have a Common Talent that applies to the Conflict, add 2 to the result of your roll.

- If you have a Deep Talent that 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). You can only use one of each category of Talent in any given Conflict roll.

Talents at Character Creation

Each character starts with seven Talents that represent their technical skills, academic knowledge or even physical training. Players can either create their own Talents or chose from the lists in a published Setting. The GM will help you decide if any given Talent is Broad, Common, or Deep in scope.

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. You then get another four Talents to give your character other options for solving problems.

Don't worry if you put a Talent in the wrong category, it won't break anything. Because you can mix and match your Talents in Conflicts, try to make them as diverse as possible. Aim to have two Broad, three Common and two Deep Talents for your Character.

- For Science Fiction settings, consider using the Talents for the NeoNihon Setting as a reference.

- For Modern settings, consider using the Talents for the Quiet Revolution Setting.

- For Fantasy settings, consider using the Enchantment Talents or Mundane Talents for the Elemental Kingdom Setting.

Broad Talents

Broad Talents represent general understanding of a wide-ranging topic. Someone might acquire these Talents through book learning or general life experience. Broad Talents may be things like:

- English

- Science

- Politics

- Law

- Engineering

- Mêlée

- Evasion

- Wilderness

- Thaumaturgy

- Religion

Common Talents

Common Talents represent a focus on a particular subject matter. When in doubt, assume that any Talent is Common in scope. Acquiring this normally requires either formal training or years of practical experience. Some examples of Common Talents are:

- Literature

- Biology

- Elections

- Civil Law

- Infrastructure

- Swords

- Dodging

- Wetlands

- Conjuration

- Catholicism

Deep Talents

Deep Talents represent 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. Some good Deep Talents are:

- Golden Age Science Fiction

- Vegetative Genomics

- Voter Suppression

- Small Claims Court

- Bridge Repair

- Scimitars

- Avoiding Gunfire

- Swamp Herbs

- Demons of the Seventh Circle

- Marriage Ceremonies

Angela: Now you know your natural capabilities and the circumstances that help you. Here's where you figure out your trained skills and experiences. These personal traits are useful in Conflicts. Brian: Ok, so how does this work? Angela: You need to create seven Talents. You propose them and I'll tell you if they are Broad, Common or Deep. Broad Talents help you a little bit in a variety of different circumstances. Deep Talents help you a lot on rare occasions, and Common Talents are somewhere in the middle. You can combine one Talent from each of the categories, so you can stack one Broad, one Common and one Deep together on a single roll. Brian: How do we get started then? Angela: He recommends that you figure out one specific activity that your character is best at, then get one Talent of each category that would suit. 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 mêlée 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. Dave: For my turn, I believe my Broad would be Observation, followed by Emotions, and then People-watching. Angela: Sounds good! Do 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.

Faction Baggage

Go around the table, with each player answering one of the Baggage Questions from the list below. Keep going around, until each person has answered two or three questions about different specific Factions.

- 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 did you abandon a Faction? Why are you passionate about a Faction's mandate?

- How did a Faction inspire you to take up one of your Beliefs?

Each player will start the game with one Influence per question they answer, to a maximum of six.

Prelude

The last step in character creation is the prelude. 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 prelude, each player creates a reason why the character would try to interact with the catalyst.

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

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

> **Angela**: Now we are ready for the preludes. Each of you gets to narrate a short 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 sits with a calligraphy brush in hand, surrounded by half-written love poems to Suki. 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. He realizes what he needs to do and plans his visit to the shrine, strapping on one of each of his father's swords. He tosses the poem into the hearthfire and steps out of his hut. **Chris**: Gisaku sees Shimura heading to the shrine and gestures at some trappers to follow the Sesei warrior. Rubbing his creaking knees, he orders villagers about and gathers his gear. Something is up, and he must follow the ronin to ensure the safety of the village. **Dave**: Ando races 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 can 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 now hot in pursuit. **Angela**: Perfect! That finishes character creation and we can start our first real scene!

Chapter 4 - Mechanics

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.

Everyone in the Conflict can either make a declaration of what they would like to happen, or support someone else's declaration. Each person determines which attribute die they're using, rolls that die, and adds the bonus from Talents to the result. The highest number wins the Conflict, paying price of victory in Influence or Harm, and gets their chosen declaration. When everyone is satisfied that you have answered the scene's Question, you can end the scene and frame the next one. The group continues to tell scene after scene, collaborating and entering into Conflicts.

Set up

Place the Faction sheet and the Belief sheet in the middle of the table so that everyone can see them. The Belief sheet has sections for each participant, listing their three Beliefs publicly. Place an Influence token on each of the icons to the left of those Beliefs. These tokens may be removed during the Closing phase of play, when people earn Influence

The Structure

Start each episode by Advancing the Factions. These groups have their own Agendas and goals that they're trying to accomplish. The players help decide which Factions will complete their Agendas and how the world on a whole will change. From then on, you will collectively play through a series of scenes. The group tells scene after scene, collaborating and entering into Conflicts.

Start by **Framing** the scene, where you decide where the action will take place and why the scene is important.

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**. After they finish the Conflict, they get to move back to Collaboration.

When the Question of the scene has been answered, you begin **Closing** the Scene. During this phase, characters can heal or retire, and they're rewarded with Influence for addressing their Beliefs.

Once you've closed the scene, either frame another scene or move to **Reflecting**. This last phase gives the players a chance to inspire each other to take up new Beliefs.

Phase 1 – Advancing

The Faction map describes the most significant major organizations in the Setting. Each Faction has an evocative name and exists to fulfill its mandate. Factions can also have diplomatic or historical ties

with one another. Each episode, Factions attempt to achieve short-term goals known as Agendas.

The GM will normally create the Factions' Agendas between episodes. If a player used a Claim option on a Faction last episode, they get to create that Faction's Agenda instead. Each episode will have its own unique, numbered index card with the Faction names and their associated agendas. Over the course of the campaign, the GM collects a series of these cards that will form the historical record of the Setting.

An Agenda is a one-sentence statement of intent. Each one describes a major but short-term goals the Factions hope to achieve. Agendas must be based on the Faction's mandate and their ties. Since all of the Factions can accomplish their goals in an Episode, make sure that the Agendas are not mutually exclusive. Factions achieve these things off screen between episodes. This step helps drive play, since the PCs need to react to these major events.

Each player rolls their Spark die and, in descending order, gets to choose one of these three options:

Block: Prevent a Faction from fulfilling its agenda. Narrate how and why the Faction doesn't achieve its goal. Strike out the agenda on the Faction card.

Claim: Choose a Faction's next agenda.

Tie: Create a new tie between two Factions, or alter an existing one. Narrate how this tie is established. Write the new tie on the Faction card and the Faction Sheet.

Every unblocked Agenda succeeds. The GM narrates a short vignette that shows exactly how the Factions get what they want.

Angela: Now that we're in the second episode, we need to determine what happened with the Agendas. Remember our Factions are: The Village of Kanata - Uncover a conspiracy of dishonourable henomin on the colonies' behalf. The Hostile Natives - A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, missing the top of their skulls. The Henomin Mercantile Guild - Create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations. The Shrine Tenders - Build a new grand shrine in the ruins of a disused communications tower. Everybody rolls their Spark dice to determine the order. Brian rolls the highest, followed by Chris, Dave, then Angela.

> **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? There are too many vested interests to set up any impartial tribunal. **Angela**: Sure. Chris? **Chris**: I think I will claim The Hostile Natives' next agenda. It's 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 a patron of their client state, Kanata. I'll mark it on the index card and the Faction Sheet. **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. **Angela**: A group of Sesei troops stopped reporting after a particularly nasty acid storm struck their encampment. When a recovery team was dispatched, it found the troops brutally murdered with their skulls partially removed. **Angela**: The Shrine Tenders move into the first communication tower established decades ago by the exploration team. They built a magnificent shrine to the great Kami within that tower.

Phase 2 – Framing

At the start of every scene, you create the initial situation. The group starts 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.

The Roll

First, Roll Spark dice and compare results, rerolling in the case of ties. The highest roll chooses between the Platform, Tilt, or Question. The second highest chooses 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 gets the final say.

Create the Platform

The person framing the Platform describes where and when a scene takes place in two to three sentences. By creating the Platform, they control the pace of play and how much time passes between scenes. 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.

Create the Tilt

The person framing the Tilt uses two to three sentences to describe what event or action forces PCs to interact with the scene. By creating the Tilt, they can guide the types of actions encouraged in the scene. The Tilt must be logical and consistent with the Platform.

Create the Question

The person framing the Question states in a single sentence what you are trying to determine with the scene. This scene is important to the story because of the Question, and the best ones challenge many Beliefs. The Question must be related to the Tilt. When you are done, move on to Collaboration.

Control Major Characters

Any player who doesn't get to frame the scene can share control of any Major NPCs during the scene. If a player-controlled NPC enters into a Conflict, use that player's Spark Attribute for the roll.

> **Angela**: Ok, so we start each scene with the Framing phase. I normally do this myself in other games, but it's collaborative here. Each of us rolls our Spark die and the people with the three highest results get to choose what the scene will be focused on. If one of you doesn't get to frame a scene, you can introduce and control Major NPCs instead. So, everyone roll your Spark dice!
>
>   - Angela rolls her D8 and gets a value of 8.
>
>   - Brian rolls his D8 and gets a 4.
>
>   - Chris rolls his D12 and gets a 11.
>
>   - Dave rolls his D4 and gets a 2.
>
> **Chris**: So I have the highest number. This means I need to choose between the Platform, Tilt, and Question? I know exactly what I want for the Platform, so I will claim it. **Angela**: Looks like I'm next. I get to choose between the Tilt and Question, right? I have no idea, so I'll go with the Question and hope to be inspired by one of you. **Brian**: Since I have the third highest score, I get the Tilt. Ok. **Dave**: Excellent. I believe that this means I get to create and control Major NPCs during the scene, since I didn't get to frame the scene. That works for me. **Chris**: Now we go through creating those three elements of the scene. The Platform is the rubble of Koru Village, at dusk. It's three days after you repelled the Saika attack. **Brian**: The Tilt is that, we see a corrosive storm that threatens to destroy any evidence in the ruined village. **Angela**: The Question; Who is responsible for the destruction of Koru Village?

Phase 3 - Collaboration

Roleplaying is a conversation. Everyone at the table gets a chance to share their opinions and contribute to the story. Most of the time, everyone cooperates and builds off each other's ideas. Occasionally, someone will disagree and interrupt the conversation. You resolve that Conflict by rolling dice and letting the winner speak next.

At the beginning of each scene, the GM gets the first opportunity to make a statement or a declaration. During the scene, each of you gets a chance to speak in the voices of your characters. You will be able to ask questions to other characters to learn more about their perspectives. During Collaboration, you are encouraged to ask questions and build off the answers. This process is sometimes known as free roleplaying.

Sometimes people will make basic statements about their PC's thoughts and simple actions. The GM gets to do the same with her NPC, narrate the current situation or explain something about the Setting. Statements may include:

  - A physical action that won't affect another character.

  - Thinking, remembering or describing something.

  - Speaking in the voice of your character.

  - Asking questions about other characters. The GM's explanation of a truth about the setting.

Periodically, you will make bold declarations of actions that could 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 to answer a question in the fiction.

- Taking a character out, removing them from the scene.

- Establishing something new about the Setting.

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

Bold Declarations

In Spark, you can use a declaration to make someone give you what you want or do what you want. You always get your way unless someone else opposes you. Other people can always stop you, if they are willing to pay the price.

By making a declaration, you are essentially asking the other person how much the issue matters to their character. Each declaration is a bet that the other person won't oppose you. This can take a bit of practice to master.

Remember that you can't Harm someone else directly; you can only try to take them out of the scene. They can only suffer Harm if they choose to improve their result in a conflict or to pay the price of victory when they win a conflict.

Indirect Declarations

Players will normally make declarations about other PCs directly during play. If another player disagrees, then the two players enter into Conflict and resolve the issue.

Some situations need a more delicate touch. It's sometimes best to act indirectly by making declarations that compel some NPCs to act on your behalf. The GM will then be able to make her own declarations with those NPCs against the other PC, hopefully with fewer hard feelings.

Collaborating with NPCs

There are three different types of NPC's that can be controlled during a scene. Most other characters are Minor NPCs who anyone may control by making statements and declarations on their behalf.

Major NPCs are more significant, reoccurring named characters with their own strengths. They can only be controlled by people who didn't get a chance to frame part of the scene.

The GM has the exclusive right to control the Faces, making statements and declarations on their behalf.

The Format of Declarations

Each statement or declaration should encompass a single idea or action. Declarations about PC's actions should be made in the first person.

- I run down the path,

- I break into the building.

By contrast, declarations about NPCs or the setting should be made in the third person.

- Ando runs down the path.

- Lightning strikes the building.

Objective Truths

During play, each statement and unopposed declaration will establish something as being objectively true. Likewise, the declaration made by the person winning a Conflict is also true. Every new statement and declaration needs to be consistent with what you have already established during play.

Use other people's ideas as springboards. Build on someone else's declaration with one of your own by saying Yes, and. Try to reincorporate details that you established earlier in the story to encourage a sense of continuity.

All Conflicts are final. If you lose a Conflict, you can't repeat the same declaration for the remainder of the scene. This applies equally to the players and the GM.

Closing the Scene

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

Phase 4 - Conflict

When someone in the game wishes to block someone else's declaration, they start the Conflict phase. Begin by picking declarations, then gather dice, and then roll the dice to see who got what they wanted.

Each of the two people who started the conflict get to propose potential declarations, what they would like to happen next. 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 the price in Influence or Harm, 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.

- Propose a new declaration.

- Sit on the sidelines and abstain from the conflict.

If they make their own declaration, they roll dice to see if they achieve their goal. If you support another person's declaration, you won't need to roll at all, but you increase the size of die they will use by one level.

Gather Dice

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

- For physical Conflicts, you would use your Body die. For social or emotional Conflicts, use your Heart die.

- For mental or abstract Conflicts, use your Mind die. If a player is using an NPC for the conflict, use their Spark die.

- For every person supporting your declaration, increase the size of your die by one level to a max of D20.

- If you are portraying an NPC and one of their Strengths applies, increase the size of die by one level.

- If you are portraying an NPC and their Weakness applies, decrease the size of die by one level.

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 for instance, then all of her rolls have a +3 bonus. Your bonus will vary between +0, if no Talents apply, and a maximum of +6 if one Broad, one Common and one Deep apply.

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 score after rolling by choosing to suffer Harm to a relevant attribute or spend Influence. For each level of Harm they take, they gain +2 to their score, while each point of Influence spent gives them +1 to their score.

Simple Victory

The person with the highest score gets their Declaration while the others don't. The winner of the Conflict must pay the price of victory; either spending 1 Influence or suffering 1 Harm.

Escalated Victory

If there is a tie between winning participants on a roll, then you trigger Escalation. Repeat the conflict phase entirely. Whoever wins this second roll gets both their declarations. They must then pay double the normal price of victory;

- 2 Influence, or

- 1 Influence and 1 Harm, or

- 2 Harm.

If there is another tie, repeat this process and double the costs for the winner again.

> **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 D6 Mind. Gisaku is using his Heart Attribute of D8. Since Ando is supporting, he increases that by one level to a D10. Angela is using her Body Attributes, since the storm is a physical threat. She selects her D6 Body 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**
>
> **Brian**: I roll 2 on my D6, add my +3 bonus for a total of 5 for Shimura. **Chris**: I roll 1 on my D10, add my +6 bonus for a total of 7 for Gisaku **Angela**: And I get a 5 on my D6 and add my +3 bonus for a total of 8 for the storm. **Chris**: I choose to suffer 1 Harm to Gisaku's Heart, which increases my 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. I think I need to spend 1 Influence to pay the price of victory, right?

Phase 5 - Closing

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

If something goes awry during play and you can't actually answer the scene's Question, the GM can also choose to end the scene.

Claim Influence

The GM and each of the players get to claim Influence when they challenge their Beliefs. This Influence can help them in Conflicts, or when they inspire others to change Beliefs.

You will usually challenge your Beliefs by entering into Conflicts that support or refute them. That said, sometimes Beliefs 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 that specific Influence token off the sheet and puts it in their personal pool of Influence.

> **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'll 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.
>
> **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.

Refresh Beliefs

Challenge their Beliefs of other people at the table, and you will be rewarded. Whenever the Influence tokens have been removed from all three of a person's entries on the Belief Sheet, a refresh is triggered.

A refresh means that everyone else in the game receives one Influence token from the supply. Once that's done, refill the original player's three entries with Influence tokens from the supply.

Remove Harm

At the end of each scene, each person can remove one Harm from one of their Attributes. If someone has a Harm on a D4 attribute, that must be the first one removed. This represents the natural recovery process and is the only way to remove Harm during play.

> **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, refill the three entries, then everyone else 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! **Angela:** Once we are done with Dave's Beliefs, each of us can remove one Harm from one of our Attributes. **Chris:** Perfect, so then Gisaku takes a Harm off his Heart attribute.

Phase 6 - Reflecting

Inspiration

When you finish the last scene of the episode, go through this last step. Each person at the table may spend 12 Influence to Inspire another Player to change a PC's Belief. Perhaps the Player is no longer interested in exploring the subject of one of their Beliefs. The character might have fully accepted a Belief and ceased to examine it critically. Maybe the character has had an epiphany and rejected their previously held Belief. No matter which reason, they need to rewrite one of their Beliefs.

The two people involved play through a small little scene. It's a chance for the two characters to talk about the Belief and explain why it's no longer relevant.

At the end of the scene, those two people get to work together to create a replacement Belief. The two of you can discuss the exact wording and create a new, mutually acceptable, Belief. This replacement Belief still needs to be declarative, subjective, and controversial as per the usual guidelines. Write it on the character sheet and on the Belief sheet. Be sure also to mark the single hollow circle on the Belief sheet, so you can keep track of who has changed Beliefs for the purposes of Evolution.

Growth

Only by challenging your Beliefs can you learn and grow. When a player inspires another player to changes a Belief, both of those characters gain a new Talent. If the GM inspires a player, she can add another Strength to one of her Major NPCs.

Evolution

When every player has changed one of their Beliefs, the world itself changes in a fundamental way. As a group, you decide which of the Setting Beliefs is no longer relevant, and what you would like to replace it with. At this point, everyone in the game gains one Attribute level permanently. The GM also gets a chance to alter any of the Factions to suit the new setting Belief. This can happen multiple times over the course of a campaign.

> **Angela**: That was a good episode, guys. I know that you all have a lot of Influence stored up over the last few games, so you can get a chance to spend that by Inspiring people to change their Beliefs. **Chris**: I would like to inspire Shimura. I'm picturing us standing infront of the mountain shrine, looking into billowing acid clouds that cover the land. "You know, Shimura, that there will come a time when you won't be able to keep on the honourable path." **Brian**: "That will never come to pass. My honour keeps me safe." **Chris**: "Safe, and far from the woman you love. Your honour causes nothing but suffering for yourself, and for poor Suki." **Brian**: "I can be with her. " **Chris**: "Not if your honour binds you to serve the colonies." That sounds good to me. Brian, I was thinking that Shimura might drop his We are nothing without our honour and replace it with Love conquers all. **Brian**: Hmm, it's a good Belief and all, but I want Shimura to continue grappling with his issues of honour. How about I replace that Belief with Honour enslaves us. **Chris**: Awesome! Each of us gets another Talent, so I will pick up a common Talent of "Romance". **Brian**: And I will pick up a Deep Talent of "Mercenary Contracts" **Angela**: Since everyone has changed one Belief at this point, we get Evolution. Everyone gets one more Attribute level, including myself. We can also replace one of my Setting Beliefs. **Dave**: I propose that we replace We are nothing without our traditions with Technology will tame this world. **Brian**: I like it! **Angela**: I will work on adjusting the Factions before the next game. 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. Harm is expressed in the fiction, usually as a physical injury, emotional distress, or mental exhaustion.

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 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.

> **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.

Being Taken Out

In some scenes, characters might be Taken Out of play, temporarily incapacitating the character. Mechanically, this means you can't make declarations or participate in Conflicts for the remainder of the scene.

Characters can be Taken Out by a successful declaration, or by filling the D4 level of any attribute with Harm. You can return to play the next scene.

Retiring from Play

When characters suffer significant Harm during the game, the player gets the option to retire them from play. Within the fiction, the character has gained some significant problem that prevents them from continuing as a protagonist of the story. Exactly what problem removes them from play depends on what kind of trauma they suffered.

Here are a few examples:

- **Shattered Body:** Death, Permanent Paralysis, Crippling Injury.

- **Broken Heart:** Suicide, Permanent Exile, Severe Anxiety.

- **Lost Mind**: Coma, Delirium, Memory Loss.

- **Faded Spark:** Destiny Achieved, Courage Lost, Identity Assimilated.

Before your character fades into the background, they get a chance to tie up loose ends. Immediately erase all Harm on your Character Sheet. This will be your final scene, but until then you can act at full capacity. Make it dramatic and memorable.

Try to make a replacement character before the next episode, with the same number of attributes levels and Talents as your previous character. You can also keep all of the Influence you have accumulated.

> **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 taken out permanently and retire your character from the game.
>
> **Dave**: I think that I have completed the arc for Ando the Android. I will retire it from play and go out in a blaze of glory. It has suffered so much emotional trauma that it isn't taking the necessary precautions for self-preservation. It stands up to the alien and holds it at bay while the others flee. I already have a concept for my next character.

Chapter 5 - Guidance

Why Guidance Matters

It's remarkably easy to write a set of procedural rules for an RPG. Procedural mechanics are easy to test, produce reliable results and are easily taught.

This chapter is here to express the more subtle aspects of play; how to make some judgment calls and how you can use the rules to bring out a compelling story. This is where can express my personal style of play, and explain what techniques I have found that make the game shine.

The first part is an explanation of the Seven Principles that were mentioned in the introduction chapter. This section explains the key responsibilities and expectations for the GM and players alike.

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, we provide Advanced GM techniques. These are suggestions rather than set rules, but I have found them useful for my own games.

The Seven Principles

Keep the Story Moving

Keep everyone engaged in the story. Accept player input and build off it to keep things exciting and dynamic.

When players make declarations or suggest something, run with it. When you react, build on their ideas by saying, "Yes, and…" Alternatively, 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, 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 are ninjas!

> **Angela**: The soldiers burst into the room, with rifles in hand.
>
> **Brian**: Could the solders be injured somehow, maybe with acid burns on their environmental armour?
>
> **Angela**: Yes, and they yell at you, "Is there another exit? The aliens are coming!" The group escapes the attack, and the pace of game play slows down.
>
> **Angela**: The leader of the unit of Sesei soldiers turns to Shimura. "We lost a dozen men to that attack. Men that would have survived if we had our most experienced recon scout. What could have brought you to betray your unit Shimura?

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. Only start Conflicts that help further the story or develop the characters.

When you do need to roll the dice and start a conflict, listen to what the dice tell you. All dice rolls are public and shouldn't be changed during play; you can always add bonuses (from Harm or Influence) if you don't like the outcome.

> **Angela**: The soldiers burst into the room, with rifles in hand. **Brian**: "Commander, I chose to stop the atrocity your men were committing. Don't question my honour!" **Chris**: "Commander, I believe that this honourable man saved your life. I understand that this is a stressful time and Shimura will be happy to accept your apology for your outburst." This is a declaration and likely a conflict. **Angela**: No, it's fine. You are successful, and the commander seems to deflate. He closes his eyes and apologizes through clenched teeth. The commander turns on the group that evening and tries to threaten the ronin, in retribution. Angela is surprised by winning the conflict. **Angela**: Ok, I totally didn't expect to win that one. Um, I declared that you would be taken out from the intimidation. We could reroll that, or just say you won? **Brian**: No. We rolled that fair and square, and I can always spend influence or get harm if I want to win. How about my stoic ronin is shaken to the core, and feels powerless for the first time in his life and fails to protect the group. This will definitely make him reconsider things! **Angela**: That makes sense. Thanks for being a good sport.

Ask the Players 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 enquire on their intent, reasoning, and motivation. Ask a question in this format: "Why are you doing X, given that Y?"

Ask leading questions that have heavy implications. These questions let you propose something about the story, and give the players a chance to interpret or modify it.

Examples of leading questions:

- Why did you abandon the Church?

- Why were you so angry with Kevin?

- How did you feel when Luke ran away from home?

> **Angela**: So why did Shimura succumb to the intimidation, given that he has clearly been physically threatened in the past? **Brian**: He has always been a bit of a lone wolf, and for the first time he realizes that other people's lives would be at risk if he made a mistake. **Angela**: If he had been such an independent sort, why did he join the organized Sesei force in the first place? **Brian**: He was caught up in the romance of it. Join the army they said. See the world, they said. **Angela**: What was the grizzly event that shattered your romantic illusions? **Brian**: It was when I had to dig the mass grave. I don't want to talk about it. **Chris**: That is good stuff man.

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. Help the other people at the table do the same. This is the one principle shared by the players and the GM.

Find the two other Beliefs around the table that your character or the 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.

Look at the Influence tokens on the Belief Sheet. When someone only has one Influence left on their portion of the sheet, guide the story to challenge that Belief. Engineer situations that will challenge multiple Beliefs at the same time; it will make the game more rewarding for all involved.

> **Angela**: So at this point, Ando only has an Influence token on his Belief that Emotions are more important than Facts.
>
> **Dave**: Excellent. "Shimura. You appear to have recently experienced severe emotions. Have you come to regret betraying your military unit and your own honour, in favour of meaningless peasants?"
>
> **Brian**: Shimura's eyes snap open in an expression of outrage, "How dare you speak to me, you silicon wretch! You have not earned the privilege to speak to me, let alone berate me for protecting the innocent!"
>
> The scene ends and they evaluate Beliefs. Shimura refuted his Belief that Emotions are a sign of weakness with his righteous outburst. He also confirmed that The honourable life is the only one worth living, as his outburst showed how much the dishonor comment affected him.
>
> Ando confirmed his Belief that Emotions are more important than Facts, by intentionally provoking the Shimura to determine the ronin's true emotional state.

Share Your Energy and Creativity

Share your ideas. They're not a limited commodity and the more you share, the more you come up with.

Share your plots and keep open secrets. While your characters might not know what's going on, the players certainly should. Secrets are only interesting because you can discover them during play.

Help the other players reveal their secrets. Help them trigger their plots. If you share your secrets with the other players, they will be able to act intentionally in a way that will threaten to reveal those secrets. It will drive the story forward and your characters will learn in the process.

> **Chris**: I would love to have a scene dealing with my villagers. It would be great if Shimura could do something that proves that helping the villagers was the right thing to do.
>
> **Brian**: Sounds good to me.
>
> **Dave**: Ok. You know that the Kami whispered to me that a storm would destroy the village on the night of the triple moon?
>
> **Brian**: I didn't. Suspect that will cause some problems for you.
>
> Shimura and Gisaku dive into the session and order the villagers to start building defenses against the inevitable attack by the hostile natives. They intentionally ignore the threat of a storm, specifically to increase the pressure on Ando to reveal his secret.

Be Good to Each Other

You are all here to have a good time. Ask what your fellow players what they are looking for in the game. Ask your GM what she is enthusiastic about. Make sure that all of your moves and decisions work to support the other people you are playing with.

Some people may be here to explore certain philosophical ideas or concepts. Help them explore the subjects that they are interested in.

Others want to build an intricate and detailed story. Throw in dramatic reversals and passionate characters to push the story forward.

Some want to immerse themselves in their character deeply. Try to minimize the discussions out of character to help them stay in their PC's head.

Fundamentally, make sure that everyone in the group is having a good time. You may want to encourage conflicts between the different characters, but make sure that you are making the game rewarding for the GM and for the other Players.

> **Dave**: Chris, I believe you wanted to focus on your character as a father figure, right?
>
> **Chris**: Yes, if I could.
>
> **Dave**: Perhaps my android tries to learn from Gisaku. It doesn't understand your attachment to your village or even the idea of "family". Would that be good?
>
> **Chris**: Absolutely. Thanks Dave.

Take Risks and Escalate Conflicts

Be vulnerable. 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 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.

Be daring. 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 Conflicts, and go big.

> **Brian**: "Gisaku, I…. I love Suki. I truly do, with all of my heart. I want to save her and her people from the hardships of the lowlands."
>
> **Chris**: "You are human. Your kind has never done a kindness to the Henomin. I can't let you threaten my little sister again. You have done enough."
>
> **Brian**: "I will do anything to be with her! Please tell me who has harmed her, and I will cut them down like the dogs they are!"
>
> **Chris**: "The General Yoshi of Clan Embei was the one who hurt Suki. Slay him, and I might allow you to stay with my little sister."

How to GM Spark

The Game Moderator has a lot to do in Spark. She has to:

- Portray most Non-Protagonist Characters (NPCs).

- 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.

Fortunately, the GM also has a set of tools at her disposal that help her drive the story.

- She can establish truths about the Setting.

- She controls the spotlight.

- She can set the Agendas.

- She portrays and drives the NPCs.

- She can frame the scenes.

The GM Establishes Truths About the Setting

While Spark is a highly collaborative game, the GM does have the the ultimate control over what is true in the Setting. The Setting is her character, to use as she sees fit.

She has the power to establish things in the world that can't be blocked by players. This lets her portray the Setting convincingly and give more context for the characters.

She can explain historical facts about the world, or cultural details important to the story.

She can introduce characters of importance to the world and explain their relationships.

She can declare things about the environment or the landscape. She can declare that a wall collapses, that a storm approaches or that the river is fast-running.

This power ends when it has direct effects on the player characters. While she can say the river is swift and strong, the players may enter in a Conflict to keep their characters from being swept away by the current.

> **Chris:** "We can force the city to help us!" **Angela**: Chris, that might be hard. The Henomin are artificial beings created by the human colonists. The colonies have never worried about their servants before, and your social status is not high enough to intimidate them.

The GM Controls the Spotlight

Give every player about the same amount of attention in the game. 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.

Make sure to give the quiet or shy players a chance to contribute, since they tend to be overlooked.

Ask questions to a player to give them the spotlight. A few good questions that I tend to use are:

- What do you do?

- How does that make you feel?

- What do you think about that?

Alternatively, you use 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. Do so to prompt a specific person to make declarations and seize the spotlight.

> **Angela**: Turns her body to face Dave. "What is Ando doing?" **Brian**: Shimura snarls out at the alien…. **Angela**: I think it's Ando's actions that really matter in this situation, Brian. **Dave**: Thank you. Ando bows deeply and begins to pray to this planets Kami, asking the alien winds to carry our words of harmony to these native beings.

The GM Sets the Agenda

The GM has the most control over the Setting by declaring what Agendas each of the Factions pursue each episode. Since at least one Agenda will be successful each session, she can always shape the story by her choices.

The GM creates the Agendas for each of the Factions between episodes. These goals must work toward the mandate and consider the Faction's ties. She must ensure that no two Agendas are mutually exclusive, since they could all potentially succeed.

Agendas typically allow a Faction to…

- 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 builds the context for interesting stories.

Angela: Here are the Agendas for this episode.

- **The Hostile Natives:** Build a strange hive-like structure in the ruined village of Koryo

- **Henomin Mercantile Guild**: Increase the feeds on Embei goods in retribution for abuse of a henomin village.

- **Village of Kanata**: Discover a way to communicate with the Hostile Natives.

- **The Shrine Tenders:** Establish a new, great Shrine on the edge of colonized territory.

The GM Portrays and Drives the NPCs

The GM interacts with the players via Non-Protagonist Characters (NPCs). They are her masks, her weapons, and her tools for building a compelling story. She declares what they do and speaks in their voices.

She needs to grab onto NPCs with zeal. If there is an opportunity for you to introduce an NPC, do so. They are the levers she has to affect the world, so she can't hold back.

There are three different types of Non-Protagonist Characters. The countless everyday characters that interact with the PCs are considered Minor NPCs. Over time, some of those characters might develop into Major NPCs who will be more important in the story. Lastly, the GM has exclusive control over the Faces; characters who represent one of the different Factions during play.

Minor NPCs

If this game was a movie, the Minor NPCs would be extras. Both the GM and Players have the ability to use Minor NPCs in Conflicts. Minor NPCs are everywhere in the mundane world. They are your shopkeepers, your foot soldiers, and your innocent bystanders.

Players will only get a surface impression of these characters. Give them unique descriptions, interesting mannerisms and memorable behaviours. Minor characters are nameless and aimless by nature. The Players can choose to elevate any Minor NPC into a Major NPC by creating a name for them during play.

> A wiry, jittery young man with weary eyes.
>
> A broad-shouldered, muscular man with a tattoo on his forehead.
>
> A gentleman with fine mutton chops and a dry cough.
>
> A chubby man in a wheelchair, constantly smiling.
>
> An androgynous person, confident and beautiful, in a red dress.
>
> A teenage girl wearing second-hand clothing, staring into space.
>
> A curvy woman with a resonant voice and large gold earrings.
>
> A deliberate and soft spoken woman, wearing a power suit.
>
> An older woman with silvered hair and remarkable laugh lines.

Major NPCs

If this game was a movie, Major NPCs would be featured actors. They are the characters that the players cared about and named during play. You collectively begin to look beyond surface appearances to see their motivations, personalities, and histories.

Each Major NPC has their own name, description, and a strength written on the GM sheet. The area of strength can be a skill, circumstance, or item that helps that character during conflicts. When the GM enters into a conflict with a Major NPC where their strength applies, she increases the size of her attribute die by one level.

Anyone who does not Frame a scene can control any Major NPCs within.

> **Robert O'Connell** is a wiry, jittery young police officer with weary eyes. He uses his intimate understanding of Gang Violence to police the streets.

> **Mayoor Ramji** is an Indian-Canadian gentleman with fine mutton chops and a dry cough. His reputation as a Professional Arbitrator is impeccable.

> **Marian Williams** is a curvy woman with a resonant voice and large gold earrings. She's one of the best Trauma Surgeons in the country.

> **Rep. Maria Rodriguez (D.)** is one of the leading political figures in Congress. She is deliberate and soft-spoken woman, always wearing a power suit. She is one of the few people in congress who knows how Washington D.C. really works.

Faces

If this game was a movie, Faces would be the supporting actors. These characters represent and speak for one of the Factions in the game. They may be the leaders of organizations, or merely foot soldiers in an army, but they are the embodiment of their Faction's ideals.

Each Face has a name, a description, two Strengths, and one weakness written on the GM Sheet.

The strength can be a talent, circumstance, or item that helps that character during conflicts, increasing the size of the GM's attribute die by one level. Conversely, the weakness is a talent, circumstance or item that hinders the character during conflicts and decreases the size of the GM's attribute die by one level.

The GM starts with a set of Faces, either created by the group or found in a published Setting. The GM has exclusive control over the Faces and can't normally delegate this responsibility to the players.

> **Robert O'Connell** is a wiry, jittery young police officer with weary eyes. He represents the Chicago PD Faction. He understands **Gang Violence** and **Bureaucracy**, but his illegal **Drug Habit** threatens his career.

> **Rep. Maria Rodriguez (D.)** is one of the leading political figures in Congress, and represents the Federal Politicians Faction. She is deliberate and soft-spoken woman always wearing a power suit. She understands **Washington D.C.**, and is a renowned **Social Justice Advocate**. That said, her **Minority Status** as a Hispanic woman often gives her difficulty in the house.

NPC Advice

Before you invent a new NPC, consider reusing an existing Major NPC or a Face. Minimize the number of characters so you can establish stronger connections. If you need to create a character on the fly, imagine an individual defined by the clash of two different character Beliefs.

> **Angela**: You, um, encounter a true human Shinto priest on the road, with a weary smile and a black bamboo walking stick.
>
> **Chris**: Gisaku asks, "Have you, by chance, found Saika up the road?"
>
> **Angela**: He actually looks you in the eye and smiles wider. This might be the first human you have ever met who gave you that respect on first sight.
>
> Angela created an NPC that supports Gisaku's Belief that *My people deserve respect* and clashes with Ando's Belief that *Respect must be Earned.*

If a player isn't playing for more than ten minutes, try to draw them in again by offering to let them play any spare Minor or Major NPCs. Just because their character isn't there, doesn't mean the player should be bored!

> **Angela**: Dave, in know that you just retired Ando but I would like to keep you involved. Could you play Lieutenant Hitoshi this scene? He's one of the major characters with strength in **Intimidation**.
>
> **Dave**: Certainly. "You have ten seconds to put down your weapons and surrender before I let my men obliterate this shanty village! Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven…."

The GM Frames the Scenes

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

The Platform By creating the Platform, she controls the pace of play and how much time passes between scenes.

- The next scene takes place moments later as you cross the corrosive river.

- The next day, you stand together on the rocky mountain ridge overlooking the peaceful village of Otawa below.

- Six months later, you stand in the newly constructed fortifications around Otawa village.

- Two years ago, Ando and Shimura first encountered each other at the Blackwater Shrine.

The Tilt

By creating the Tilt, she guides the types of actions encouraged in the scene. She can encourage the kinds of situations that will challenge multiple Beliefs. Likewise, she can make the Tilt appropriate for the PCs' Talents.

- Unfortunately, it seems the only way forward would be through a marshland. (Gisaku's Wayfaring Talent and Shimura's Reconnaissance Talent)_

- The numbers have just come in; the village won't survive another rainy season without help from outside. The Embei taxes are just too high for any food surplus. (Gisaku's Villages Talent)

- The fortifications were completed just in time, as Saika bandits attack! (Shimura's Military Talent)

- The Kami whispers to Ando to watch Shimura intently. (Ando's Shinto Shrines Talent)

The Question

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

Will you be able to safely guide all the villagers through the marshlands?

Gisaku's Belief that Danger always strikes when everything seems fine.

How will you help the village avoid starvation?

Gisaku's Belief that My people deserve respect

Ando's Belief that Emotions are more important than facts

> *Will Shimura reveal his love for Suki?*
>
> Shimura's Belief that Suki, my love, is worth any sacrifice.
>
> Shimura's Belief that Emotions are a sign of weakness
>
> Gisaku's Belief that Men will never hurt my little sister Suki again.
>
> Ando's Belief that Emotions are more important than facts
>
> *What secret will Shimura share with Ando?*
>
> Shimura's Belief that The honourable life is the only one worth living
>
> Ando's Belief that The will of the Kami must be obeyed.

Advanced GM Techniques

Here are a number of useful tips, tricks, and techniques for the GM to use. None of these is necessary to run the game, but they can make for a richer play experience.

Create Opportunities

Spark really benefits from improvisational GM techniques during play. The players have a lot of power to change the direction of the story, so it's not terribly useful to create complex plans. Instead, make your life easier in the future by creating opportunities.

Prepare a handful of pre-determined events between NPCs, without accounting for any PC actions. You might tell the players that "Joe and Bob are fighting" and let them decide how that situation resolves.

Leave gaps, with questions unresolved and hints at nebulous threats. You can use these gaps to help you come up with NPCs, dialogue and events on the fly. Set up potential Platforms, Tilts, and Questions for future scenes.

Think about what's happening offstage and in the background. If the PCs kill a mugger, consider what repercussions they might face in the future. If they do a kind deed to a beggar, perhaps someone in the city will remember them favourably.

> **Angela:** While you are arguing, you hear an explosion in the distance and a column of rising smoke to the southeast. What do you do? **Angela:** The colour of the smoke seems to be a strange hue. You wonder why that might be. (Angela writes it down) **Angela:** Remember that the Village of Hoju helped you after the Sesei attack? It looks like some form of brutal retribution.

Describe the World

Make the setting feel real for your players by describing the little things. By telling the minor details, players can feel like everything else in the setting has an equal level of detail. Tell them the origin of

the silk cloth and how much a desert trader would charge for it. It's a small thing, but it implies a rich and interconnected world.

Think beyond the visual elements of the setting. Describe the rough texture of the cloth, the cloying musk of cologne, the sound of the bronze gongs or the peppery flavor of the tea. Engage all the senses.

It's often more effective to imply certain things about the world, rather than saying them outright. Describe a character trembling with clenched fists, instead of directly stating they are angry. Show, don't tell.

> Angela: Walking into the shrine, you smell the lingering incense and burnt plastic. The bamboo structure creaks in the constant winds that you feel come from the southeast. That's when you notice the bodies.

Places with Personality

One of the best ways to keep the setting feeling vibrant is to have rich and distinct locations within it. Make sure that each of the different places in the setting has a unique symbol, motif, or metaphor that makes it stand out from the others.

The gentrified neighbourhood might be represented by rust. The crumbling brown bricks, the shuttered factory with rusty bars on the windows and the old diner with flaking paint are good ways to express the "rusty" nature of that place.

Maybe your city is like a passionate lover, sizzling hot with clouds of steam escaping from the sewer manholes. Fast rhythmic dance beats echo in the dark alleys, with throngs of people dancing long into the night.

Speak with the Body

Remember to describe the NPCs' body language whenever possible. These subtle cues can tell the PCs a great deal about the NPCs mood and personality.

Even better, as you roleplay the various NPCs, consider your own body language. Keep your back straight for important or arrogant characters. Lower your shoulders and avoid eye contact for shy or submissive ones. These little cues will help you get into character more quickly.

A good technique for portraying NPC's is to imagine one particular body part that defines them. The merchant who has a nose for deals, the technician who is always fiddling with things with her nimble fingers and the lusty warrior are all great examples of characters led by their bodies.

> The noble representative keeps her distance, with crossed arms and an upward gaze.

> The GM is playing a submissive servant character who is cowardly and fearful. She hunches her shoulders and lowers her gaze.

> Roku curious to a fault. His roaming eyes explore every minute detail of the world, and he is driven to learn more about the world around him.

Draw Relationship Maps

It can be challenging to understand the motivations of each NPC in the game. It's often useful to grab a blank sheet of paper and sketch out a relationship map between the various characters in the game.

Draw a rectangle for each of the Faces or Major NPCs in the game and a circle for each PC. Whenever two characters have a relationship or some common history, you should draw a line connecting them on the map. Write a couple words beside those lines, describing the specific kinds of interactions.

This will highlight the various motivations and perspectives of your NPCs, and help you manage a complex social network.

The Love Letter

Think of the character sheet as a love letter to the GM. By creating their characters, the players are expressing exactly what they are interested in playing with. Every Belief, Attribute and Talent can express something different about what the player is looking for in the game.

Beliefs tell you what kind of personal or philosophical challenges are most compelling to those players.

Attributes tell you what kind of approaches the players want to use during conflicts. Talents tell you what kind of obstacles the players want to face.

Read those love letters carefully and take care. Build obstacles that the players find engaging, relevant, and surmountable.

> Angela looks at Gisaku's Talent in Confidence Building and Shimura's high Body Attribute. She decides that some alien menace is assaulting the village at night, and that the woodcutters are too fearful to defend themselves. She gives an opportunity for both characters to work on resolving this overall problem.

> In a similar way, she noticed Ando's Belief that The will of the kami must be obeyed. She creates a zealous hermit, willing to do harm to innocent henomin at the behest of the Kami. She gives Dave a tough ethical choice, just what he was looking for.

Chapter 6 - NeoNihon: Shogunate Science Fiction

Overview

The Japanese colonization ship landed on the extra-solar planet of Shi Tateyama in 2236. Like the other corporate nation-states fleeing old earth, Japan used remote planetary surveys to target their colonization efforts. This planet seemed to be just what they were looking for; a paradise with abundant water, a comfortable climate and a vibrant biosphere. Once the colonists awoke from their decade-long cryo-freeze, they found the planet was far less pleasant than planetary surveys indicated. 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 produced genetically engineered humans called henomin to labour for the colonies. These henomin were sent down to the lowlands to grow rice, extract protein from the seas, and grow iron-hard black bamboo. Wandering, devout androids delivered messages between villages, shrines, and great colony.

Geography

The Colonies are modern cities built into the cool and dry mountain peaks, where the humans can live in comfort. While far less advanced than the great terran cities, each of the colonies is home to over a million citizens. Shikura Environmental Systems Incorporated (SESI) controls Matsue Colony, the domed city.

The immense Fukuoka Colony, controlled by Moto Bioengineering Incorporated (EMBEI), is the economic centre of the planet due to their extensive lowland territories. The underground Akaishi Colony was founded by Nakumura, so they could shield their sensitive electronics from the atmospheric EM radiation.

Kita City is the political centre of the planet, founded by Shirane on the highest mountain's peak.

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 are bizarre fungal-animal hybrids with toxic flesh. Only the genetically engineered henomin and the pious androids built from rare terran alloys can survive and work in this harsh environment.

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.

Society

Shi Tateyama is home to two distinct societies; the corporate meritocracy of the mountain top colonies, and the feudal society of the lowlands. The colonies rule over the lowlands, wielding high technology to impose their will on their servants below.

The original colony ship was a commissioned in a joint venture by four of the biggest Japanese MegaCorps.

- Shikura Environmental Systems Inc. (SESEI)

- Moto Bio-Engineering Inc. (EMBEI)

- Nakumura Sensors Inc. (Nakumura)

- Shirane Exploitation Inc. (Shirane)

These Megacorps, commonly referred to as Clans, hold nearly total control over life in the cities. For those who seek political power, they need to either earn promotion through merit, or by purchasing sufficient shares in their corporate clan. There are never enough resources to go around, and the four clans are constantly engaging in corporate espionage and small scale military maneuvers.

The henomin have a rather different society. The human colonists needed a way to keep their artificial servants docile and obedient. They chose to use the idealized imagery and stories of Japan on Old Earth to maintain control. Those henomin were indoctrinated as feudal peasants in service to the noble human clans. They are taught the importance of honour, service, and obedience to their superiors. In turn, the human clans promised to protect them from external threats. Unfortunately for the henomin, the humans rarely hold up their end of the deal.

Setting Beliefs

Choose 3 of these Beliefs for your game. Select a number of Factions under those chosen Beliefs equal to the number of people in the game.

Technology will tame this world

- Moto Bio-Engineering Inc. (Clan Embei)

- Shikura Environmental Systems Inc. (Clan Sesi)

- The Dreamers

We are nothing without our traditions

- The Village of Kanata

- The Kensei

- The Shrine Tenders

The greatest honour is to serve your clan

- The Village of Otawa

- The Henomin Merchant Guild

- Shirane Exploitation Inc. (Clan Shirane)

The secrets of this world will destroy us

- Nakumura Sensors (Clan Nakumura)

- The Saika Mercenaries

- The Hostile Natives

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 henomin servants, the iron-hard black bamboo, and the cultured rice necessary for human survival on Tateyama-4.

Initial Agendas:

- Create the first vat-bred henomin 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.

Embei Yukiko Mikisama

A bitter and cynical scientist, trying desperately to feed Fukuoka. Strengths: Indigenous Botany, Bioengineering Technology Weakness: Henomin Empathy

Shikura Environmental Systems Incorporated (Sesi)

Setting Belief:

Technology will tame this world

Mandate: To enable human access to the inhospitable lowlands

Profile:

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

*Initial Agendas: *

- Initiate peaceful trade deals with the Henomin Mercantile Guild.

- Seize the prosperous Baku hills from Clan Embei.

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

Kurosan, Shikura Commander

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

Strengths: Military Strategy, Prototype Environmental Suit Weakness: Civilian Etiquette

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.

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.

Rinzei531 Bodhisattva

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

Strengths: Philosophy, Artificial Intelligence

Weakness: Tangible Solutions

The Village of Otawa

Setting Belief:

We are nothing without our traditions

Mandate:

To survive at any cost

Profile:

The henomin 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, the bamboo is essential for the survival and expansion of colonial civilization.

Initial Agendas:

- Acquire desperately needed medical supplies from Fukuoka.

- Repel Saika bandit attacks.

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

Headsman Gisaku A weary yet defiant henomin leader, driven by duty to his village and family.

Strengths: Village Hardship, Defiance

Weakness: Peasant

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 other advanced technologies. The Kensei sought an alternative. 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 henomin.

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

Kensei Haruka

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

Strengths: Honourable Duels, Reconnaissance

Weakness: Politically naive

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 travelers 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 henomin alike. The Shrine Tenders double as a mail service, connecting the lowlands to the colonies through couriers.

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.

Ando1573

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

Strengths: Human Emotions, Messenger

Weakness: The Laws of Robotics

The Henomin Mercantile Guild

Setting Belief:

The greatest honour is to serve 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.

Initial Agendas:

- Create an impartial trade tribunal for guild-colony negotiations.

- Establish a Black Market.

- Convince the colonists that torturing henomin is dishonourable.

Speaker Sakhalin

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

Strengths: Subtle Persuasion, Network of Contacts

Weakness: Physically Frail

The Village of Kanata

Setting Belief:

The greatest honour is to serve 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.

Initial Agendas:

- Increase farming yields through some risky experiments.

- Domesticate the local wildlife to help in fishing efforts.

- Uncover a conspiracy of dishonourable henomin on the colonies' behalf.

Headwoman Suki

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

Strengths: Sympathetic, Spotless Reputation

Weakness: Haunted by her Traumatic Past

Shirane Exploitation Incorporated (Shirane)

Setting Belief:

The greatest honour is to serve your clan

Mandate:

To keep the peace and protect civilization

Profile: Shirane Exploitation Inc. founded the first colony city on the planet; the Kita City is on the summit of the planet's highest mountain. The Megacorp established the city as the capital of the new civilization, a bastion of education, of culture and of law. Shirane maintains its position as the dominant political force by controlling the Great Library, the Planetary Board of Directors and the Supreme Court. As a result, Kita City has also become a hotbed for political intrigue and corporate espionage.

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.

Chuganji Ryoko, Chief Negotiator

A middle-aged woman with shocking blue hair, multiple facial piercings, a Nakumura X

1-Cybereye implant, and a soothing voice.

Strengths: Political Favours, X 31-Cybereye Implant

Weakness: Drug Abuse

Nakumura Sensors Inc. (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 that diversified to computer systems, cybernetics, 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.

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.

Nakumura Atsushi, Sensor Technician

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

Strengths: Sensor Systems, Jury-rigging

Weakness: The Lowland Acid Storms

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.

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.

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

Weakness: War Criminal

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. Their goals are unknown, but they are clearly displeased at humanity for trespassing on their territory.

Initial Agendas:

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

- A unit of Clan Sesei troops is found dead, their skulls removed.

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

The Envoy

A swarm of tentacles, bound together like tumbleweed. The Envoy is the most sympathetic of the native beings and seeks a diplomatic solution to the two-leg problem.

Strengths: Slaughter, Acid Storms

Weakness: Human Communication

Sample Talents

Broad Talents

- Androids

- Arts

- Athletics

- Colonies

- Commerce

- Cultivation

- Engineering

- Evasion

- Henomin

- Lasers

- Law

- Logging

- Mêlée

- Military

- Observation

- Persuasion

- Philosophy

- Politics

- Religion

- Science

- History

- Villages

- Weather

- Wilderness

Common Talents

- Construction

- Aikido

- Artisan

- Barter

- Biology

- EnviroSuits

- Electronics

- Emotions

- Etiquette

- Herbalism

- Sociology

- Implants

- Karate

- Laser Rifles

- Leadership

- Medicine

- Oratory

- Outposts

- Propaganda

- Reconnaissance

- Shinto

- Spears

- Stealth

- Storms

- Swords

- Synthetics

- Tactics

- Travel

- Treaties

- Harvesting

Deep Talents

- Artificial Intelligence Systems

- Appraising Goods

- Black Bamboo Logging

- Black Markets

- C31 Laser Sniper Rifle

- Communications Relays

- Confidence Building

- Cybernetic Prototypes

- Daisho (Paired Swords)

- Dirty fighting

- Fishing Native Life

- Formal Duels

- Henomin Genetic Tailoring

- Historical Rebellions

- House Construction

- Hover Transports

- Human Genecrafting

- Listening to Kami

- Lowland Territories

- Moral Instruction

- Native Ecology

- Native Sentients

- People watching

- Plasma Grenades

- Poisons

- Policy Analysis

- Resource Scarcity

- Rice Farming

- Sensor Engineering

- Shino Purification Rituals

- Shinto Amulets

- Storm Shelters

- The Storm Kami (Oni)

- Trade Logistics

- Wilderness Exploration

- Wristlocks

People

Major Corporate Clans

- SESEI
- EMBEI
- Nakumura
- Shirane
- Yamato
- Honda
- Futaba
- Meiji
- Ashai
- Daikin
- Mitsui
- Orix

Female Given Names

- Asami
- Erika
- Karin
- Kasumi
- Keiko
- Meiko
- Mina
- Mayako
- Natsumi
- Noriko
- Rumi

- Reiki

- Satomi

- Shoko

- Toshiko

- Yumi

Male Given Names

- Akimitsu

- Daisuke

- Genjiro

- Hakaru

- Hiro

- Ichiro

- Isami

- Jiro

- Kanesuke

- Ken

- Mitsugi

- Nariyuki

- Raizo

- Tadashi

- Tetsuo

- Yasuki

Places

- Fukuoka Colony

- Matsue Colony

- Akaishi Colony Colony

- Kita City

- Edo Outpost

- Shinai Monastery

- The Village Kanata

- The Village Otawa

- The Village Bunaka

- The Village Furinaka

- The Takahashi Dojo

- Shirane Platinum Mines

- The Oversoul Mainframe

- The waterfall shrine

- The infested shrine

- The writhing forest

- The acid shores

- The corroded cave network

- The wrathful river

- Signals Outpost 23

Mysteries

- Why have the colonies lost extra planetary communication?

- Can there be peace with the native sentiments?

- What destroyed Ashikaga Colony, and could it strike down another human settlement?

- What is this ancient alien artifact that the henomin woodsman discoverered?

- How will Kita City survive being struck by a hundred-year storm?

- What are the incredible capabilities of the exotic element discovered on Shi Tateyama.

Chapter 7 - Quiet Revolution: Montréal Police Drama

Overview

Montréal is the second largest city in Canada and its cultural capital. It's the political heart of the francophone province of Québec. It's the second largest French-speaking city in the world, just after Paris.

It's an economic powerhouse, with a Gross Domestic Product of over one hundred billion dollars a year and population just under four million.

Its citizens come from every corner of the world, bringing a variety of languages, faiths, and traditions. Ethnic minorities and immigrants bring a cultural richness and diversity to the city. Organized crime preys upon an open-minded, tolerant society.

The city has its own share of problems though. That cosmopolitan diversity has led to tension in the streets between different linguistic, religious, and cultural groups. That open-minded and tolerant society gives organized crime the opportunity to thrive.

As members of the Montréal Police force, you're asked to resolve problems within the community. Your unit is assigned to the most sensitive cases, where tact and discretion can make all the difference.

You research, negotiate, arbitrate, and investigate. Protect the innocent citizens of the city from the criminal element. Find a way to keep the city safe. Nothing is simple in this city, and there are no easy answers.

Disclaimer: This is a fictional portrayal of the City of Montréal, created for the purposes of starting discussions about complex social issues. No disrespect is intended toward the real City of Montréal, its communities, or to its inhabitants.*

Geography

The French settlement of Ville-Marie first began as fortified village on a large island in the St. Lawrence River in the 1600s. Control of this river was essential to the european colonial powers, and Ville-Marie provided that control, The settlement, built in the shadows of Mt. Royal, expanded over the years. Centuries after the first village was founded, it was renamed the City of Montréal.

It was one of the biggest cities in the new world and one of the great ports of the fur trade. Both France and Great Britain fought for control of this strategically important city. Now it's a modern metropolis.

Old Montréal consists of the original settlement of Ville-Marie. It is home to Notre-Dame Basilica, the Old Port district, and countless heritage buildings.

Westmount was an enclave of wealthy Anglophones of British ancestry, on the southwest slope of Mount Royal. It has become more diverse over the last decades.

North of downtown is Outremont, home both a wealthy French community and a large Hasidic Jew population.

Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce are adjacent neighbourhoods both ethnically diverse and home to a large student population.

Le Plateau was originally a working class neighbourhood that gentrified and is now home to upscale restaurants, nightclubs, and boutiques.

Ville Saint-Laurent is also ethnically diverse area, home to large Lebanese and Muslim populations.

Le Village is the heart of the city's gay and lesbian communities, promoted as a tourist attraction.

The Montréal Métro, the subway system, makes travel between the various neighbourhoods easy.

Society

France first founded the settlement on the modern island of Montréal and built wooden fortifications to defend its interests. When France lost the Battle of Québec, on the Plains of Abraham during the Seven Year's War, the British seized control of the territory.

As a response to the occupation by the English-speaking British forces, the people looked to the Roman Catholic Church for support. The Church stepped into the forefront, preserving the French language and culture. The British State and the Catholic Church maintained control over the society for centuries.

In the 1960s, the Quiet Revolution was sprung and Québec changed overnight. The francophone identity replaced the catholic religion as the central element of society. The citizens attempted to declare independence from the British state, and this sovereignty movement continues to divide society. This new society declared the women's rights, secularism, and the primacy of the French language as fundamental values.

In the fifty years that followed, Montréal has thrived. Immigrants from across the globe have flocked to this city, each bringing their own distinct culture. Some embraced these newcomers, while others feared their influence on society. The immigrants were forced to choose to integrate, assimilate, or remain apart from Québec society.

You are police, asked to keep the peace, at any price. You are asked to keep culture clashes from turning violent. You need to enforce the politicians' laws. You have to keep the city from tearing itself apart.

Setting Beliefs

Choose 3 of these Beliefs for your game. Select a number of Factions under those chosen Beliefs equal to the number of people in the game.

Absolute power corrupts the best natures

- Government of the Day

- International Corporations

- Organized Crime

Those who bend do not break

- The City Bureaucracy

- Association of Small Businesses

- The New Quebecers

You are your culture

- The Catholic Conservatives

- Society of Religious Understanding

- Guardians of the French Language

The World must change

- The Student Movement

- The Sovereignty Movement

- The First Nations Community

Factions

Gouvernement du jour - Government of the Day

Setting Belief:

Absolute power corrupts the best natures

Mandate:

To win the next election

Profile:

The Government of Québec is a powerful institution. It creates laws, acts on a provincial and national scale and controls the provincial bureaucracy. It collects the taxes, runs the public healthcare system and funds education, along with regulating the cities, including Montréal.

That's a lot of power, and the politicians are happy to seize it. The ruling political party works hard to improve public opinion, buy votes, and gather campaign donations.

Initial Agendas:

- Pass a new law, increasing tuition fees.

- Provide tax breaks for resource extraction industries.

- Build a new bridge in Montréal to make it easier for suburban commuters.

The Honourable Lucien Lavoie, Prime Minister of Québec

The Honourable Lucien Lavoie is an experienced politician who began his career running a non-profit arts organization before his election to the National Assembly, fifteen years ago. He is now the official leader of the Province of Québec.

Strengths: Public Opinion, Sovereignty Weakness: Election Irregularities

Multinationales - International Corporations

Setting Belief:

Absolute power corrupts the best natures

Mandate:

To make maximum profits

Profile:

Montréal is an excellent market for our many products and services. Its healthy retail sector, high population density, and publically funded healthcare increases our revenue while decreasing our insurance costs. While the regulatory burden is high, sufficient political influence should improve our profit margins. The International Corporations are here for one thing: profit. They are ardently federalist, as it reduces trade requirements. French language laws impose an additional burden, unnecessary in other markets. Corporate taxes need to be reduced as much as possible.

Initial Agendas:

- Crush a potential union before it starts.

- Undercut the local merchants to reduce competition.

- Offer to carry products from Montréal manufacturers, if the wholesale prices are low enough.

Chris Smith, Walmarde Canada, Regional Executive

Mr. Chistopher Smith is a Californian native who moved up to Canada to head the new Walmarde regional office. While he is a handsome fellow, his poor skills in French often make his life difficult.

Strengths: Corporate Representative, Logistics Weakness: Minimal French

Crime organisé - Organized Crime

Setting Belief:

Absolute power corrupts the best natures

Mandate:

To maintain control over the city

Profile:

Organized crime is a powerful force in Montréal, and for good reason. The Sicilian Mafia runs the city from the shadows. It uses construction companies to launder their money. It extorts small business owners and torches anyone who fails to pay up. The biker gangs are at open war, ensuring a steady flow of illicit drugs and guns into the city while reaping great profits for their efforts. Organized Crime likes things just the way they are, and will do anything to keep an iron grip over the city.

Initial Agendas:

- Earn millions of dollars from the drug trade.

- Smuggle automatic weapons into Montréal.

- Secure influence over a prominent provincial minister.

Luigi Dizzuto, The Sicilian Don

They say the Don is untouchable. His people are in every industry and his blood money is in every politician's pocket. He is a slightly overweight and balding man who doesn't care about appearances. He's too busy controlling this city.

Strengths: Sicilian Mafia, Legally Untouchable

Weakness: Criminal Rivals

La bureaucratie de la ville - The City Bureaucracy

Setting Belief: Those who bend do not break

Mandate: To fearlessly advise and faithfully obey

Profile: The politicians run the city and they use the bureaucracy to do it. The civil servants keep the libraries open, repair the roads, and enforce bylaws. They all joined for the best of reasons; to support their communities and feed their families. Their role is to advise their political masters and implement the decisions of the elected officials. This really means that passionate, dedicated and educated professionals are stuck writing acronym-laden memos and running programs designed by committee. The bureaucrats are stressed, depressed and wish they could fix a broken system.

Initial Agendas:

- Delay a construction project for environmental reasons.

- Extend the metro system of public transit.

- Create a new cultural centre in an economically depressed area.

Gabrielle Toulouse-Lautrec

Gabrielle recently joined the city administration as a junior community outreach officer. She earned her master's degree in sociology at l'Université de Québec a Montréal, specifically focusing on

immigrant communities in Québec. She took the job so she could foster cultural understanding in the city.

Strengths: Sociology, Ethnic Minorities

Weakness: Burnout

Association des petites entreprises - Association of Small Businesses

Setting Belief:

Those who bend do not break

Mandate:

Take care of our families

Profile:

It's hard to run a small business, especially in this city. You need to work long hours, selling your wares and dealing with the never-ending piles of paperwork. The landlord keeps raising the rent, and he gets paid first. Next are the utility companies, taxes, and your part-time employees. You get to keep the crumbs left over at the end of the day. That's why we formed the Association. We pool our resources to fight the city when we need to. We pay our protection rackets as a group, and lose less money in the process. We vet our employees, and hire the good people who need a job. We take care of our own. We take care of our families.

Initial Agendas:

- Pay the protection racket to the mob.

- Establish a new profitable tourism initiative.

- Successfully petition for lower business taxes.

Marcel Côté

A older gentleman, owner of a popular British pub known as "Le Norman". His establishment is next to the precinct, and many of the police officers are loyal patrons.

Strengths: Police Patrons, Barkeep

Weakness: Rebellious Son

Les Neo-québécois - The New Quebecers

Setting Belief:

Those who bend do not break

Mandate:

Integrate into Québec society

Profile:

The New Quebecers are immigrant peoples who fled to Montréal to secure a better life. Some were refugees from war-torn countries; others were merely seeking greater prosperity. In any case, they are all here to stay.

These people recognize the need to integrate into Québec society and adopt those values. The necessity of the French language, secular governance, and women rights are the norms of Québec society, and thus they need to adapt to fit in.

Initial Agendas:

- Teach their children to speak in French at home, rather than their ancestral language.

- Abandon a religious practice to fit in with mainstream society.

- Support their daughters' admission into university.

Jamila Hachem

Jamila is a warm and accepting mother of two teenage children. She has spent the last twenty years teaching her two daughters to fit in with Québec society to the detriment of her native traditions, faith, and language. Strengths: Québec Culture, Lebanese Community Weakness: Assimilated

Les conservateurs catholiques - The Catholic Conservatives

Setting Belief: You are your culture

Mandate: Conserve our catholic heritage and values

Profile:

The Quiet Revolution of the 1960s changed Québec society dramatically. This new society was secular, nationalist, and ardently feminist. This Faction represents the vocal yet rare minority who rejected the revolution and seeks to push back the clock. Québec society has been corrupted since the revolution. The people have abandoned the Holy Roman Church, which had guided them for centuries. Debauchery has replaced fidelity, leading to thousands of broken homes. Childless couples have replaced large, joyful families. Traditional marriage between man and woman has been abandoned, replaced by unnatural unions. We must restore our society to its former glory and allow the church to guide it again.

Initial Agendas:

- Start a debate on abortion in national media.

- Raise funds to restore a cathedral in Old Montréal.

- Volunteer for politicians against same-sex marriage.

Father Gabriel Paradis

Father Paradis was the priest for a small community in northern Québec for forty years before he moved south to Montréal. His mission, post-retirement, was to encourage traditional marriage between man and woman.

Strengths: Oratory, Faithful followers

Weakness: Arthritis

Société de dialogue intereligieux - Society of Religious Understanding

Setting Belief:

You are your culture

Mandate:

Foster religious tolerance and diversity

Profile:

Montréal is a cosmopolitan place, and that diversity is its great strength. Dozens of distinct religions and faiths intermingle, and each has its own places of worship.

The Society was created to encourage interfaith discussions and religious tolerance in the city, after the burning of a synagogue several years ago. Working to broker peace between the different religious groups, it advocates for a spiritual role in the increasingly secular society.

Initial Agendas:

- Organize a multi-faith theological conference.

- Publish a book on religions common ground.

- Arrange for a spiritual advisor to help the police diffuse religious tensions.

Judith Cohen

Judith is a middle-aged woman of Jewish descent who founded the society. She is enthusiastic, optimistic, and passionate about learning about other faiths. She splits her time between charitable works, and writing non-fiction books concerning commonalities between religions practices.

Strengths: Radiant Smile, Diplomatic

Weakness: Overly Trusting

Les gardiens de la langue française - Guardians of the French Language

Setting Belief:

You are your culture

Mandate:

To protect and promote the French Language

Profile:

The French Language unifies modern Québec society. It ties the nation together, and helps establish a distinct society in North America. Our language and our culture are deeply intertwined, and we need to protect them both.

French is the language of public institutions, of work, of teaching, communication, and business within Québec. Immigrating peoples need to make efforts to learn the language, so they can integrate with Québec society. Their French-language contributions will add to our cultural richness, and we are eager to help them learn.

Initial Agendas:

- Elect politicians with a strong platform on defending the French language.

- Ensure that the children of immigrants can't transfer into English language schools.

- Gather funding for French language movie production.

Bruno Lévesque A former movie star in the Québec cinema scene with several awards to his name. After the car accident, he began to use his fame to defend the French language and French arts scene within Montréal.

Strengths: Famous Actor, Activist

Weakness: Wheelchair

Le mouvement étudiant - The Student Movement

Setting Belief:

The world must change

Mandate:

To encourage universal education

Profile:

Montréal is an educated city, with four major universities and a host of colleges. There are over 400,000 students in the city, studying everything from philosophy to quantum physics.

The student activism culture is strong in the city. There is a long tradition of the student body declaring strikes and protesting social justice issues. The students have captured media attention and can bring the city to a standstill when united under a common cause.

Raising tuition fees is a bad idea.

Initial Agendas:

- Launch an attention-grabbing protest downtown.

- Embarrass the government of the day.

- Make a remarkable scientific discovery.

Marie-Lourdes Mervil, Student Union President

A meticulous young Haitian woman who leads her student union with passion and reason in equal measure. She is currently studying Political Science at Concordia University.

Strengths: Activism, Social Media

Weakness: Poverty

Le mouvement souverainiste - The Sovereignty Movement

Setting Belief:

The world must change

Mandate:

Secure independence for Québec

Profile:

For some, the ideal world is of an independent Québec. They seek to separate from Canada and create a new sovereign nation, representing their citizens on the world stage and expressing the common values of the Québécois. There have been two referendums, in 1980 and 1995 respectively, where the provincial governments sought a mandate to separate from Canada. This Faction represents those continuing to fight for sovereignty.

Initial Agendas:

- Claim the funding from the federal government to distribute international aid.

- Challenge federal legislation that conflicts with Québec values.

- Unleash a media campaign to promote sovereignty.

Pierre Bergeron Pierre is an experienced lawyer and former minister from the provincial government of Québec. He continues to advocate for independence and engages in extensive lobbying.

Strengths: Constitutional Law, Political Connections Weakness: Political enemies

La communauté des Premières nations - The First Nations Community

Setting Belief:

The world must change

Mandate:

Build a better future for Aboriginal Peoples

Profile:

This is all the traditional territory of the First Nations peoples. When the European settlers arrived, they depended on the locals to teach them how to survive the harsh climate. They signed treaties that exchanged European goods for the right to use the land. There was peace, once.

The peace was broken when the Europeans began to persecute the "Indians." They stole land, destroyed families, and dragged children into residential schools to "take Indian out of the child". It was a dark time, and First Nations Peoples still suffer the effects of colonialism.

Initial Agendas:

- Teach a new generation of youth to speak Cree.

- Settle a land claim with the crown to reclaim lost territory.

- Block a proposed development project that would harm First Nations territories.

Elder Marie Stacey

Marie Stacey is a respected elder of the Mohawk people. Her history is tragic, but she has overcome her history to educate the new generations about the old traditions.

Strengths: Teaching, Traditional Medicines Weakness: Discrimination

Sample Talents

Broad Talents

Business

Fine Arts

Athletics

Medicine

Sociology

Psychology

Engineering

Computers

Performing Arts

Literature

Law

Linguistics

Policing

Crime

Observation

Persuasion

Philosophy

Politics

Religion

Chemistry

Physics

Crafts

Weapons

History

Common Talents

Accounting

Drawing

Hockey

Trauma

Ethnic Groups

Mental Illness

Infrastructure

Social Media

Acting

Classical Literature

Criminal Law

English as 2nd Language

Investigation

Interrogation

Justice

Debate

Aristotle

Sovereignty

Islam

Material Sciences

Forensics

Glasswork

Police Weapons

Quebec History

Deep Talents

Dirty Money

Graffiti Art

Playoffs

Paramedic

Lebanese-Canadian

Anglophone

Jewish Community

Mohawk Community

Construction Companies

The Metro

Undercover

Molière

Extortion

Sexual Assault

Murder

English Expressions

Forensic Accounting

Witness Statements

False Confessions

Referendum 1995

Mosques

Nanomaterials

Fiber Analysis

Genetics

Glass Sculpture

Tasers

Batons

Tear Gas

Heritage Sites

Church History

People

Montreal Family Names

Tremblay

Gagnon

Roy

Bouchard

Gauthier

Morin

Fortin

Gagné

Ouellet

Pelletier

Bélanger

Leblanc

Ahmed

Lopez

Awashish

Phipps

MacDonald

Abbott

Arsenault

Nguyen

Female Given Names

Anne

Catherine

Marie-Claude

Marie-Pierre

Louise

Charlotte

Mélanie

Sylvie

Hélène

Rosalie

Isabelle

Lise

Annik

Marjolaine

Eleni

Sadia

Male Given Names

Joseph

Pierre

Jean

Charles

Louis

André

Paul

François

Serge

William

Gilles

Yvon

Marcel

Thomas

Maurice

Moustafa

Places

McGill University

Concordia University

Université de Montréal

Université du Québec à Montréal

Centre Bell

Montréal Biodome

Mount Royal Park

Mount Royal Cemetery

Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery

Underground City

Ubisoft Montréal

Montréal Microbeweries

Place-des-Arts

Pierre-Elliot-Trudeau Airport

Jean-Talon Farmer's Market

Notre-Dame de Montréal Basilica

Chinatown

The Islamic Centre of Quebec

Chez Paré, a high class strip club

Québécor Media Offices

The Old Port of Montréal (Heritage)

The modern industrial Port of Montréal

The Old Brewery Mission for the Homeless

Schwartz Deli

Mysteries

- What happened to the dozens of aboriginal women reported missing?

- Who was responsible for the arson of four synagogues, and what was their real agenda?

- Why have the organized crime families abandoned the Plateau area completely?

- What group has been paying off the mayor, and which decisions were influenced over the last two years?

- Which side will win the upcoming referendum for independence?

- What great legacy project will city hall be undertaking, and who will pay the price?

Chapter 8 - The Elemental Kingdom: Fantasy Under Siege

Overview

The Kingdom is under siege. Elemental monsters threaten to overwhelm us from every border. Only the four Elemental Orders, wielding their corrupt magics stand between us and total destruction.

Once, the kingdom was a place of peace and respect. The capital was a gleaming wonder of white marble and golden statues. The provinces were vibrant cultural centers, with each city specializing in unique arts and sciences. It was the greatest realm the world had ever known, until the invasion.

The monsters destroyed the nations on our borders, through violent invasion and subtle subversion. The desperate refugees rushed into the provinces, who are under attack themselves by the elemental foes.

The monsters wield terrifying elemental sorceries, directly creating or manipulating the essences of the world. The relentless Dwarves commend the mountains themselves and shape ore into supernatural artifacts. The cruel Orks wield blades of flame and hurl bolts of fire. The beguiling Elves whisper great distances and hide themselves in the winds. The corrupting Snatchers can travel the waters and warp their bodies like water.

Only the four Orders, those who have learned the secrets of elemental enchantments, offer any hope to the people of the Kingdom. They invoke the flames' rage, the deceptive waters, the enduring stone, and the perceptive winds to guard our borders and keep the monsters at bay.

Geography

To the North, the relentless Dwarves command the very mountains. The Remulan Empire was the first to be crush by the creeping northern mountains. The Resilient Order fights back, delving deep into the mountain tunnels to slay their stone-skinned foes and steal the powerful Dwarven artifacts.

To the East, the Orkish hordes assault our defense. They drove forth thousands of refugees from beyond the mountains. Only the Radiant Order, manning the Ashen Wall, can keep the beasts at bay.

To the South is the fallen Odysan kingdom, destroyed by the corrupting influence of the Elves. These monsters whispered promises and forged oaths with Odysans, leading to a brutal civil war. The eastern forest has reclaimed much of their civilization, with mad cults inhabiting the ruins of a once great kingdom. The Whispering Order is vigilant to prevent the same from happening to us.

The West has been taken by the Snatchers. The once great Hellan Republic, the center of culture and philosophy, has been corrupted beyond recognition. Cursed artifacts and poisoned waters have

transformed these proud peoples into new Snatchers. The Flowing Order roots out Snatcher corruption, so we may keep our humanity.

Setting Beliefs

Choose 3 of these Beliefs for your game. Select a number of Factions under those chosen Beliefs equal to the number of people in the game.

Empathy is weakness

- The Flowing Order

- The Warped Snatchers

- The Queen's Court

Outsiders are stealing our land

- The Resilient Order

- The Mountain-herders

- The Provincial Lords

Anger is the ultimate power

- The Radiant Order

- The Charred Ones

- The Desperate Refugees

Everyone has a price

- The Whispering Order

- The Tempting Winds

- The Merchant League

Factions

The Flowing Order

Setting Belief:

Empathy is weakness

Mandate:

To guard against the decay of human civilization

Profile:

The first of the Elemental Orders, the Flowing Order protects humanity from the corrupting influence of the Snatchers. Its members are concentrated on the western border, patrolling the many rivers to hunt down any Snatchers before they can corrupt any more victims. They also fill a counter-espionage role, using Hydrologos enchantments to track down and eliminate any Snatcher-tainted agents. The Queen has given the Flowing Order sanction to enforce her laws on the commoners, functioning as a rudimentary policing force for the kingdom.

Initial Agendas:

- Protect the granaries from external threats.

- Escort a foreign trade ship into harbour safely.

- Purge the snatcher-tainted village of Resan.

Thales A young, androgynous member of the Flowing Order, tasked with observation and infiltration of large groups. Only the sea green eyes remain when Thales takes on a disguise. Strengths: Infiltration, The Rite of Stolen Faces Weakness: Hellan Immigrant

The Warped Snatchers

Setting Belief:

Empathy is weakness

Mandate:

To free the humans of civilization's restraints

Profile:

The Snatchers were once human; many of them converted citizens of the fallen Hellan Republic. These monsters are small, emaciated frog-like creatures, with sharpened teeth and a mad strength.

They seem driven to destroy civilization itself. They sabotage our industries, disrupt our commerce, and corrupt our citizens into new Snatchers. Worse still are the river cults, groups driven to acts of obscenity and perversion in the name of heretic gods. The Snatchers threaten to rip apart the fabric of society.

Initial Agendas:

- Poison the water supply of the southern provinces.

- Sabotage the forges of the Northern provinces.

- Corrupt the village of Kyjan, turning the children into new Snatchers.

Perakles of the Nine Fingers

Once the respected leader of the Hellan republic, he was transformed into the most cunning and dangerous Snatcher. Strengths: Hellan Republic, Cult Leaders Weakness: A Missing Finger

The Queen's Court

Setting Belief:

Empathy is weakness

Mandate:

Maintain the Queen's rule over her kingdom

Profile:

Her Majesty Dzenana rules from her palace in the heart of the capital, the city of Veceric. She is a kind-hearted monarch who toils to protect her people from the monstrous hordes.

The Queen's Court focuses on eliminating any internal threats to their own power or to the queen. The various nobles act to maintain the status quo and keep the provincials subservient. They wield their power without concern for the citizen's wellbeing.

Initial Agendas:

- Restore the Cathedral of the Five Divines to divert public sentiment to spiritual matters.

- Replace the governor of the Southern Province with a more loyal servant of the Queen.

- Divert money from the war to build a new royal academy for the young nobles of the capital.

Lord Egzon the Golden

Lord Egzon is the Queen's most trusted advisor since the King's death. This xenophobic lord currently holds the title of Lord Treasurer and has agents everywhere. Strengths: Political Status, Informant Network Weakness: Elven Oaths

The Resilient Order

Setting Belief:

Outsiders are stealing our land

Mandate:

To slow the mountains' advance

Profile:

The Resilient Order holds its ground. They are the unmoving guardians of the north, the only thing standing between the Dwarven mountains and the human lands. Members of the Order wear grey and black colours, arming themselves with hammer and axe. They can only succeed in slowing the mountain advances by delving deep into the Dwarven warrens and slaying the monsters within.

Initial Agendas:

- Delve into the great mountains and steal the Dwarven forge.

- Seize a Dwarven warren, slaying all of the Dwarven inhabitants within.

- Reinforce the provincial defenses with Petralogos enchantments.

Larcia, the Eternal Aegis

Larcia was a young scholar who had joined the Resilient Order over a hundred years ago. A Dwarven artifact shield transformed her into an ageless, indestructible, living statue. Strengths: Immortal, Indestructible Weakness: Alone Forever

The Mountain-herders

Setting Belief:

Outsiders are stealing our land

Mandate:

To gain new territory for our people

Profile:

The Dwarven race was born with the first mountain. They were driven as a people by the compulsion to build, grow and expand. They crafted countless artifacts, delved as deeply into their mountain homes as they could and multiplied. When they ran out of room or resources, they were driven to raise new mountains out of the bedrock so they could expand their territory.

They never even noticed when they destroyed the Remulan Empire. The Kingdom has been far more troublesome.

Initial Agendas:

- Raise a new mountain, blocking a major trade route.

- Divert the major rivers away from the eastern farmlands.

- Create a new fleet of war machines.

Stonetender Thomek

A young Dwarf of a few hundred years, he is one of the scouts that raises new mountain territory for his people. He does his best to tend for his thirty-seven children, but it can be a challenge at times.

Strengths: Speaking Stones, Moving Mountains Weakness: Open Skies

The Provincial Lords

Setting Belief:

Outsiders are stealing our land

Mandate: To keep our people and our land safe

Profile:

The Lords are desperate. They have monsters rushing over their borders, desperate refugees draining their resources and incessant demands from the Orders. What's worse, the capital refuses to give them much needed support to keep their people safe.

The Lords do what they must to protect their domains, no matter what the consequences may be.

Initial Agendas:

- Offer citizenship to provincials who serve one of the great Orders.

- Repair the battered provincial fortifications.

- Redirect all of the Kingdom's taxes to local defense.

Vladko the Great, Duke of Svetlar Province

Duke Vladko is the eldest of the Provincial Lords, with no legitimate heirs to his title. He uses his wry smile to mask his true emotions and give his people some measure of confidence.

Strengths: Provincial Resources, Shielding Smile

Weakness: Deeply Indebted

The Radiant Order

Setting Belief:

Anger is the ultimate power

Mandate:

To guard the Ashen Wall from Ork invasion

Profile: The Radiant Order is the largest of the four Elemental Orders, thanks to the terror spread by the Ork hordes. They guard the eastern frontier and slaughter wave after wave of the brutal monsters.

The Wall of Ashes is the greatest defense that the kingdom can muster against the horde. Repeated invasions from the fire-wielding Orks have left a barren wasteland of scorched earth all along the

border. Without cover to hide the Orks, the humans use stone artillery towers to strike down any invaders.

Initial Agendas:

- Protect the Ashen wall from an overwhelming Ork assault.

- Recruit more soldiers for the Kingdom, at spear-point if need be.

- Destroy a major Ork camp and the war machines within.

Recruiter Raifa Raifa is one of the most successful recruiters for the war effort. She travels from city to city, speaking of the glory of defending the kingdom and the desperate need for more women and men at the wall.

Strengths: Oratory, The Radiant Order

Weakness: Hot-tempered

The Charred Ones

Setting Belief:

Anger is the ultimate power

Mandate:

Devour the humans and burn their kingdom

Profile:

The Ork race is defined by their hunger and their rage. They are a crude people, led by brutal warlords and cruel shamans. Nomadic by nature, they destroy all the land in their wake. They are driven to overwhelm the Wall of Ashes and sate their hungers. The Orks are roughly man-sized creatures with flattened faces, long arms, broad shoulders and skin the colour of ash. They are carnivores and cannibals to a one, with sharp fanged maws and rending claws. What's worse is the liquid flame coursing through their veins, burning their foes when they are injured. There can be no reasoning and no peace with the Ork.

Initial Agendas:

- Raze the village of Marj, leaving no survivors.

- Discover the horrific hellblossom rite, fueled by Ork-sacrifice.

- Dispatch a half-breed emissary to negotiate human surrender.

Warlord Kurk-Margus The Warlord Kurk-Margus is massive in stature and wielding a brutal Morningstar. He slew the last leader of the Radiant Order in single combat and devoured him on the battlefield in front of his men.

Strengths: Massive Stature, Berserker Rage

Weakness: Burning With Hunger

The Desperate Refugees

Setting Belief:

Anger is the ultimate power

Mandate:

To build a new home for our families

Profile:

They lost almost everything. They lost their homes, their possessions, and their holy sites to the monsters. They could only take their families, the clothes off their back and a handful of mementos of their former lives with them as they fled. When they arrived in the Kingdom, they were greeted with suspicion and abuse. They live in makeshift settlements and try to find a way to rebuild their lives in this strange new land. They try to bury their anger, pain and loss by building a better future for their people. Sometimes it works.

Initial Agendas:

- Create a shantytown outside the city of Jerica.

- Build a shrine to the Hanged Father in the Capital.

- Petition the Queen's Court for settlement rights within the kingdom.

Berthegund

A brave woman who led her five surviving children to this new southern land. She was once a great healer of her people and uses her skill to barter with the other refugees for the necessities of life.

Strengths: Angry Mobs, The Healing Arts

Weakness: Homeless

The Whispering Order

Setting Belief:

Everyone has a price

Mandate:

To keep the Kingdom unified and strong

Profile:

The Whispering Order may be the smallest of the four Elemental Orders, but they are never overlooked. Their order was originally founded by the church of the Five Divines and many clerics fill their ranks. Members in the order walk openly in society and wear distinctive white capes that mark them as agents of the crown. The members of the Order are the law, travelling across the Kingdom and hunting down any human traitors. At the same time, they also freely offer council and advice to any one who wishes it.

Initial Agendas:

- Acquire a new foreign ally to support us in the war.

- Convert one of the Snatchers into a useful ally through Aerologos.

- Disappear Lord Nyron, whose son bargained with elves.

Paroh Hasan

A portly, scholarly man with a remarkably sympathetic demeanor. As a former cleric of the Five Divines, he retains his former title of Paroh and maintains strong ties to his flock. Strengths: Five Divines, Scholarly Research Weakness: Out of Shape

The Tempting Winds

Setting Belief:

Everyone has a price

Mandate:

To offer the humans tempting bargains

Profile:

The elves are terrifyingly helpful. They forge oaths, bargains and pacts with humanity as a matter of habit and ask for trivial actions in return. The inscrutable elves have a perfect understanding of chaos and consequence and over a long timescale, those actions inevitably lead to disaster.

The Odysan Empire fell into civil war because of a series of small bargains. An overly full wineskin, a particularly aggressive boar, an overturned applecart and a stolen genealogical tome led to the year of the three Emperors.

Initial Agendas:

- Offer great riches to the third son of every cobbler in the provinces.

- Shoot down a Whispering Order patrol in the creeping wood.

- Deliver a dire prophesy to the owner of the Hanged Goat Inn.

The Three Promises

Three golden-haired elves who are always found together, finishing each other sentences and giving priceless advice. Strengths: Prophesy, Illusion Weakness: Can Never Speak a Lie

The Merchant League

Setting Belief:

Everyone has a price

Mandate:

To maintain the trade network

Profile:

Where trade crosses borders, armies do not. The merchant league uses the trade networks to keep the provinces united, to supply the Elemental Orders and to maintain the military. In exchange for their diligent efforts, they manage to extract just enough money to feed their families. At least, that's the theory.

War is good for business, and the League is populated with many unscrupulous merchants who profit greatly by the chaos. Invariably, these merchants acquire more and more political power.

Initial Agendas:

- A shipment of enchanted weapons is delivered to a provincial village for almost nothing.

- The Radiant Order has its supply lines cut after failing to protect a merchant.

- A black market is built in the depths of the Capital with countless artifacts liberated from the monsters.

Kamal the Arms Dealer

Kamal is a perfumed gentleman of impeccable taste in clothing and possessing a vast arsenal of weaponry. He is the Merchant League's representative for trade and logistics with the Elemental Orders.

Strengths: Trade Networks, Enlightened Self-Interest

Weakness: Love of Luxury

Sample Enchantment Talents

Flowing Order - Water Enchantments

Broad: Hydrologos **Common:** Trust, Change, Identity, Life **Deep:** Stolen Faces, Healing Waters, Invisibility, Mind Ripples, Transformation, Water-Breathing, Charm

Resilient Order - Stone Enchantments

Broad: Petralogos **Common:** Resolve, Durability, Weight, Stasis **Deep:** Unmovable, Unbreakable, Unstoppable, Eternal, Tireless, Oppression, Slowing, Binding, Weaken, Shatter

Radiant Order - Flame Enchantments

Broad: Pyrologos **Common:** Anger, Fear, Purification, Destruction **Deep:** Flame's Rage, Ignite Terror, Purifying Flame, Light, Destructive Blow, Holding Warmth, Fire's Focus

Whispering Order - Wind Enchantments

Broad: Aerologos **Common:** Communication, Speed, Promises, Detection **Deep:** Far-sending, Wind-Running, Oath-forge, Blink, Oathbreaker's Curse, Long Sight, Whispering Winds

Sample Mundane Talents

Broad Talents

Scholarship

Athletics

Wilderness

Trade

Provinces

The Orders

Evasion

Politics

Monsters

Mêlée

Missiles

Armour

Common Talents

Fortifications

Philosophy

Climbing

Riding

Barter

Spears

Bows

Breastplate

Etiquette

Herbalism

Foreigners

Orks

Elves

Dwarves

Snatchers

Deep Talents

Routing Armies

Butterfly Effect

Dwarven Artifacts

Snatcher Transformation

Mounted Archery

Spear Charges

Dodging Blades

Siege Machinery

Small Unit Tactics

Dwarven Tunnels

Cult Infiltration

Political Favours

Hellan Culture

Remulan Engineering

Odysan Politics

Medicine

Food Shipments

Royal Bloodline

People

Female Citizens

Ana

Dijana

Elena

Emira

Jasminka

Jovana

Katarina

Manda

Milena

Mirjana

Nada

Natasa

Sanja

Selma

Sonja

Vesna

Male Citizens

Aleksandar

Asim

Baltazar

Berne

Davor

Dragen

Dzevat

Ivan

Jovan

Lazar

Marko

Milan

Murat

Nermin

Pedrag

Stipe

Female Refugees

Adonia

Calista

Hespera

Miloslava

Svetlana

Vera

Eliza

Ilyana

Nora

Justina

Romana

Rhea

Male Refugees

Acheron

Dimitrios

Vasilios

Dobromir

Radek

Zelislav

Andrei

Kristo

Petko

Crassus

Flavian

Marius

Places

Veceric, the Capital City

Pavko City

Drazet City

Bragor City

Krunilo City

Veles Village

Kretar Village

Ostin Village

Kjarn Farmsteads

Svetlar Province

Krapina Province

Skadar Province

The Vojislan Mines

The Kreksad Forest

The Wall of Ashes

The Odysan Wood

The Thessalon Ruins

The Legios Stronghold

Mysteries

- Why has the Dragon risen in the southeast, and what hunger drives her?

- What woke the demonic Malarok deep in the eastern Dwarven mines?

- Who has found the Hellan Crown in the southwestern frontier, and what is it whispering?

- What is the Kreep and what can stop it from spreading to the northwestern farmlands?

- What caused the elemental monsters to strike our neighbouring nations and what does it want?

- Who will be the first to find the lost heir to the royal bloodline?

Annexes

This Game wouldn't have been possible without the generous support of the many Kickstarter backers. In addition for backing the game, they have also contributed extra content that you can use in your own games.

Kickstarter Backer Names

Consider using one of these names when you create an NPC during play!

Adam "Kicktraq" Clark Adam Hegemier Adam Koebel Adam Miller Adam R. Easterday Adam Rajski Adam Surber Adam Windsor Alex Wyatt Alicia Smith Amber Viescas Amos Hayes Ana "The Littlest Ninja" Silva Andreas Skyman Andrew Curtis Hull White Andrew Tmesis Merchant Andrew Whittle Andy Hauge Åsa Roos Ben "Cyril" Erickson Ben Kramer Ben Plopper Beth Tsai Brandon Oosterhoff Brian Forester Brun7 Kollektivet Bryce Perry Calaway Rohloff Calvin Shafer Cart Reed Charles "Wlad" Andrusyszyn Charles Crowe Cheryl Trooskin-Zoller Chris Angelini Chris Jensen Romer Chris Snyder Christian A. Nord Christine Pitre Christopher "Pocket" Earnhart Christopher Coulter Christopher Just Dane Ralston-Bryce Danny Keen Dave Hill David "Yoda" Odie David A. Hill Jr. David Hoberman David Lacerte David Terhune Del Benjamin Del Johnston Delbert W. Saunders Donald White Drnuncheon E. Damon Eden Brandeis Edouard Contesse Edward Saxton Emile de Maat Emperor Norton Eric M. Paquette Flavio Faz IV Flavio Mortarino Freyki Gabriel Velarde Gabriel Verdon Gregory Sanders Guillaume "Nocker" Herman Duyker Ian "Reth" Kitley Ian Cunningham Ian McFarlin Ingo | obskures.de

J. Derrick Kapchinsky Jack Gulick James Graham James Myers Jason Blalock Jason Corley Jason Tranter JayAngryProphet Jeffrey J.A. Fuller II Jeffrey Wikstrom Jennifer "Zenduck" Lewis Jennifer Fuss Jeremiah Frye Jeremy Kostiew Jeremy Morgan Jerome L Jerome Larré Jesse R. Davis Jessica Cohen JKPrince Joab Stieglitz Joe Beason Joe Sosta John LeBoeuf-Little John Poole Jonathan "Buddha" Davis Jonathan Moore Joseph Oliveira Josh Albritton Josh Crowe Josh Rensch Junius B. Stone III Justin Lee Kat L. Keiran Sparksman Ken Finlayson Kyle Forrester Lane Howe Larry Level 99 Games Lexi Gable Liam Murray Lionel Davoust Magpie Games Marcus Cope Marissa Kelly Mark Diaz Truman Mark Richardson Mark S Mark Shocklee Martin Greening Matias Dahlbäck Matt Blair Matt Leitzen Matthew Broome Matthew Coverdale Matthew Edwards Matthew Jackson Matthew Karabache Matthew McFarland Matthew Nielsen Matthew Orwig Matthew W. Sutton Mauro Ghibaudo Mendel Schmiedekamp Michael C. LaBossiere Michael Mockus Michael P. Lamoureux-Sauve Michael Stevens Michelle King Michelle Lyons-McFarland Mike Pitre Mopsothoth Morgan Weeks Moustafa Chamli Nat "woodelf" Barmore Nathan Lax Olivier Murith Ong Wei Cong Owen Thompson Patrick Brewer Paul Andinach Paul Burrows Pete Hurley Peter Aronson Peter R. Brooks Peter Tidd Petri Leinonen Philippe Debar Professor Thronberry R0N1C Rafael Torrubia Rakshukin "The Knowing" Randy Topliffe Rex Lupis Richard 'Vidiian' Greene Rishi Agrawal RJ Stewart Rob Justice Rob Masters Robert Rees Robert Slaughter Rolling Intentions Crew Ron Wilhelm Ryan Aech Ryan Percival Sadric01 Sage LaTorra Scott Scott Dunphy Scott Johnson Seth and Rachael Blevins Seth Clayton Shale Crom Shane "The Pain" Emmons Simon Ward Sophia Brandt Sophie River Cooper Stefan Ohrmann Stephen Joseph Ellis Steve Bergeron Steve Dempsey Ted Childers The Book Guy The Dan The Toxic Wombat Theo Clarke Thom Walker Thomas Kelley Thomas P. Dahmen Tim Jensen TJ Mathews Tom Flanagan Tom Ladegard Tomohisa Naka Tonya Bezpalko Travis S. Casey Trent "Ax_kidson" Boyd Trent Stephens Tristan Valentine Troy Lenze Tucker McKinnon Ty (Troll) Sawyer Vicki Hsu Wesley Dryden Willow Palecek Xavid Yolgie Zachary Erfman Zero Ninja

Kickstarter Backer-Created Beliefs

- Abhor nothing but hate

- Good deeds are the best prayer

- Omnitheism – everything is divine

- Abortion is murder

- Man is his own worst enemy

- There are no paradoxes due to our free will

- There's always a silver lining

- A life with laughter is a life worth living

- Good and Evil are absolute

- Luck guides every action

- Sweet fictions beat bitter truths.

- Purification can only come from suffering

- War does not determine who is right - only who is left

- What you give is what you get returned.

- Practicality does not override my ideals

- How far will you go for your own good

- I believe in the power of the now

- Life is not special, it is common

- We live in the best of all possible worlds

- The Stars know our fates!

- The eyes are doorways to the soul

- All governments should be run by friendly AIs

- There is a kind and loving God and he cares about me, personally

- We need to stop propagating the human race, we have destroyed our world enough

- Human happiness can only be achieved through personal freedom & responsibility

- Every human has a soul; no robot has a soul

- You only deserve what you have the strength to protect

- Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die

- A person is only responsible for their own actions

- No one is beyond redemption

- True immortality is the only and ultimate goal

- Democracies don't go to war with one another

Ludography

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Glossary & Index

Agenda: A one-sentence statement of intent describing a major but short-term goal a Faction hopes to achieve.

Advancing: The beginning of each episode where the players determine which Factions achieve their Agendas, who creates new Agendas, and how the ties between Factions change.

Attribute: A trait the represent's the character's inherent capability to perform a type of action, associated with size of die (D4, D6, D8, D10, D12 or D20).

- Body: The attribute for physical Conflicts.

- Heart: The attribute for social and emotional Conflicts.

- Mind: The attribute for mental and perceptual Conflicts.

- Spark: The attribute for dramatic and narrative control.

Belief: A declarative, subjective and controversial statement that the people playing the game seek to challenge and explore during play.

Closing: The end of the scene where you distribute Influence and remove Harm.

Collaboration: Free roleplaying, with each person making statements and declarations. **Conflict:** When two or more people disagree what should happen and they roll dice to determine the final outcome.

Faction: A major group or organization within the setting, Ties to other factions and a unifying Mandate.

Framing: The phase of play where three people collaboratively create the initial situation in a scene.

Platform: Description of where and when the scene takes place, including who is present.

Tilt: Description of an event or action that will force the characters into action Question: A single question that you are trying to answer with the scene.

GM: The Game Moderator. The single person playing the game responsible for portraying the setting and guiding the majority of the NPCs.

Harm: A temporary decrease in an Attribute as a result of a Conflict.

Influence: A resource earned by challenging Beliefs.

NPC: Non-Protagonist Characters. Characters in the fiction who are not under permanent control of any player.

Minor: Nameless and insignificant characters, memorably for their behaviours.

Major: Named characters with their own motivations, personalities, and histories. *Faces:* Named, significant, and GM-exclusive characters that represent individual Factions.

Mandate: Broad mission statements that either confirm or refute part of a Setting Belief

Player: A person participating in the game, portraying a single Protagonist Character.

PC: Protagonist Characters An important fictional character with Beliefs, Attributes and Talents, portrayed by a Player.

Settings: Fictional worlds with their own Factions and NPCs, portrayed by the Game Moderator during play.

Talent: A skill, ability or other learned capability possessed by a Protagonist Character. *Broad:* A general understanding of a wide-ranging topic. *Common:* A focus on a particular subject matter, the default. *Deep:* A specialization on a particular sub-discipline or application of skill

Ties: The diplomatic relationships and common history set between any two different Factions.