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Magnum
OPUS

A Shoujo Resource for

BESM

HEARTS

SWORDS

FLOWERS

SHOUJO ANIME
ROLE PLAYING

Hearts
Swords
Flowers

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Dedication

This book deals with manga and anime that covers a wide range, from the shoujo to the shounen, but is intended above all to be a resource for the roleplayer rather than for the manga expert. As such, the writers have followed trails which strayed into shounen areas, in the hopes of providing a wide-ranging picture for the GM or player.

With thanks to April, Beth, and Jeanne, in various order, for getting me closer to Aestheticism, Bishounen, and Yaoi.

Genevieve

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Introduction

So what is shoujo?

The word literally means "girl" or "young woman" in Japanese, and the genre began as a type of manga aimed directly at them, with a strong focus on character interaction, atmosphere, and complex dialogue. Dramatic and terrible events frequently happen to protagonists, antagonists, and bystanders, and are often used deliberately to explore the actions and reactions of the characters involved. The story may focus on flawed or outright evil characters — the results of a character's decisions, in the past or present, often compose a major part of the story — and cycles of redemption or corruption become major themes.

Shoujo can be romantic, or fantastical, or playful. Five girls are the reincarnations of warrior princesses from a world thousands of years ago, and must discover the truth about their past while struggling against a foe who has travelled down the millennia to confront them and destroy the world. A mysterious masked man haunts their footsteps, searching for a legendary crystal with the power to sustain worlds. Are their mysterious allies justified in killing in order to save the earth? Who is the Guardian of the Gate to Time? Will they ever find true love?

Shoujo can be dark and threatening. Two teenagers, brother and sister, live together in a somber and corrupt Tokyo, where the brother works as a medium and psychic. Their best friend is the local veterinarian, a kindly and gentle man. But what is the vet's dark secret, and why does he know killing magic? What bargain was once made and has been forgotten, but must be fulfilled within the year? Will the young medium be yet another sacrifice buried beneath the cherry tree?

Shoujo For Girls

Shoujo Manga, literally speaking, is manga that is marketed primarily to school-aged girls in Japan, and is written with them as the primary audience across a vast array of genres. However, it has caught on across a much wider audience, and the stories have themselves begun to reflect that. Strictly and literally, shoujo manga is supposed to be the province of teenage girls, and is written mainly for them. But as the target audience ages and still keeps on buying their favorite manga in order to read work by their favorite artists or about the characters they particularly loved, so in turn the stories have come to deal with more mature themes, and to embrace a wider selection of styles, to keep the attention (and money) of older readers. As a result, shoujo has broadened and deepened as a genre, and when something is described as "shoujo" these days, unless the speaker is being very specific indeed, it means a great deal more than just "manga for teenage girls."

Shoujo can be warped and twisted. Is it true that the young hero is the reincarnation of one of the two most powerful angels in creation? Why does he love his sister so much, and what is her affinity with lilies and water? Who is the strange veiled chancellor who controls Heaven with a tyrant's grasp? Why does the angel of death go masked? Who was the hero's best friend, millennia ago, before he was trapped in the form of a seven-bladed sword? Can the angel of fire ever be reconciled with his older brother? Who will be the 999th bride of Lucifer?

Shoujo themes and elements can appear in any genre, from hard science fiction to the wild west, or from samurai fantasy to the present day. What matters in shoujo is the relationships between characters (often the more twisted, the better) and the personal adventures and torments which each character must undergo. Nobody gets out unscathed. Everyone has to fight for their happy ending — if they get one at all. Villains can be honorable, and heroes can be petty. One story may come to an end, but another will be founded on its loose ends. The past always has secrets, and the future is never settled, however many prophecies may litter the world.

There used to be a wide divide between shounen (boys) and shoujo (girls) manga, more recently the two have become much more closely blended. It is rare to find a shounen manga without some trace of the character definition and relationships which used to be the province of shoujo. Similarly, a number of shoujo manga have the high detail of technology and weaponry, and the constant battles, which used to be the hallmark of shounen. It is no longer possible to split shoujo and shounen cleanly apart — even if shounen is still more prone to have fold-out diagrams of the heroes' armors where shoujo presents personality analyses, star signs, and blood types (believed to indicate personality) for the heroines. Artists such as CLAMP have heavy crossover appeal; they have stories serialized in shoujo magazines which have huge non-shoujo audiences (such as *X/1999*), and even appear in shounen manga serials, targeted towards that audience as well (the series *Chobits*). Art styles which were originally found almost entirely in shoujo books have made their way into shounen books as well — such as the series *Tenshi na konamaiki*, or *A Cheeky Angel*. Today, shoujo manga reflects an increasingly heterogonous society, and a much larger manga industry. Shoujo themes are similarly more and more common in role-playing games, however much shounen fighting such games may also involve, and deserve further exploration.
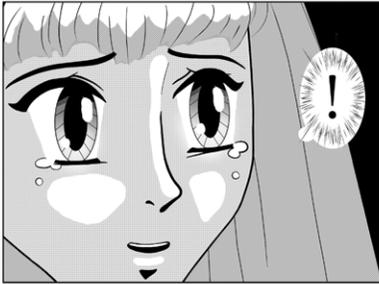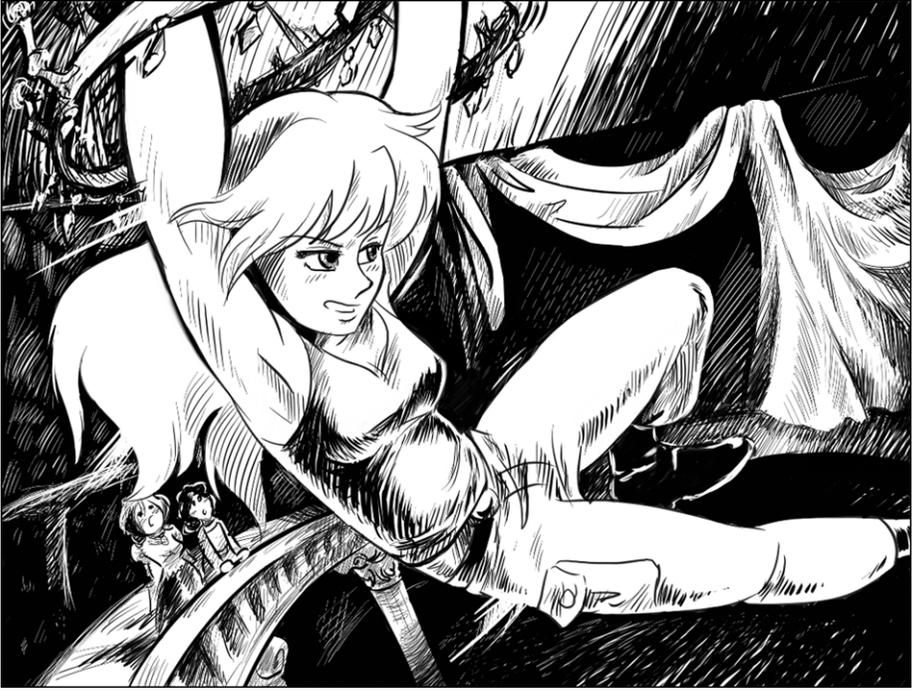
Chapter One

    Joanna stared up at her target from the now-empty gaming board, littered with corpses, which had served as arena for the game of human chess. Sparing a moment of disgust for the corruption which filled the heart of these degenerate, rich industrialists and crime bosses, she sheathed her katana and leapt for the chandelier hanging above. Her fingers caught the gilded edge, and she swung perilously above the black and white squares, pivoting her body to bring the chandelier round in a long curve so that she could drop into the balcony where her target was recoiling in fear.

    And then she saw the face below in the mob. Just one man in the crowd, bodyguard hustling him towards the exit like so many of the others present. But that face — the face of the man who had looked out of the back of the car as it drove away, leaving her sister crumpled unconscious on the ground. The face of the man who had ruined her parents and let them take the blame for the financial failure of their company. That face which had haunted her dreams, night after night.

    Her body finished the motion, and she landed neatly on the edge of the balcony, bringing out her katana and decapitating the cringing target in a single moment, but her focus was on that face below.

    "Mikazori!" she screamed, and leaped into the crowd, blood and mayhem on her mind, a terrible coldness in her eyes.

Shoujo is not necessarily a particular setting — it is a type of story, whether comic or tragic, full of wonderful art and emotional agony. Characters should suffer, even if it's comic suffering. They should also triumph, even if it is a painful, bitter triumph, with everyone else dead, and leaving them with the knowledge that they ended up releasing a deity who is going to bring down the entire world in flames and thunder. (*RG Veda* — be careful about how you interpret your prophecies.) This chapter is an overview of the genre, considering some conventions which occur regularly enough to be noteworthy; gaming tips will follow in later chapters.

Comedy And Tragedy

Shoujo can be humorous, even slapstick. A shoujo campaign can have a happy ending every week, even if it involves the hero and heroine locking themselves away while they recover from a compulsion to embrace each

other on hearing the sound of a gong. (It's amazing what magic mushrooms can do in the hands of a properly motivated Amazon wanting to collect her "husband" — just watch *Ranma 1/2* for details.) The hero can be regularly battered to a pulp in "training sessions" for exotic martial arts methods, or in fights with increasingly exotic opponents. Martial Arts Tea Ceremony! Martial Arts with nylon underwear! Martial Arts Takeout Race which just happens to climax at the home of one of the most annoying regular opponents in the series! A master of the Anything Goes School of Martial Arts who is old, wizened, incredibly annoying, and steals female underwear! Heroes plagued by the eternal frustration of a dozen fiancees! (Of course, the one that they really want will be the one who most frequently ends up smashing them into the floor in frustration.) Cute misunderstandings, amusing

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Comic Conventions In Shoujo

Some things in shoujo are always amusing — to onlookers, at least, if not to the participants. These include:

☻ Members of one sex walking in on members of the other sex nude in the bath.

☻ Children making innocently tactless comments.

☻ Cute young admirers besieging dour but handsome heroes or heroines.

☻ Lechers getting an (usually well-deserved) come-uppance.

☻ The heroine's appalling cooking, and the hero having to try to eat it with a straight face.

☻ Attempting to spy on a close friend's date "for his/her own good" though actually due to wild jealousy.

☻ Innocent heroes or heroines being utterly unable to recognize a romantic approach.

☻ The brash hero making the most tactless possible comment.

Tragic Conventions In Shoujo

Equally, some events are always tragic, though the degree of sorrow and angst depends on the general tone of the campaign.

❧ Not only does your true love try to kill you while brainwashed, but he says that he hates you.

❧ You discover that your most trusted friend is actually your destined enemy.

❧ Your entire family gets massacred because of some action or quality of yours.

❧ You find out that you've been manipulated/brainwashed for most of the series into working for the villains.

❧ You realize that the person you love is in love with someone else.

❧ You are forced to rebel against Heaven for the greater good.

❧ You have to accept your destiny to either preserve or destroy the world.

❧ You discover that not only that are you the sole inheriting child of the enemy, but that they were right all along.

accidental meetings resulting in total chaos, hero and heroine accidentally walking into the bathroom at the same moment — and both stark naked.

Most shoujo stories have a dominant emotional tone, whether serious or blatantly humorous. They can and regularly do flip from one mood to the other with astonishing rapidity, however. A sudden pratfall can enliven a dark, angstful series, while a moment of sincere emotion can bring weight and even tragedy to an otherwise comic story. In *Rurouni Kenshin*, the serious and tarnished hero notices a sudden lack of noise from the heroine's bathroom, and deduces that she is on the point of committing suicide by drowning herself. He bursts in to try to convince her to live, to find that she was just washing her hair, is not amused to have him see her in the nude, and has a surprisingly good aim with heavy objects. In *X/1999*, Yuzuriha Nekoi's first reaction on meeting the angstful and not overly tall Kamui is, "Second shortest in the class! Do they stick you in front when they take the class picture?" In *Gensomaden Saiyuki*, two of the heroes argue over food in the back seat of their jeep in between angstful fights to the death with swarming youkai.

GMs can take advantage of this, scattering in moments of either type to prevent the campaign from becoming either a total angst-fest or a purely comic game. Players may also wish to introduce tragic or comic moments — in fact, I find that players will often wish to create a humorous situation. Put them anywhere near a public bath-house, and they'll be wandering in and out of it nude before you drink a can of sake.

Symbolism In Shoujo

Shoujo brims with symbolism. The GM can use this to both create a mood, and to foreshadow future events. Players can also work with the symbolism which they perceive, in order to deepen the resonance of the story, and to set up later irony or suffering for their characters. (After all, dramatic irony can make a wonderful storyline . . .)

There are two obvious types of symbolism: that which the characters in the manga recognize, and that which they do not recognize, but the readers do. The two categories can occasionally overlap, but are usually separate.

Recognized Symbolism

Symbolism which characters recognize includes such things as a "themed" sentai, or team, where each character is linked to a particular element, or guardian planet, or flower, or similar. (It does not have to be strictly accurate with regards to genuine mythology or history. If the characters feel it appropriate to have a triple goddess with aspects of Kali (destruction), Maya (illusion), and Eos (dawn) so that they can be her symbolic avatars, go with it, and add in a few more artistic touches to suit the style.)

Group Symbolism: In *Sailor Moon*, Rei Hino is the Passionate Fighter, Sailor Mars. This brings a lot of symbolic baggage with it. Her name, Rei Hino, literally means "Spirit of Fire." Her favorite colors are red and black, her favorite gemstone is a ruby, and she is hot-tempered. (These details are all provided at various points in the manga, and frequently summarized in little summaries about the characters.) Her attacks all involve forms of fire, and her foretelling of the future is based on fire-gazing. Symbolically speaking, she has all the strengths and weaknesses of her particular element. The others in the team all have their own particular orientations — and this is accepted among them, and regarded as perfectly natural, though it may cause occasional jokes.

Individual Symbolism: Symbolism can be individual rather than part of a set or team. In *Tokyo Babylon*, Seichirou Sakurazuka is the Sakurazukamori, the Guardian of the Cherry Blossom Burial Mound, a sorcerer and an assassin. His illusions dissolve to cherry blossoms when broken. As discussed below, the symbolism of cherry blossom (or *sakura*) in Japanese culture has strong connections with death, as it demonstrates the transience of life and beauty. The darkly ominous and seductive Sakurazukamori kills children and buries them beneath the cherry tree which he guards.

Unrecognized Symbolism

Unrecognized symbolism occurs around the characters (as if drawn in by the author, one might say) and conveys meaning and foreshadowing to the reader. For instance, cherry blossoms flower and die quickly, and are a symbol for transience, or beauty, or death: all these possible meanings come from the concept of *mono no aware*, the idea that beauty can be found only in impermanence. When a character in shoujo manga has cherry blossom petals scattered on him in a gust of wind, it may be a symbol of death, or of coming drastic change.

Music: Samisen (a stringed instrument) music is associated with the geisha world; when the instrument is used in anime as background music to a meeting between two characters, the subtext is immediately stated to those who know the symbolism. Romance or sex, or both, are foreshadowed.

Nature: Nature itself may echo interpersonal relationships, at the GM's whim. Storm clouds may gather in the sky while the characters argue below, or rain may run slowly down the windows while hearts break inside a lonely apartment. A happy young heroine will find the birds singing while she passes, while brooding samurai inevitably end up on snowy landscapes or in corpse-strewn battlefields. Assume that nature arranges itself to provide the most meaningful and symbolic background for the confrontation or other scene in progress, and you won't go far wrong.

Signature Symbolism: Sometimes a particular symbol can saturate an entire series. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, the action takes place at Ohtori Academy. The ironwork around the school is wrought in rose-patterns. The heroine and her best friend, the mysterious Anthy Himemiya, drink tea out of delicate bone china with roses painted inside each cup. Duels are fought between the Student Council (all of whom wear a rose-pattern seal ring) where the objective is to cut away the rose which your opponent is wearing on his chest. Anthy herself tends the roses in the conservatory at the center of the school, and is the Rose Bride who brings with her the power to revolutionize the world. (Or so says the mysterious Ends of the World, who sends secret letters to the Student Council, and who is cultivating the school as his own private garden . . .)

Past History, Present Danger

Characters always have history, even if they don't yet know about it. In Sailor Moon, the central group of heroines is understandably unaware at the beginning that they are the reincarnations of the Moon Princess and her four Sailor Scouts. Further revelations about their past — and the problems associated with it — continue through the series. Truly, no shoujo hero or

heroine can outrun the tragedies brought by their past — though they may have an interesting time trying.

The main characters of *Silent Moebius* are an excellent demonstration of this principle. These five women are all reasonably powerful individuals, and form the core of the Attacked Mystification Police, but they all have the sort of history which would bring many roleplayers slavering to their feet in enthusiasm. Yuki Saiko, the youngest of the group and a psychic, was raised in a secret project to develop ESPer weapons. (What happened to the other subjects?) Kiddy Phenil was nearly killed in battle with a megadyne (a cyborg) and was only saved by a combat graft which replaced 70% of her body with bionic parts, making her what she hates most. Nami Yamigumo is a Shinto priestess, heir to the House of Yamigumo and inheritor of its divine Ki-Rin dagger, and has been forced by her family to face potentially lethal trials. Lebia Maverick is able to enter cyberspace, due to a number of cybernetic implants in her body, and has a data bank stored in an orbital satellite. Kasumi Liqueur, the most endangered of all, is the daughter of a magician who was responsible for bringing the Lucifer Hawks to earth. Even if she has inherited great powers from him, together with Grospoliner, king of swords, she is also the target of the Lucifer Hawks, who seek her in order to open the gateway further. Their leader, Rally Cheyenne, is the product of crossbreeding between a Lucifer Hawk and a human being — her sister, Rosa, serves Nemesis and the Lucifer Hawks.

If the hero was once a government assassin, even though he may have attempted to forget his past and begin a non-lethal lifestyle, rest assured that his past will haunt him constantly. This may be through old enemies, betrayed friends, or challengers hunting for the fabled duellist and endangering all those around him. If a heroine deliberately had herself made into a cyborg after crippling injuries in order to hunt down and kill the cyborg who wounded her, then she can expect a future of pain and angst. She will have to face transplant anxiety, problems with a boyfriend who is physically far weaker than she is, enemy attempts to manipulate the bionics in her body, being framed for murder which has apparently been committed by a cyborg, and a permanent nemesis in the person of the cyborg who attacked her in the first place.

A character's history provides wonderful fodder for the current campaign. Players should not feel afraid to provide details of past mistakes, tragedies, enemies, and even victories when describing their character; they are laying up material for future adventures which the GM can utilize. Equally, the GM should not abuse her players' trust by forcing the characters through an endless cycle of angst, pain, and torment based on their background (unless that is what the players want!) but should, as in the shoujo genre, provide opportunities to resolve past mistakes or to better the current situation. The part-cyborg can learn to live with her new body; the

psychic can say goodbye to her fellow experimental subjects and find a new life; the sorcerer's daughter can knowingly choose to resist the Entities to which her father mistakenly opened a gate. Players should not hesitate to add color and depth to their personal history, as it will only serve to deepen the intensity of the campaign. There's nothing wrong, in shoujo, with having a dark past. It's the present and the future which are the focus of play, and a bright future can be all the brighter in contrast.

Or perhaps the characters would like to give in to their past, repeat their past mistakes, and commit their previous follies once again? It's quite understandable — they did it once before, after all, and old habits are very easy to fall back into. It also leads to agonizing hesitation over the course of action, drawn-out moments of temptation and doubt, and other enjoyable character-expanding details. Let the assassin choose the expedient route with his sword, and the sorceress decide to give way to the Lucifer Hawks, or let the psychic despair and allow the government to take her into custody again. Perhaps their friends will rescue them from this addictive pattern of behavior? Or maybe they'll abandon them — and meet them on the opposite side at the next battlefield?

Misconduct by one character can spread to an imbroglio that will involve the entire group. The character's bad habits and tragic history may become a recurrent theme (or a running joke) which causes everyone problems. (Even if it's just a case of the heroine's gluttony drawing her into dangerous situations, as with Miaka in *Fushigi Yugi*.) Maybe unforeseen tragedy will result from a minor backsliding incident. Or maybe, in a lighter campaign, the hero's reluctance to ever learn manners will simply result in him being hammered through the roof and into low orbit (*Ranma 1/2*). The story won't end because the character chooses to act in a particular way, but merely spawns further campaign. The GM observes the action, and allows the universe to reward — or punish — the hero appropriately. Dark futures are as much fun to roleplay as bright ones.

The GM may wish to introduce aspects of the character's past that the player had no idea existed. This can, unless handled carefully, result in the player feeling persecuted at the sudden appearance of hideous past secrets and pursuing enemies, or disliking what her character has become. The GM should not overdo things, and should not rewrite the character's history in blatant contradiction of what the player has already stated. If the player has stated that she is amnesiac about her past, and has a set of kendo skills which her background fails to justify, then by all means make her an escaped government experimental assassin. However, if she has lovingly delineated her happy childhood, and based the strength of her character on it, then it is inappropriate for the GM to suddenly tear her character history apart. Equally, one assassin is permissible, but to have an entire ninja society hunting the character is overdoing things, unless the player has actually expressed a desire to be quarry.

Results And Consequences

An unexpectedly satisfying aspect of shoujo is that actions rarely take place in a void: what the characters do will have an impact on the continuing story, and not be forgotten by next week. If the teen superheroes are caught sneaking out to fight crime, their parents will trust them less (and may insist on a curfew), which may provoke emotional complications, and will certainly cause practical ones! More seriously, if the heroine abandons her best friend in an alternate world while attempting to return home — even if she didn't realize that she was doing so — then the betrayed friend will seek revenge, and may swear herself as priestess to a dark god in order to obtain it. Even if the action is minor and inconsequential, a matter of a careless word or a joke, it may be the crucial weight which tips the balance and causes a later breakdown. Equally, a casual act of kindness from a generous nature may be the vital action which later persuades an enemy to trust the hero, or convinces the enemy that the hero is an honorable man. It works both ways.

However, this is an extremely useful tool in campaign evolution. Make the players pay for what their characters choose to do. If they are faced with a "lesser of two evils" situation, don't let them get away with the lesser evil unpunished. Confront them with the consequences of their actions. And if they actually fail their duty, flee the field of battle, or display outright selfishness, then make them pay. Let them meet an innocent relation of someone who died in an earthquake which they could have prevented (*X/ 1999*.) Have the entire school mock them for being beaten in a martial arts fight due to over-confidence (too many *Ranma 1/2* episodes to mention.) Let their gentle, kindly elder sister explain, privately, that she is disappointed in them. Allow them to encounter their long-awaited enemy in a position where they must ask people whom they have previously wronged for help. The players will love you for it, even if their characters are busy staring gloomily over the edge of the roof in the rain and pondering suicide.

Besides, punishment leads to redemption, which means action, conflict, excitement, and other really interesting roleplay. Players treasure good solid character history — why deprive them of it?

Chapter Two

It had been six hours since they had delivered the kabbalistic manuscript to Professor McCoy; Nataku could only hope that it had been long enough for the expert to analyze it and decrypt it. The demons, led by Baron Danysk, had been desperate to retain it, and had fought tooth and nail (literally) in an attempt to escape with it. His colleague Jordan was still in hospital, unconscious, with his shoulder bandaged from where one of the creatures had managed to stab him.

This manuscript might provide the vital clues as to what was really going on: who had assassinated Duke Chienaplu of the Seventh Order of Hell, why the forces of Heaven were staging pinpoint strikes on museums across the world, and exactly what had been going on last night when he had found a succubus in his bed.

A thin tinkling sound came from four floors above his head. He glanced upwards, then dived back, rolling and coming to his feet, as a rain of shards of glass sprayed across the pavement where he had been standing. In the window which had just been broken crouched the twisted, malformed Baron Danysk, silhouetted against a blazing fire inside the room. In the demon's arms hung the unconscious form of Professor McCoy, her long hair blown back by the wind.

The demon chuckled, then addressed him in his hatefully cultured tones. "So, Nataku . . . a moment late, perhaps? Don't worry, mortal, I have the Eyrie Manuscript — and by midnight, I shall have your soul to go with it!"

Eyrie of the Fallen, episode 21

Character Types and Shoujo Themes

The writers of shoujo series would naturally like to claim that every manga or anime is individual, distinct, and full of brilliantly original ideas, the likes of which have never been seen by any **otaku** (fanboy) before. However, it must be admitted that certain character types do keep on turning up, and certain themes recur time and time again. Of course, this can be a good thing — if the genre didn't have definable stereotypes, or recognizable plotlines, it would be impossible to distinguish it from anything else. In the good shoujo work, we find known tropes and characters, but put together in a way that gives an original storyline, with plenty of surprises for the characters, and even a few for the viewers. Here are a few of the character stereotypes and plot themes, to help a GM add a bit of shoujo flavor to her own campaign, and to assist players in getting into the spirit of the thing. ("The flowers of the cherry tree are white as snow. Do you know why they are sometimes pink? It is because they are nourished on the blood of men . . .")

Character Types

Certain generic types of character do tend to recur in shoujo manga. While there may be individual peculiarities of storyline — in fact, there usually are — it is still often possible to watch a single episode of a show and identify the "magical girl", the "mysterious masked bishonen", the "psycho villain", the "wise elder", or the "hapless innocent who will die horribly in order to galvanize the hero into action". Most characters, however, will be a combination of stereotypes; a Magical Girl with Obsessive Expert tendencies in a particular area, or a Teacher who is also occasionally a Possessive Predator. A few examples follow, which can be combined or altered to suit the individual character as necessary, and are provided in order to give an example of stock figures who can help serve as linchpins for a campaign. These stereotypes can be used for both heroes and villains. There's plenty of room for the main villain to have a Best Rival, for the team of evil ghosts to have a psychotic but honorable Family Protector, or for the heroes to be assisted by an Obsessive Expert of dubious morality but great utility ...

Angstful Hero

What do you do when the fate of the world depends on you, when your best friend has betrayed you, when your brother from a previous incarnation wants to kill you (or worse), when you're on a quest to destroy the usurping God-Emperor but know that your travelling companion is fated to kill you, and when you're going to fail your college exams at this rate? The answer, in shoujo, is simple. Angst. Angst with a luxurious abandon which would turn most vampires (assuming you aren't one

already) green with envy. Stare at the horizon, refuse assistance from well-meaning friends, deliver long soliloquies while sitting on the roof at night, explain to everyone that you can't cope any longer, and hesitate fatally before finally taking action. Then angst some more about the tragic consequences of your hesitation.

Most shoujo heroes and heroines have moments of doubt, indecision, and hesitation — it's part of the genre, in its studies of emotion and psychology. Even villains are allowed to ponder their actions moodily, or to consider their future and mutter darkly about fate, prophecy, and unavoidable tragedy. In lighter shoujo, the hero can still have moments of depression and self-doubt. Fortunately, something almost always happens to jolt him out of his angst. This can range from a well-timed word from a friend, or a crisis which demands his attention, to the death of someone he loves because he didn't react in time. He will then spring into action, and do his best to resolve the situation. Particularly evil villains have been known to do their best to induce angst in heroes, in order to undermine them and cause them to doubt themselves, by such tactics as murdering innocents and blaming the hero for it. ("She would never have died if it hadn't been for you!") Heroes goaded by such tactics tend to either go into severe depression, or react with extreme prejudice, or both.

Examples: **Kamui in *X:1999*; Tsuzuki in *Yami no Matsuei*; Haruto in *Haunted Junction*; Setsuna in *Angel Sanctuary*; Yasha in *RG Veda*; Chihaya in *Earthian*; Vampire Hunter D, in *Vampire Hunter D* and *Bloodlust*; and most shoujo heroes and heroines, at some point in the storyline.**

Best Rival

Heroes and heroines tend to have particular rivals, who are constantly trying to best them in some particular field, but who will nevertheless help them in truly important matters (such as the lifting of a curse, a life-or-death battle, or keeping someone who they both love safe). However, in non-crisis moments, challenges from the Best Rival are frequent. This may range from jumping out at them while screaming, "Ranma Saotome, prepare to die!" to comparing bust sizes. (Never tell Lina Inverse she's not well built.) Best Rivals are particularly common in stories centering on martial arts.

While Best Rivals have a lot in common with Stalwart Friends, they are not quite as reliable (although they are probably extremely stubborn) and can often be tricked into something dangerous by a cunning third party, under the belief that this will give them the vital advantage they need over the hero. Best Rivals can show up in both light-hearted and serious shoujo, though in serious shoujo the complications of their actions can be much more painful, and their final decision to stand beside the hero is much more emotionally weighted.

Examples: **Ranma and Ryoga in *Ranma 1/2*; Ryoko and Ayeka in *Tenchi Muyo*; Sakura and Li in *Card Captor Sakura*; Meimi and Asuka Jr. in *Saint Tail*.**

Family Protector

Whether aggressive or pacifistic, this character is the linchpin, rock, and support of a family group or set of friends which is prominent in the storyline. In *Ranma 1/2*, Kasumi Tendo is the mother-substitute, cooking, cleaning, providing emotional support, and merely saying, "Oh my," when the dojo roof is blown off by yet another challenger or weird magical assault. In *Yami no Matsuei*, the department secretary Tatsumi is protective of his department, and is willing to use his considerable talents as a Kagetsukai if necessary to keep them safe. (He's also a skinflint and ruthlessly cuts expense budgets, but that's another story.) The Family Protector keeps the group safe, functioning, and together.

In lighter shoujo, the Family Protector may be inefficient, absent-minded, capable of obsessing over minutiae while ignoring spaceships hovering overhead, constantly in the middle of a crisis, or all of the above. In more serious shoujo, she will be aware of the dangers which constantly threaten her family, and either ready to respond with all her strength and skill, or conscious that she cannot protect them, but willing to sacrifice herself in any case. Everyone in the group tends to like and respect the Family Protector, though they aren't always ready to admit it. (Fortunately, the Family Protector usually has at least one obnoxious habit, even if it's

only something as mild as "believes the best of everyone, whatever the situation", or they would be too good to be true.) In darker stories, the honorable-but-misguided Family Protector of a group of villains always makes a good adversary, while a psychotic Family Protector enlivens any horror shoujo.

Examples: **Kasumi Tendo in *Ranma 1/2*; Tatsumi in *Yami no Matsuei*; Belldandy in *Ah! My Goddess*; Cho Hakkai in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*; and Sorata in *X:1999*.**

Flamboyant Stranger

Not everyone in shoujo is willing to explain their motivations and purposes to the heroes (or villains), let alone cooperate with them. The Flamboyant Stranger usually has a specific project under way, which may conflict with the heroes' own designs. He or she — both are equally common - will only rarely speak with the heroes, and even then it's usually just a warning to stay out of his way. He is mysterious, elegant, unforthcoming, intriguing, and continually crosses paths with the characters while at the same time complaining about how they are getting in his way. His secret project is bound to involve the characters or their dependents in some way.

If Flamboyant Strangers become a regular part of the storyline, they usually develop links with other characters. This may be because the heroes have foiled the Stranger, or assisted him, or stumbled into his path at the very moment when he was about to seal away the demon and then spent the next week trying to trace the mysterious Stranger in the trenchcoat with the strange spells . . . In any case, it is difficult for a Stranger to remain part of a campaign without developing some ties to other major characters, whether it is as lover, teacher, friend, regular rival, or enemy.

Examples: **Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune in *Sailor Moon*, before their identities are revealed; Mille Feuille in *Sorcerer Hunters*; Darkside in *Darkside Blues*; Mephistopheles in *Monster City*.**

Guide and Teacher

Every hero needs someone to drill her in advanced combat techniques, to teach her the secret sorcery which will allow her to reach a new level of power, to expand her mind in directions undreamed-of, to point her in the direction of the hero, and to generally be a nuisance by trying to organize her life. Teachers and Guides are important characters in steering the campaign, but they also tend to be annoying to their students and followers: either they have obnoxious personal habits, or they refuse to pass on useful information at a relevant point, or both. GMs will probably find the latter character traits useful in persuading the characters not to rely on the Teacher too much.

Teachers and Guides are often removed before a final confrontation with the major villain of the plotline, by demands of prophecy ("Only you can hope to confront him alone!"), distraction ("Silky darlings!"), narrative adjustment ("My leg . . . you must go on alone . . ."), or simple death. Even if they are present, they rarely take an active role, allowing the hero to take center stage. They frequently have a past history full of interesting deeds, bitter enemies, tragic mistakes, lost romances, and horrific secrets, all of which will come back to haunt them at inconvenient moments.

Examples: **Kujaku in *RG Veda*; Sailor Pluto in *Sailor Moon*; Tai Yi-Jun in *Fushigi Yugi*; Cologne in *Ranma 1/2*; Kanzeon Bosatsu in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*; Ichirou Mihara in *Angelic Layer*; and Hinoto in *X/1999*.**

Hapless Victim

A Hapless Victim can be expected to suffer. In lighter shoujo, they are the constant target (deliberate or accidental) for the villain's evil plots, and their tendency to wander into every possible danger can only be compared to Lois Lane's ability to end up in trouble every week on Superman. If the villain's plan of the week involves using evil jewellery to suck out people's souls, they'll have bought a bracelet at the shop in question. If the villain is holding an art gallery hostage, they chose that day to go and enjoy high culture. And if one of the regular cast has an attack which causes collateral damage, they're always caught in the backblast. In more serious shoujo, the character is destined to meet a Horrible Fate, and the observant reader can usually see it coming; she will die in a way which causes the hero to come to a crucial decision, or be a victim of an inevitable betrayal, or something similar.

Hapless Victims tend to be pleasant, sweet, gentle, and generally nice characters, making their fate all the more tragic (or amusing, in ridiculous situations). One can see why the heroes care about them, and why their doom is such a crucial point in the plotline. Hapless Victims can be of either

gender; male Hapless Victims are usually stoic, affectionate, reliable types, while female Victims are more openly loving, gentle, and fluffy. The Hapless Victim is often merged with the Stalwart Friend, leading viewers to conclude that the character has a tendency towards masochism.

Examples: **Kotori in *X:1999*, Naru Osaka in *Sailor Moon*, Anthy Himemiya in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (apparently), and Princess Emeraude in *Magic Knight Rayearth*.**

Kid

The Kid is not always a child in terms of age, just in his outlook and behavior. He acts with an imperfect understanding of the adult world, failing to grasp concepts of honor, discretion, privacy, courtesy, wisdom, and when to keep his mouth shut. He can be used to catalyze the plot by inquiring innocently (and at the top of his voice) whether the hero and heroine are in love, or by mentioning a private assignation at the worst possible moment. The Kid has obsessive hobbies (such as collecting female underwear), manners which are either bad or excessively cute, and is usually greedy, lazy, or both. Unfortunately, the heroes and heroines are morally bound to protect him for some reason or other, much to their frequent regret.

The Kid can be either male or female, but is unlikely to get involved in any relationships other than the occasional severe crush on a totally impossible target. He usually has some sort of power (minor illusions, expert martial arts, Implausible But Irresistible Cuteness) which can be useful in emergencies. Kids very rarely understand the full complexity of the relationships going on around them, and frequently get things wrong — or worse still, get them right. ("But if you like her, why don't you kiss her the way father used to kiss mother?") Even in more serious shoujo, a Kid can

be used to break the tension, or to lighten the general atmosphere. However, Kids can also cut to the heart of complicated moral issues with childish simplicity, or provide eerie commentaries on current events in more horror-themed shoujo. A Kid can be used by the GM to point out selfishness or dishonorable behavior to which the heroes are deliberately blinding themselves.

Examples: **Ashura in *RG Veda* (when not displaying his alternate adult personality as destroying god); Happosai in *Ranma 1/2* (though old, his behavior is definitely childish); Shippo the kitsune cub in *Inu-Yasha*; Son Goku in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*; and Chibi-Usa in *Sailor Moon* (a perfect example of how annoying even a cute Kid can be).**

Love Complication

This character is usually something else as well as a Love Complication, but this feature defines his or her most important role in the overall drama. Love Complications are additional suitors thrown in to complicate the hero or heroine's life, pursuing their adored one (who may be of the same sex) in the certainty that if they can only find the right tactic, victory will be theirs. This "right tactic" may involve brainwashing shampoos, electrical shocks, beating your love in single combat, impressing your love by your mastery of any skill or art you choose to name (such as kendo, sorcery, or Martial Arts Cheerleading), or old standbys such as removing your rivals by turning them into ducks. (Removing one's rivals is a sure-fire winning tactic in any case — or so most Love Complications believe.)

While it is more usual to have several girls pursuing a single boy, the converse can also be true. Love Complications show up at the most awkward moments, and as the most awkward people. They are more usually found in light-hearted shoujo than in serious shoujo, but they are often used as a leavening source of humor in serious shoujo. (A dark, obsessive, psychotic would-be-romance is better defined as a Possessive Predator, and is discussed elsewhere.)

Examples: **Shampoo, Mousse, Ukyo, Ryoga, and Tatewaki Kuno in *Ranma 1/2*; Tira Misu and Chocolat in *Sorcerer Hunters*; Lum in *Urusei Yatsura*; Ryoko and Princess Ayeka in *Tenchi Muyo*; Aburatsubo in *Maho Tsukai Tai*, or *Magic Users Club*.**

Magical Girl

This character usually has two identities. There is the "normal" persona, the everyday schoolgirl or teenager or secretary, who is apparently just a regular person (though who usually has at least one extraordinary talent, such as music, computers, or racing-car driving), and there is the sparkly gorgeous smiter of evil, with fancy (and minimal) costume, attacks with

Cute Pets

Cute pets, whether they are enchanted toys, neat little robots, magical animals, well-trained pets, or mystical guardians that are currently looking like cute toys because they are low on power, frequently turn up in lighter shoujo. They are usually found together with Magical Girls, either as teachers and guardians, or as beloved pets and convenient allies. While they are rarely directly helpful in combat, they may offer useful advice, or be keeping valuable magical items for the point when the heroines are "ready" for them. Cute pets often have annoying personal habits such as gluttony, laziness, or continually criticizing their owners' bad habits. They occasionally turn out to be the creator of the world (as in *Magic Knight Rayearth*), but this is extremely rare.

Examples: **Kerberos in *Card Captor Sakura*; Jeff in *Maho Tsukai Tai*; Luna and Artemis in *Sailor Moon*; Chu-Chu in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*; Hakkuryu in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*; and Mokona in *Magic Knight Rayearth*.**

dramatic names, and frequently a cute pet to give her helpful (and disregarded) advice. Magical Girls are young, cute, pretty, and usually virtuous (though they may have minor vices such as gluttony or laziness). They often show up in teams, with each member of the team having a particular responsibility, skill, and elemental or other symbolism.

Sometimes the Magical Girl does not actually have a secret identity, but develops unexpected sorcerous or psychic powers due to a new responsibility or status. (When Miaka in Fushigi Yugi becomes the Priestess of Suzaku, she develops the ability to call Suzaku, and a tie to her seishi.) However, most Magical Girls do have a transformation sequence into their powered identity (often involving strange lights, floating in mid-air, and a costume change) and do attempt to keep this identity a secret. Whole storylines can be based on attempting to hide the true identity of Rapier Butterfly Princess, the protector of the local neighborhood . . .

Attack names are usually appropriate to the symbolism of the Magical Girl's identity. Sailor Mars uses Mars Fire Sniper, Sailor Venus uses Venus Love and Beauty Shock, and Sakura invokes the powers of the Clow Cards which she owns. There are few if any Magical Boys, probably because the cuteness and sweetness associated with the part is inappropriate to male characters; in such storylines, the male characters are usually Mysterious Masked Bishonen or Stalwart Friends.

Examples: **Sakura in *Card Captor Sakura*; Miaka in *Fushigi Yugi*; the three Magic Knights (Umi, Fuu, and Hikaru) in *Magic Knight Rayearth*; Sae Sawanoguchi in *Maho Tsukai Tai*; and all the heroines in *Sailor Moon* and *Wedding Peach*.**

Mysterious Masked Bishonen

Who is that brooding figure in tuxedo or kimono or spandex or trenchcoat or traditional costume of some sort, stepping in episode after episode to protect the heroine(s) at a crucial moment, exchanging deep, meaningful glances with her? What is his secret, and how come he knows so much about what's going on but refuses to share the information? And why does he have such a similar profile to the ordinary friend (or enemy) of the heroine in everyday life?

The Mysterious Masked Bishonen is protecting the heroines (or heroes) for deep and serious purposes which they do not yet fully understand. He may be unsure as to whether they are the Destined Heroes, or may be searching for something which only they can find for him. Eventually his secret identity (usually somewhat obvious to players, if not to the characters) will be revealed, and he will become a trusted friend and regular ally, though he remains prone to keeping back information that he really should have shared. Mysterious Masked Bishonen have an unfortunate tendency to be brainwashed by the villains of the storyline, and turned into their minion/lover/colleague (as the GM deems most appropriate). They are more common in semi-serious or Magical Girl storylines; in more serious stories, one tends to get the Brooding Stranger instead.

Examples: **Tuxedo Mask (from *Sailor Moon*) is the best known of the genre, and has been frequently parodied.**

Obsessive Expert

While most characters in shoujo are mildly obsessive about their particular skills or hobbies, the Obsessive Expert takes matters a step further. The Obsessive Expert (male or female are equally common) believes firmly that his particular area of expertise is the answer to all human problems, can resolve all difficulties, and is the highest form of art or science that any human being (or other form of character) could be called upon to master. Whether he deals with giant mecha, medieval alchemy, martial arts, rhythmic gymnastics, kendo, ancient secrets, or anything else, he will be glad to use his knowledge to assist those around him. (Actually, stopping him assisting those around him may be the difficult thing.) Obsessive Experts see everything through the lens of their particular interest; this can be a comic thing in lighter shoujo, or a tragic meditation on humanity in darker shoujo.
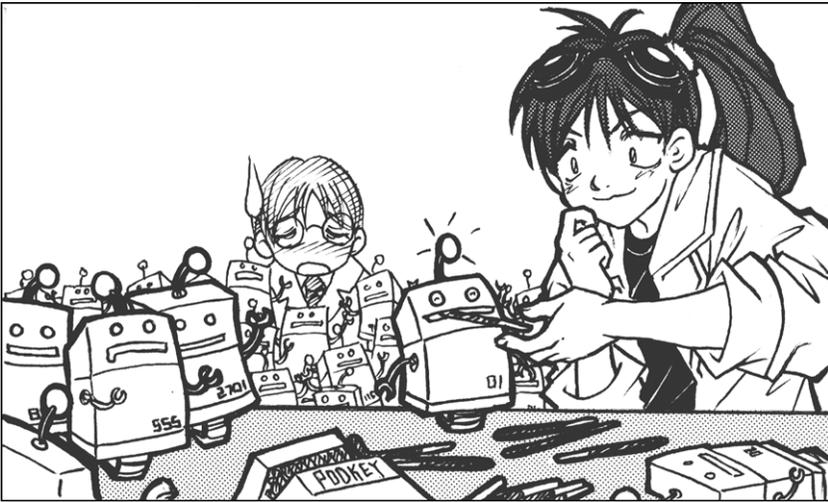
Those Obsessive Experts with an interest in science can be particularly trying. With a charming lack of vanity, they will allow those around them the privilege of being experimental subjects, and will gleefully press potion-laden chocolates on them, or strap them down under weird ray-blasting devices, or present them with un-beta-tested power armor — all for the advancement of science! However, even if their inventions don't always work, they are frequently useful enough that the heroes (and villains) have to keep on coming back for more. Unfortunately, evil Obsessive Experts in darker shoujo tend to have a higher success rate than good Obsessive Experts (or at least until the end of the storyline). In lighter shoujo, both can be equally incompetent but enthusiastic.

Examples: **Washuu in *Tenchi Muyo* and Watari in *Yami no Matsuei* (science); Shampoo in *Ranma 1/2* ("Shampoo use ancient Amazon potion!"); Saionji in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and Tatewaki Kuno in *Ranma 1/2* (kendo); and Sailor Mercury in *Sailor Moon* (academic pursuits generally).**

Possessive Predator

He or she wants the hero or heroine, or other target of choice. This isn't pure, sincere love, but obsessive, compulsive desire of some sort. The Predator may want the hero or heroine as breeding stock, as a victim, in order to use his unusual physiology to resurrect his murdered brother, to use her pure soul to open the gates of the Castle of Dios, or out of some twisted passion or lust — or all of the above. The male Possessive Predator is more common, but female examples of the genre occur. Targets may be of the same sex as the Predator, or of different gender. The Predator is often either the major villain in a campaign, or a running villain who keeps on eluding capture and may even ally with the heroes at crucial moments. This won't stop him harassing his target. He will show up at inconvenient moments, make suggestive comments, and attempt to lure the hero or heroine into his schemes.

The Predator is not always immediately recognizable. He may often appear to be a Stalwart Friend or other, more pleasant type, before revealing his real personality. His pursuit of the hero may be playful, with him sending hundreds of red roses, making jokes when they meet, or offering to play poker for a night in the hero's company. It's more likely to be vicious, with him arranging a string of serial murders to lure the hero into investigating, or kidnapping one of the hero's friends. He may become quite annoyed by friends of the hero who keep on getting in his way, and therefore devote time and attention to removing them from the hero's vicinity, by whatever means are necessary. A Possessive Predator who's known the hero for a while may even have quite a casual relationship when they meet, lighting his cigarette and discussing current events. He doesn't deny his intentions, but he's relaxed and polite about it. He is quite willing to take his time and wait. Possessive Predators tend to be extremely competent in their fields of expertise, usually magic and/or science — they wouldn't be so frightening otherwise — and quite good-looking. If and when a Possessive Predator dies, circumstances often suggest that he did feel just a spark of genuine love for his target. Not that this ever stops them.

Examples: **Akio Ohtori, and to a lesser degree Touga Kiryuu in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*; Muraki in *Yami no Matsuei*; Seichirou Sakurakazuka in *Tokyo Babylon*; Fuuma (eventually) in *X:1999*; Rociel (though he has his reasons) in *Angel Sanctuary*; and, in a lighter vein, Kodachi Kuno in *Ranma 1/2*, and Tomoyo in *Card Captor Sakura*.**

Stalwart Friend

Every hero or heroine has to have someone he can depend upon absolutely. This friend or colleague or relative will help him in times of danger, put him up on the sofa after his girlfriend's broken up with him, train with him in martial arts or sorcery or some other skill, supply philosophical advice during those vital moments of campaign-altering decision, and so on. If the hero has a secret identity, then the Stalwart Friend will either be one of the very few who knows that secret and who provides vital support, or will entirely fail to recognize him while disguised, however flimsy and implausible the costume. Stalwart Friends may be of either gender. Sometimes they have a competitive relationship with the hero, and serve as regular sparring partners, though in the case of an emergency they would stand by him. They may have romantic yearnings for the hero, though they are unlikely to be the one who ends up as his permanent partner. They make excellent kidnap victims, and are also often blackmailed into something that seems relatively innocuous under threats of some secret of theirs being revealed to the hero.

Stalwart Friends may have surprising backgrounds. In *Angel Sanctuary*, the hero's best friend Kira turns out to actually be the spirit of his sword from his previous incarnation as one of the most powerful angels — and then is revealed to be something even worse, that was imprisoned in the sword. However, this rarely affects their loyalty to the hero. They may be brainwashed, but this can often be broken by the hero reminding them of their friendship. Finally, for GMs, there is the occasional storyline where a Stalwart Friend snaps and gives way to frustration or previous trauma, and seeks revenge on the hero. Such storylines tend to be bitter, painful, tragic, and have consequences which are rarely entirely healed. (But if the player characters are taking their Stalwart Friends too much for granted, and ignoring the sacrifices which those friends are making, then . . .)

Examples: **Wakaba in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, Gateau Mocha in *Sorcerer Hunters*, Watari in *Yami no Matsuei*, and Ukyo Kuonji in *Ranma 1/2* are all excellent examples of Stalwart Friends. Seishirou in *Tokyo Babylon* seems to be a Stalwart Friend — for a while. Jumping in front of your friend to shield him and losing an eye in the process is definitely Stalwart Friend material.**

Group Types

Characters gather together for many different reasons. Their motives range from the tacky and barely plausible ("you met in the bar just as the nuclear bombs started falling outside") through the outrageous ("you are all engaged to the same boy") to the nobly heroic ("you are the destined heroes") and elite ("you are top members of a spy agency").

Consider this choice for your group carefully, since the reasons bringing the characters together may play a major part of the story and setting. The GM may wish to leave certain aspects of it vague, in order to later adapt them to ongoing events in the campaign. What if (as in *Weiss Kreuz*) the heroic group of noble assassins find out that they are actually the manipulated tools being used by one dubious group against another? It's worth listening to the players as they discuss ongoing problems in character. Sometimes their feverish suspicions of tangled plots and complex motives are far more interesting than what the GM may have had in mind, and are worth borrowing for later campaign development. (Thank the players later by letting them discover the dreadful truth, just as they suspected.)
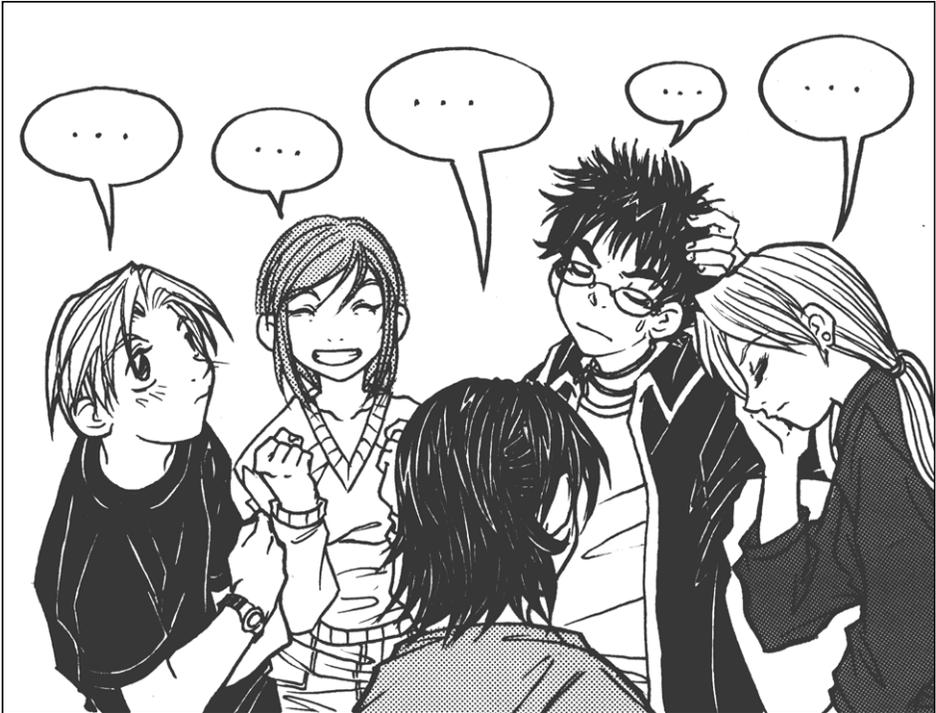
Accidental Groups: These groups just happen to meet up during a catastrophe, or come together accidentally because of the location of a favorite coffee-house, or are in the bar together when the helpless maiden staggers in and begs for help. This grouping allows an ill-assorted group to be forcibly thrown together, where no sane person would have assembled them as a workable team. The problem with such a grouping is that there may be no real reason for the heroes to stay together once the immediate crisis is past. Examples include *Cowboy Bebop*, *Maison Ikkoku*, and a lot of *Slayers*.

Destined Heroes: Prophecy, divine guidance, and mystic divinations are very good reasons for explaining why so ill-assorted a group as the characters happens to have met up. The enemies which will be attempting to hunt them down after an episode or two are an even better justification for them to stay together. The GM can observe the characters, and quietly tailor prophecies to fit with suitable symbolism and reference. ("Why, yes, the ancient texts say that a maiden clothed in water shall bear the sword of fire . . . fascinating, it matches you precisely!") It is wise to make the prophecies vague enough so that the campaign isn't overly railroaded; fortunately, nobody said that divination was an exact science. Destined Heroes are usually an ethical group, but prone to periods of angst and fatalism. Examples include *RG Veda*, *Sailor Moon*, *X/1999*, *Gensomaden Saiyuki*, and most *Final Fantasy* games.
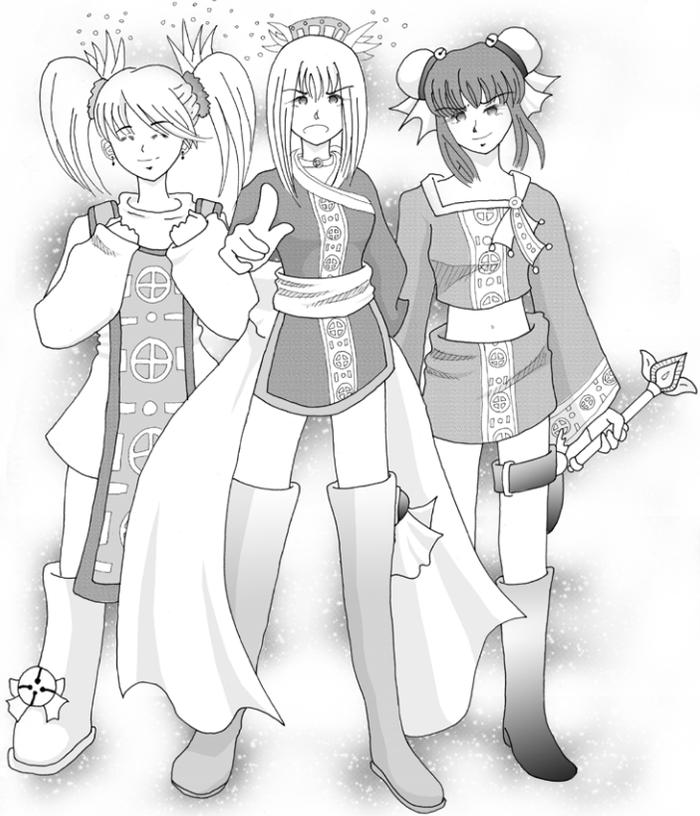
Family and School: You may be able to choose your friends, but you can't choose your family or your classmates. This is a convenient reason for a group of characters to be in close proximity, and occasionally even co-operate. However, the GM needs to be sure that the characters are not totally incompatible, as it will be difficult to come up with a good reason for separating such a group, once created. Temporary splits are plausible; characters may argue with their family, sleep out on the roof, run away from home for a few nights, go on training trips, and avoid their classmates, but usually they are reunited in time for the campaign to continue. (However, if an NPC in the group completely fails to fit in or agree with the PCs, this is a classic villain origin. Take advantage of it, and play out the character's dissension and leaving the group.) Examples include *Angelic Layer*, *Ranma 1/2*, *CLAMP Campus Detectives*, and *Tenchi Muyo!*.

Team of Experts: This group of characters consists of a set of specialists, each of whom is recognized for her skill in a particular area, who have been gathered together in order to carry out some function. It may be protecting the galaxy, assassinating criminals, or keeping the school ghosts in order, and it may be taken in a serious or light-hearted vein. One of the benefits of such a group is that it provides the characters with a clear purpose. A problem, however, is that the characters may grow bored with the team's purpose, or that the missions may become overly similar. This can usually be solved by doses of emotional involvement, plotting behind the scenes, rival teams (whether ally or enemy), and sudden revelation of higher purpose or deeper corruption. Examples include *Irresponsible Captain Tylor* (in a manner of speaking), *Weiss Kreuz*, *Read Or Die*, *Haunted Junction*, and *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman*.

Shoujo Themes

Some story themes recur time and time again in shoujo; duty, honor, love, purity, sacrifice, innocence, strength, forgiveness . . . These can add flavor or depth to an ongoing campaign. They can also be combined with the omnipresent symbolism in shoujo (see Chapter One), or used in creating character background and history.

Duty

Duty to family, duty to employer, duty to society, duty to friends, duty even to one's self — these are all important elements in shoujo, even the lighter sort. They are part of the underpinnings of society, and are automatically accepted as part of the backdrop of the story, to the point that

going against one's duty is an important action, and clearly revealing of character. (Usually bad character, or at least dangerously flawed character.) Naturally, a lot of shoujo involves characters being torn between duty and honor, love, friendship, and so forth. Disregard of one's duty tends to lead to tragedy of some sort — or comic embarrassment, in lighter shoujo. It's a pity for the suffering character, but it makes for a good story. And duty trumps angst; a character who remembers her duty will abstain from self-pity (as with Caroline in *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*), and get the job done.

Duty to one's country and homeland is perhaps the most easily defined. However, characters can be forced into emotional dilemmas by having to choose between strict service to their country, or possibly committing some form of treason for the "greater good" if their country should be in the wrong. Will the character countenance everything that an amoral secret service is prepared to do? What if he finds out about the secret genetic experiments being hidden by the government? Or what if a friend of his turns out to be an alien spy? Will he choose his duty to his native land, or more personal — or ethical — options?

On a lower level, the character probably has a duty to whoever is employing him (assuming he is employed — if not, then he doubtless has another set of problems to concern him.) The firm, agency, government, or whatever pays him — surely they have the right to expect loyalty from him. But what if they turn out to have a darker side, or if there's a criminal at the top? What will he do if one of his friends is employed by a rival company, and only one of the two organizations can stay in business? Life's tough. Is he prepared to become a proper company man, and devote his life to his job? Will this cut into his spare-time activities as a masked superhero?

On a social level, there's duty to family and friends, and to your love. One should support them, cherish them, fight for them, and certainly never

betray them. However, one should also work with them — to cut yourself off from those around you in a fit of angst, even if it is in order to protect others, is in itself a denial of your duty to them. Such an action breaks the social links between yourself and others. To refuse to share your own problems (as Tsuzuki does, in *Yami no Matsuei*, unwilling to tell his partner Hisoka his problems and to let Hisoka return the support which he has
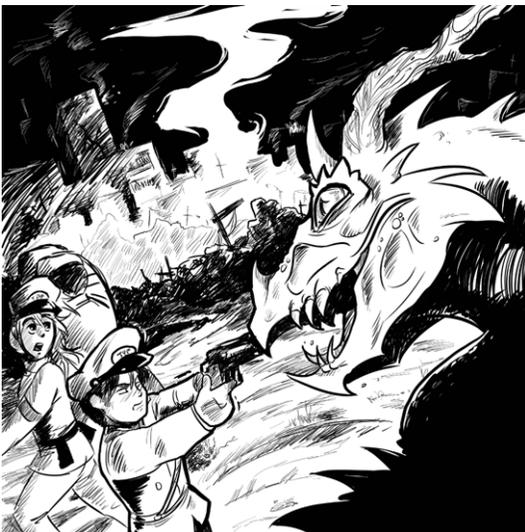
been given) is to fail in your duty to your friends. They have a right to help you, and it is a character's duty to recognize this right. It can even be argued (and is, in *Magic Knight Rayearth*) that to let yourself die alone when you could have survived with help from your friends is a selfish action, as it causes pain to those who are left behind. GMs should feel free to use this as a tool to lever angstful loners back into the mainstream action. It's all part of shoujo.

Honor

Honor in shoujo is not necessarily restricted to heroes, nor forbidden to villains. It is often part of a character's nature, even if it is never actually verbalized except as an urge to "do the right thing." It can provide some of the most bitter choices which a character can undergo, and it can cause as many tragedies as it does victories. The two may even be one and the same. Naturally, this makes it a wonderful undertone to add to a shoujo campaign.

In *Angel Sanctuary*, Sara Mudo has escaped from the tower where she was held captive by Sevothtarte, the veiled chancellor of Heaven, by exchanging places with a child-minded serving girl who doesn't understand what is going on. When on the brink of safety, she realizes that by leaving that girl behind to face probable death, she has betrayed her. She turns back and returns to the tower, eventually facing trial for her life, but saving the girl. Her actions may appear ridiculous, stupid, and a waste of effort and opportunity — but she acts with honor.

Innocence

In shoujo, innocence is an immensely rare and precious thing. It is almost invariably combined with purity of heart and a gentle, loving nature. Both boys and girls can be innocent, though innocent boys often

tend to be rather passive, unaggressive types. The loss of innocence, and the development of maturity, is a very frequent theme in shoujo. Naturally, the loss of innocence is immensely painful for the character in question: it is often due to betrayal by someone they trusted, or caused by an exposure to personal tragedy, such as the death of a close relative or loved one.

Once innocence has been lost, the character has two options: either attempt to come to a new understanding of the world, or seek vainly to regain his lost innocence. The first is the action of a shoujo hero or heroine, and promises plenty of interesting roleplay, while the second is the action of a deluded character who may cause a great deal of pain to others in a hopeless pursuit of something he can never reach again. An example of this is Mikki Kaoru in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, who wants power in order to regain his "shining thing", the beauty which he perceived when playing duets on the piano with his sister as a child. His sister Kozue, once an innocent child, has abandoned both piano and chaste study, and lives wildly in what seems a deliberate attempt to aggravate him. Tragically, he has never realized that his sister had no skill on the piano, and the beauty which he produced when they played together came from him alone. Until he stops trying to find his "shining thing" by forcing those around him to conform to his image of innocent beauty, he will never find it again.

Purity

Purity and innocence are not the same thing, though they may occur in the same character. Purity, in shoujo, means purity of emotion, and almost always purity of love and affection. Most of the time it is manifest in young girls (or boys), and is usually one of the main characteristics of heroines of "magical girl" shoujo. In *Sailor Moon*, *Card Captor Sakura*, *Saint Tail*, *Oh My Goddess!*, *Fushigi Yugi*, and other similar anime, the main character is notable for her purity of heart and sincere affection for her friends — and even her enemies. She is sweet (sometimes tooth-rottingly so), honest (and often less than tactful), and merciful and generous in the

extreme. In *Fushigi Yugi*, the heroine Miaka more than once throws herself between her friends and a demon or enemy in order to halt an attack. This allows her to try to convince her friends to trust the enemy, or give them a second chance, or to appeal to the enemy to reconsider their behavior and choose a different way.

This may seem (and probably is) risky, foolish, and insanely stupid, but in these cases the heroine is acting with a purity and sincerity of emotion which helps to define her character. As in many other shoujo situations, she is ruled by her heart, and will suffer for it. Hokuto Sumeragi, sister of Subaru Sumeragi, goes in her brother's place to meet Seichirou Sakurazuka, the Guardian of the Cherry Tree Burial Mound, and dies in his place. Her brother has to live with her death, and the Sakurazukamori pays no apparent price. Kotori, in *X/1999*, chooses that, "if the world must break, or me, then let me be broken . . ." and foresees her own death. Purity can have results, however; villains may be redeemed, fate may be changed, a brother's life may be saved. But players shouldn't rely on it.

Emotional purity is different from physical purity. Japanese culture lays a heavy stress on ritual purity, which derives to a large extent from Shinto practices, where it is forbidden to enter a shinto temple or touch sacred objects while ritually impure. (This can involve matters from having touched dead bodies to sex.) The Shinto concept has since been crossed with Buddhist (and later, Christian) notions of purity, and can encompass some very strange concepts. Shinto purity can be reclaimed through proper ritual, though certain things are inherently impure. In certain characters, such as a Shinto shrine maiden, we have inherent physical and moral purity; these, or some close analogue, frequently turn up as heroines in "magical girl" shoujo, such as Rei Hino in *Sailor Moon*.

Reclaiming personal purity can be difficult. While Japanese culture tends to be full of examples of redemption by self-sacrifice and death, this has certain drawbacks in the case of the heroine of an incomplete series, or a set of characters mid-campaign. In such cases, a GM can doubtless provide characters either with suitable events for emotional redemption, or a large case of permanent angst.

As a side note, it is never a good idea to be the true love (or even significant other) of an impure character. Horrible things tend to happen to them, in some sort of universal manifestation of pre-emptive cosmic punishment, and the true love either suffers with them, or is an instrument of their suffering. For instance, any fiancees of Ranma Saotome, in *Ranma 1/2*, suffer constant emotional and physical trauma from all the insane events which occur around Ranma himself. What with challenges to duels, mystical martial arts, new fiancees or old enemies appearing, stolen underwear, and aquatransexualism, the hero is a walking disaster zone, and those who care about him don't escape unscathed.
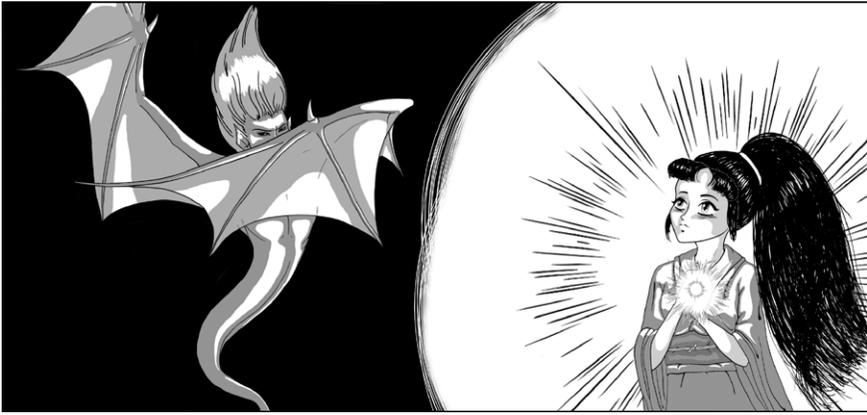
Strength

Physical strength, in shoujo heroes and heroines, is automatically linked to moral and spiritual strength. When Nuriko in *Fushigi Yugi* exerts himself to move the rock which blocks the crucial mountain passage, despite his physical strength, it's more than just a physical effort; it is a spiritual one, where he devotes himself to the task for the sake of those he loves. At that point in the story, only a true-hearted person could have moved that stone. (Admittedly the fact that he was distinguished among the seven seishi warriors for his strength didn't hurt.)

Many characters may be strong, and tough villains will frequently toss heroes and heroines up and down the campaign setting, leaving the victims with a few artistic injuries and many cries of pain. However, true strength is mental and spiritual, and is given by strength of purpose and character. When a hero and villain square off, if they have equal strength of body, their focus and spirit will decide the winner. Of course, under such circumstances, the hero will probably suffer painfully, and may even receive fatal injuries — but he will survive for long enough to do whatever needs to be done. It should be noted that villains are also capable of great concentration, strength of purpose, and even honorable intent; a trained and focused villain will knock a brash, impure-minded hero into the middle of next week.

Forgiveness

Generally in Japanese culture, in the case of conflict, an action is either forgivable or unforgivable. (Japanese concepts can be rather harsher on this than Western ones — consider such institutions as seppuku, or other situations where the only possible resolution is honorable death.) If an action is forgivable, then it can be resolved by the character in question apologizing to those whom he has wronged (either by his deliberate action, or by being under their authority while committing the action, and thus disgracing them by proxy). This need for apology can prompt a lot of play: how many PCs are usually willing to admit that they are wrong, and go cap

in hand to confess their error, apologize, and ask for pardon? What if a major NPC in the campaign will accept nothing less? What if the PC could apologize, but feels that no apology short of a suicidal mission into the jaws of death to redeem his honor will be sufficient? Will the other characters try to talk him out of it, or will they go with him? There is also the difference between ritual forgiveness and true forgiveness; ritual forgiveness may be necessary in a given situation, but true forgiveness may never come. Vengeance can be planned for a very long time . . .

Alternatively, an action can be so evil, malicious, destructive, or antisocial as to be unforgivable. This may be a case of willfully and knowingly stealing someone else's boyfriend or betraying a girlfriend (in a magical girl storyline), or cursing a boy to a long and painful death through disease just because he happened to see you murdering your latest victim. (*Yami no Matsuei*, notable for one of the most psychotic villains I have ever enjoyed watching.) The refusal to accept an apology, or to accept the situation, is usually summed up as "I can't forgive you!" or "That's unforgivable!" This is more than just a display of hyperbole by the speaker; they are declaring that the target has taken a decisive step beyond social and moral boundaries. When Sailor Moon says, "It is unforgivable to hurt innocent college girls! In the name of the Moon, I'll punish you!" she is pronouncing judgment for a defined crime — an unforgivable act. In the case of two teenagers, it means, at the very least, "This friendship is over!" If it's between two enemies in a more serious manga, as when in *Yami no Matsuei* the shinigami Tsuzuki discovers exactly what the evil Muraki did to the hapless Hiroka (murder by curse over three years, as mentioned above) then it can be best translated by a promise of, "No mercy!"

> **Unforgivable Actions**
>
> The degree of seriousness of these actions depends on how serious the campaign is, naturally . . .
>
> ⚜ Grab all the cakes.
> ⚜ Cheat on your lover in a particularly flagrant or treacherous way.
> ⚜ Steal your sibling's lover.
> ⚜ Fail your college entry exams.
> ⚜ Let down your school/society/team in a sports event.
> ⚜ Somehow prey on or corrupt innocence.
> ⚜ Betray a friend to death (or worse).
> ⚜ Commit incest (even if unaware at the time).
> ⚜ Attempt to brainwash a heroine into accompanying you to hell as a minion-to-be.
> ⚜ Commit a very nasty murder(s).
> ⚜ Reduce a city to hell on earth as part of your grand plan to conquer the universe.
> ⚜ Refuse both duty and honorable suicide.

Chapter Three

The three girls stood together in the center of the darkened hall, their robes blowing about them in the rising wind. The time had come for them, as avatars of the Three Goddesses, to face the demonic storm which threatened Tokyo — and, if not halted, the entire earth.

"Ready," said Deirdre. As was appropriate to the avatar of Kali, dark goddess of birth and murder, she was garbed in thin black silks, with a belt of skulls around her waist. Her long hair spun in wild patterns, framing her pale face in a veil of dark crimson. One upraised hand held a set of **ofuda** charms, each one a spell waiting to be cast.

"Concentrate," warned Leonie. Her rainbow robes swirled in a mass of whirling colors, confusing the eyes of any watcher. Half-formed creatures of mist lurked around her feet and rose above her head. "Under the guidance of Maya, Goddess of Illusion, let the enemy be confounded!"

"Wai wai!" cheered Rebecca, bouncing up and down. Her sparkly pink and green robes glowed in the torchlight. "Go gettem! Yatta!" Dragonflies and butterflies wheeled around her in dizzying pinwheels, and flowers sprang around her feet as she drew on the power of Eos, the Goddess of the Dawn.

The darkness pooled and puddled in the corners of the hall, and a figure rose to take shape, mantled in furs and velvets blacker than any of Deirdre's shadows. A great panther rubbed against his legs, baring teeth in a vicious hiss. The man's predatory eyes fixed on the three teenagers, and he smiled, a tiny movement of sensuous lips. "At last," he whispered. "I, Barucco, shall be reborn upon this earth . . ."

— Triple Goddess Jeopardy, episode 15

Conflict and Scale

The emotional conflict inside shoujo is like a fractal equation; altering according to the nature of the background and the scope of the characters, but constantly expanding in new patterns. There will always be the tense emotional dynamics between heroes and villains, heroes and other heroes, villains and other villains, the twists of honor, the requirements of necessity against the personal demands of idealism, and the choice between personal growth and stagnation. Sakura in *Card Captor Sakura* must struggle with personal challenge and growth (the cards) and enemies (Yue, and later Eriol), romance (Li Syaoran), crushes (Yukito), family demands, and schoolwork. Subaru Sumeragi in *Tokyo Babylon* has to try to cope with the continual challenges of his work as a medium, enemies (the Sakurazukamori), romance (the Sakurazukamori again), family demands (his sister Hokuto, and his family duties as a Sumeragi), and schoolwork. However, the tone of the first is very different from the tone of the second. The first is light, frothy, and sweet, while the second is dark, doomed, and ends in tragedy.

So what determines the tone of a shoujo campaign? Several factors: in particular, the nature of the heroes, the nature of the villains, the dynamics between them, and the background setting. *Angelic Layer*, a sweet and fluffy shoujo, has heroes who are innocent schoolchildren, "villains" who are fellow competitors or other children with petty motivations, and a moderately normal world background with mostly nurturing adults and stable relationships. The interpersonal dynamics are generally childish ones, too; straightforward affection and friendship, or petty annoyance and dislike.

X/1999 is much darker and moodier, with tragedy and bloodshed in quantities sufficient to satisfy angst-seeking players. The heroes come from tragedy (a child who was beaten by her mother for her fire-raising powers and saw her mother die in front of her), or suffer tragedy (mother dies, cousin dies, other cousin turns evil and is going to destroy the world), or have tragedy predicted for them ("You will die for a woman!") and must face the future knowing that. The villains range from noble types who will kill for their higher purpose, to innocents who go into battle without realizing what they're doing and amoral characters who simply "find it interesting," to ruthless assassins with fixations on the heroes. The whole story is set against a dark Tokyo on the edge of apocalypse, punctuated by major property damage and civilian casualties, with the threat of the destruction of the human race. Relationships between characters vary from simple friendship to desperate affection and frightening obsession.

The tone of shoujo campaigns is therefore a collaboration between GM and players — players define their characters and the relationships between them, while the GM provides the villains and the background, and the two together define PC-NPC conflict.

Villains

One must have villains in a shoujo plot. Even if the character in question is actually acting for the highest motives, and the heroine has merely failed to realize that she is being driven to improve her magic for her own good, shoujo requires character conflict. In the lightest, happiest shoujo, villains may simply be misguided (such as another girl at school who's only a bully because she's lonely), stupid (the boy who's curt because he doesn't understand other people's feelings), or hidden heroes attempting to prompt the heroine into necessary actions from the shadows. Comic shoujo may have villains who are lazy, arrogant, lecherous, or simply obsessive and desperately in love. ("Come back here and eat too too delicious Amazon brainwashing noodles!") Serious shoujo can have villains who are honorable but resolved to their purpose, unaware of the full scope of the results that will be produced, or who have sold their soul and are now hopelessly lost. Dark shoujo has room for villains who are insane, amoral, sadistic, and thoroughly corrupt.

Of course, none of these are absolutes. Villainy forms a shadowy rainbow of differing hues which can be dropped into any style of shoujo. Let the innocent cute Magical Girl face a truly corrupt villain, or put the tragic Angstful Hero from the horror epic up against a coworker who just needs love and understanding. Life would be dull if the characters only ever faced one particular sort of villain — and that's hardly conducive to an interesting storyline.

Villains are often akin to the heroic archetypes discussed in Chapter Two; one can have an evil Teacher, a prideful Best Rival, an obsessive Love Complication, an amoral Possessive Predator . . . What often best distinguishes the villain, however, is his or her motivation. Shoujo villains must have a plausible motivation for their actions, unless they are totally

and utterly insane. Even that will require background and history, motivation, a cause for the insanity, and other details which will enhance the storyline. If the villain is a serial killer, mad scientist, sorcerer, and obsessed with the hero, he will require a suitable history to explain all these details. A mother who was obsessed by antique dolls and viewed him as the gem of her collection, for instance, and a half-brother who murdered his parents, a grandfather who was an obsessive scientist himself and who kept hospital records about the selfsame hero . . . The hero's discovery of these details will either increase his motivation, or deepen his moral quandaries. Either of these is good for roleplay.

Motivations in Comic Shoujo

These motivations may often apply to heroes as well, since many heroes have minor character defects. Of course, in the case of heroes, they are usually compensated for by an otherwise good character, upright behavior, loyalty towards friends, and so on . . .

Arrogance: An arrogant character knows unshakably that she is superior to everyone else around her, whether in skills, personal attractiveness, wealth, or birth. In gentler, softer shoujo she may be compensating for feelings of personal insecurity or childhood abuse, which the heroine will come to understand; in such shoujo, she will discover true self-worth and will abandon her arrogance. In comic shoujo, she is a laughing-stock who constantly makes herself ridiculous with her posing and declarations, and who launches complicated plots of revenge at the heroes for somehow insulting her. Examples include Kuno Kodachi in *Ranma 1/2*, Ayeka in *Tenchi Muyo*, and Nanami Kiryuu in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

Gluttony: A gluttonous character is just plain greedy. He or she is always distracted by food (apart from moments of world-shaking crisis) and stuffs her face at the least opportunity as though she hadn't eaten for weeks. While sleeping, she happily burbles the names of her favorite foods, and will chew on anything nearby that comes too near, such as the limbs of fellow team members. This motivation is usually played for comic relief, though intelligent villains may use it to bait a trap if aware of the character's tendencies. This is a common flaw among light shoujo heroines. Examples include Miaka in *Fushigi Yugi*, Ryoko in *Tenchi Muyo*, Cherry the priest in *Urusei Yatsura*, and Lina Inverse and Naga in *Slayers*.

Hunger for Power: These characters just want power, whether it's sorcerous, physical, political, financial, or something else. Very few of them are willing to stay on the straight and narrow ethical path, when stepping off it makes the power that they want so much easier to obtain . . . Generally speaking, however, there is usually another motivation behind their wish for power, which may range from the nearly-ethical (help a friend, stay safe from bullies, organize things better than the people

currently in charge) to the selfish (get more food, rule in luxury, grind the faces of the peasants into the dirt under my feet). Such characters are usually pitiable, laughable, or both. Examples include Gosunkugi in *Ranma 1/2* (sorcerous power), Li Shaoran early on in *Card Captor Sakura* (the Clow Cards), Tamahome early on in *Fushigi Yugi* (money), and most of the Sorcerers in *Sorcerer Hunters*.

Lechery: Characters of this sort are either hitting on every target in sight, or are fixated on another character and seize every urge to press their suit. If they're merely chasing every possible target in the vicinity, then they'll probably never get any closer than the occasional embrace. Lechers hunting a particular victim are likely to be comic relief, endlessly turning up outside their bedroom window (or worse still, in their bedroom), in the public baths, in restaurants, and wherever else may be awkward. While lechery rarely provokes world-class villainy, lechers have been known to take unwise actions or use dangerous spells and items in an attempt to fulfil their frustrated lusts. They're usually very sorry about any cataclysmic results — until the next time. Examples include Mikado Sanzenin and Happosai in *Ranma 1/2* (cute girls), Mutsuki Asahina in *Haunted Junction* (underage boys), and Carrot in *Sorcerer Hunters* (anything female).

Stupidity: Never underrate the power of stupidity. It is rarely a pure motivation in itself, unless you count unintelligent monstrosities going on rampages. However, it is a wonderful reason for villains to persuade themselves that the most implausible schemes can succeed, that their logical reasoning is flawless, and that the hero really does like them. Stupidity explains such schemes as having one of the villains dress up as a heroine in order to impersonate her and lure the other heroines to investigate. (Admittedly, the villain in question looked prettier than the heroine usually did, but that was hardly the point.) It justifies such plans as "kidnap the heroine, chain her up, and force her to look into a cursed mirror with a demon trapped in it, because the demon has promised me that this will make her love me." It causes minions by the hundred to believe that the master villain's promises of power and wealth will come true this time — or, alternatively, it causes two villains to mutually believe that they can double-cross the other successfully. Fortunately, heroes have their stupid

moments too, but their innately virtuous natures tend to save them. Even if they try such schemes as "pretend to have split up in order to lure the enemies to investigate," "break up with my destined true love to keep her safe from danger," "try to convince villain that we have gone back in time and that the world will lose all its nylon stockings," or anything similarly lame-brained. If players deliberately allow their heroes to try stupid plans in keeping with a shoujo theme, the GM should be merciful when it comes to the result of the plans; they may fail, but the heroes should not be seriously penalized for trying them, and they may even work once in a while. Examples of stupidity include the male Misako in *Angelic Layer*, Usagi Tsukino (Sailor Moon) in *Sailor Moon*, Lord Potato Chips in *Sorcerer Hunters*, all four Generals in *Sailor Moon* when it comes to schemes for catching the Sailors or collecting energy, and all thugs and demonic minions everywhere.

True Love: True love justifies a host of stupidities, a morass of selfishness, and a whole rap sheet full of errors. Even heroes can forget about ethics and law while under the influence of love, and villains are far worse. Of course, as this is light shoujo, nothing too bad happens; a few lies, a love potion resulting in a temporary change of affection (though nothing permanent), a theft, a brawl, or just being deliberately too slow to help someone else in a crisis, so that you will show to advantage and they to disadvantage. Characters who are acting with love as a motivation generally have some glimmer of virtue. The more intelligent ones can often be brought to realize that true love respects the feelings of the other person, and to take no for an answer. Stupider ones just become a running joke and nuisance. However, they can occasionally be useful — if the object of their love is in danger, they will usually fight to protect her. But be careful; it is common for the villain to

set up an artificial danger so that he could "save" his target, and then find matters escaping his control . . . Examples of true love as a motivation include Nephrite in *Sailor Moon*, Kouga in *Inu-Yasha*, Ryoga Hibiki and Mousse in *Ranma 1/2*, and B-ko in *Project A-Ko*.

Motivations in Serious Shoujo

In more serious shoujo, villains need deeper motivations — ones which will justify the scale of the actions which they are undertaking. Since a large part of the genre is inter-character roleplay and heavy emotional motivations, the GM must try to make his villains almost as interesting as the players' characters. It is not recommended that villains be more interesting than the characters. The players want to take the main roles in the story, and will dislike being consistently upstaged and out-acted by one of the GM's pet villains, or even just a pet NPC, however fascinating his background and traumatic his history. Players will want the spotlight on them, though they will appreciate good villains to act against. One of the quickest ways to lose player interest is to have villains and NPCs who keep on outdoing them in the personal tragedy stakes. Villains who are almost (but not quite) as interesting as the heroes will do nicely. One of the best ways of making a villain interesting is by involving him in a player character's history, or vice versa, since nothing interests players quite as much as their own characters. The following common types of villainous motivation have been noticed by observers in the field; many villains also combine two or more of these motivations.

Amorality: This villain honestly isn't concerned by questions of morality or ethics. She is generally after personal power, scientific knowledge, or simply control of her environment, but it isn't out of any particular desire to hurt other people. She may even have good management instincts and take reasonable care of those who serve her, simply because it makes sense not to waste resources. Heroes will probably wish to deliver long speeches exhorting her to change her ways, to care about the people she has hurt, and to develop a conscience. Such attempts will be met by cold laughter or simple boredom. Sometimes the amoral villain does have one particular thing she cares about — a child, a lover, a dead parent or sibling, faith, or some relic of childhood — and this will occasionally prompt a change of heart. However, characters should not rely upon this; anybody who does is liable to be painfully disappointed. The amoral villain makes an excellent leader for an evil organization or corporation, or a solo scientist or sorcerer who is unconcerned by the rest of the world, and wishes only to advance her knowledge without hindrance. Heroes may occasionally bargain with her for knowledge, assistance, or non-interference. GMs should take the opportunity to strike a harsh bargain and explore the story tropes of "dealing with the devil", as this villain will want a high price. However, she will generally be masterminding some scheme which will

impact the heroes, and they must resist her or be destroyed — or, in the villain's point of view, cease obstructing her plans or meet a well-deserved fate. Examples include Lucifer in *Angel Sanctuary*, Queen Beryl in *Sailor Moon*, Nakago in *Fushigi Yugi*, and Sesshou-Maru in *Inu-Yasha* (most of the time).

Higher Purpose: Whatever other people may say, this villain knows that he's acting for the best. Even if he has to kill off half the population of the world, or sacrifice an innocent child, or desert his loved ones, this villain will do what he believes is right, no matter who must suffer for it. Such a villain will rarely be truly sadistic or perverse, but can be capable of insane rages and ruthless deliberate cruelty. The keynote to his character is that he believes that his ends justify his means, and though he may suffer from angst and self-doubt, ultimately he will carry out his schemes. He will sacrifice himself — and others — to achieve his goals. This is an excellent villain in stories of misguided honor, tragedies, and (surprisingly) lighter shoujo, though in lighter shoujo it is usually possible to convince him to alter his methods, or abandon his purpose. He is often served by less ethical villains, whom he tolerates because he needs someone to take certain actions, even if he personally dislikes them. He may even have a relationship of mutual respect with some of the heroes, although he and they disagree as to means and ends, or be related to them. In *Sorcerer Hunters*, Sacher Torte is a villain who wants to wipe out magic in order to create a better social structure and a more equal world, though this will cause the deaths of approximately half the world's population. He is also the adoptive father of two of the heroines, Tira Misu and Chocolat, who had to be rescued from him as children when he went on a mad rampage, seeking the avatar of the Lord of Destruction. Character involvement, emotional pain, conflict of methods though for a good purpose . . . Examples include Kusanagi in *X/1999*, Sacher Torte in *Sorcerer Hunters*, Taishaku-Ten in *RG Veda*, and obsessive scientists everywhere.

Innocence: In some ways, however much pain and damage this sort of villain causes, she is ultimately innocent; she truly does not realize that what she does is wrong, or perceive the pain which she is causing to others. This may be due to some sort of psychosis, mental manipulation, being a clone only newly brought to life, having been raised on an island far from civilization, being an alien from a totally different culture, or for other reasons. This sort of villain has an extremely high potential for redemption if she can somehow be brought to comprehend what she is doing, and that it is wrong. She is frequently associated with other villains who are using her as a convenient tool or playing piece, and who she trusts for some reason. Scenes between this villain and heroes can have a great deal of pathos and drama, as she causes destruction or pain while asking childlike questions, or fails to understand that the hero is in tears because she has just killed his cousin. Heroes who attempt to help this villain understand right and wrong, joy and sorrow, pain and relief, should also question their actions in bringing this relative child to adulthood, and consider their role as "parents", and their future responsibilities for her actions. There is also the question of how much such an innocent is actually responsible for her actions, and whether the heroes have the right to risk her life, any more than they would do other children . . . This character also includes deities or major spirits who have no comprehension of human morals, and no sympathy with anything on the human level — they simply lack the ability to comprehend it. Examples of such a villain include Nataku in *X/1999*, Ascot in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, Lirin in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*, and Messiah in *Earthian*.

Misguided: Someone has been lying to this poor villain — he either thinks that he's serving some higher cause (as per the Higher Purpose type of villain) or he doesn't realize that he's working for corrupt superiors and darker ends. A misguided villain is usually an honorable, noble type, or it wouldn't have been necessary to deceive him. Such villains can easily interact with heroes, and may even become their friends or lovers before the truth of their actions — and the true nature of the cause they serve — becomes apparent. At that point, misguided villains may either renounce their previous allegiance and become true allies with the heroes, doing their best to undermine the true villains of the piece, or may feel bound still to serve their previous masters. In the former case, they will still retain a certain villainous glamor, and may well have dark secrets as yet unrevealed which can be used to blackmail them, or contacts and lovers among the villains. In the latter case, they are either trapped by their personal honor, and become tragic figures, or have become corrupt by knowingly choosing to serve evil, and are an excellent example of corruption and disgrace. Player character intervention may save them — possibly. Examples of this type of villain include Eclair Mocha in *Sorcerer Hunters*, Katan in *Angel Sanctuary*, Prince Diamond in *Sailor Moon*, and most of Mikage's victims in the Black Rose arc of *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

Psychosis: A good deal of this villain's actions can be explained by the fact that he is insane. This can range from mild derangements (delusions as to place and time, episodes of megalomania, a tendency to fugues and catatonia, and the like) to full-blown sadism (rarely masochism), schizophrenia, paranoia, split personality, and homicidal mania. A villain who is insane, however, usually has good reasons in his past to justify it. Very few villains go insane for no reason, and those that do are usually low-grade, low-power ones. Reasons for insanity may include having family members brutally murdered in front of him, being abused as a child (physically or psychologically), being distrusted by society due to strange abilities, having suffered physical or mental tampering in order to be made into a useful agent, snapping under the strain of caring for others, and so on. Insane villains can be among the most dangerous, unpredictable, and vicious in all shoujo, but also the most tragic. As their interaction with the heroes continues, the heroes should be allowed to learn their motivations, and the underlying trauma behind the insanity. This will not necessarily mean that the villains are curable, but it will add emotional involvement. If the heroes — or their connections — are in some way involved with the cause of the villain's insanity, it gets even more interesting. Especially so, given that insane villains often obsess on heroes, and select them as particular rivals, objects of desire, or victims. Examples of insane villains include Dilandowne in *Escaflowne*, Muraki in *Yami no Matsuei*, Farfarello in *Weiss Kreuz*, and the Sakurazukamori in *Tokyo Babylon*.

Utter Corruption: This villain is pure, undiluted evil, corruption incarnate, utterly vile, malevolent, and cruel. He is the sort of character that heroes love to hate, and can feel thoroughly justified in fighting. He has no good features whatsoever — even the occasional flash of what might look like honor is merely a manifestation of personal style or ennui. Such villains don't even have the excuse of insanity for their crimes, obsessive pursuit of the hero, attempted world domination or universal ambitions, or plans to destroy the world and repopulate it with more intelligent clones. They're just plain evil. As such, their motivation isn't particularly interesting in terms of emotional conflict. What they are useful for, in terms of relationships, is traumatizing heroes, or causing situations where the heroes will need to support each other, or providing horrific past history (and thus psychological damage) for heroes to surmount. Utterly corrupt villains usually show up as the mastermind behind a great evil scheme, or the demon lord attempting to enter this world, or the plotter manipulating both sides in order to destroy the universe. Disposing of them (in a reasonably permanent way) usually marks the end of a major plot thread. Examples of this type of villain include Naraku in *Inu-Yasha*, the rulers of the Lucifer Hawks in *Silent Moebius*, Brigade Leader Saagatanasu in *Yami no Matsuei*, and Death Phantom in *Sailor Moon*.

Levels of Villainy

Villains tend to belong to one of four main power levels, ranging from the wimpy "monster of the week" to the near-omnipotent cyborged overlord whose defeat (hopefully) marks the climax of the campaign. It is possible for villains to evolve in power level, rising from Wimp to Competent, and even to Serious Threat. (GMs may wish to consider doing this with any villains who the players show a particular interest in, or ones that have past history with the PCs.) Here are four vaguely-defined levels of villainous power, described in comparison to the heroes.

Wimp: This is a low-grade zombie, demon, human thug, minor nature spirit, mini-ninja, or similar character. He has no hope whatsoever of beating one of the heroes in a straight match, though large numbers of them might be able to temporarily overwhelm and capture a hero. (They're more likely to be thrown in all directions and destroyed or redeemed, though.) This level of villain rarely has much of a character or history.

Competent: This level of character is generally a match for a single hero in a one-on-one combat; circumstances and force of character will depend on which of them actually wins. Characters at this level of power will have definite history and personality, and may have a friendly or antagonistic relationship with the heroes. They often serve as lieutenants to a master villain, or combine to form a team which will oppose the heroic group. Competent but stupid villains may also become a running joke — never quite strong enough to

Helpful Suggestions For Villains

⚜ Never doubt yourself. Your destiny was foreordained. You will achieve your goal.

⚜ Drugging people with love potions is an acceptable option.

⚜ He/she loves you really. Showing up everywhere he/she goes will help him/her realize this.

⚜ Strike dramatic poses. It will impress those around you.

⚜ Some day they will all bow down before you. Have faith.

⚜ Elegance is good. So is overkill. Try to achieve a happy medium.

⚜ You may be mad, but don't let this stop you.

⚜ Just because you love your children doesn't mean they can't become your tools, agents, and experiments.

⚜ Stalking, emotional blackmail, and psychotic torture are perfectly good ways to start a relationship.

⚜ Have plenty of minions to do the dirty work for you.

⚜ Interpret religion the way you want.

⚜ Take pains to explain your methods and plans to your enemy — it fosters a suitable sense of fear and foreboding in them.

⚜ Nothing should be allowed to hinder the advancement of science, especially where it relates to important projects like bringing your half-brother back from the dead so you can kill him in person.

seriously threaten the heroes, but constantly showing up with ridiculous new weapons and techniques, or unrealistic schemes.

Serious Threat: A character of this level of power is tougher than the average hero, though he can still be dealt with in single combat if attacked with the right method (summoning Suzaku good, attempting to use empathy bad), or if the hero has sufficient motivation. However, this type of character is often also very intelligent, and will take care to stack the odds, research the heroes for psychological flaws or weaknesses, attack from surprise, take hostages, and so on. A master villain, or a campaign's main recurring enemy.

Way Out Of Their League: The heroes have no chance of dealing with this character in a one-to-one fight. (Unless, possibly, they've done something like focusing their power in one character who also wields the Silver Imperium Crystal and all come to terms with the fact that they love each other.) Even if they attack in a group, they're liable to be thrown in all directions, helpless, tossed into their darkest nightmares, and so on. Fortunately, such villains are either vulnerable to particular methods and weapons (which will take a major adventure to locate and obtain) or can be defeated by ultimate love, strength, cooperation, and so on, depending on the tone of the shoujo. This sort of villain is usually the final point of a long campaign, and one or more heroes may die in the confrontation.

Bishonen and Bishoujo

Shoujo heroes and heroines tend to be beautiful. Even the artistically scarred ones are rarely made that unattractive by the traumatic scar across their face which marks some personal trauma. However, there's more to the bishonen ("beautiful boy") and bishoujo ("beautiful girl") than just their looks . . .

Bishonen

Literally, bishonen translates as "beautiful boy" (just as biseinen, less commonly used, translates as "beautiful man".) In shoujo manga, bishonen range from the sweetly vulnerable to the aggressively predatory, and from the shyly competent to the angstfully dramatic. They are frequently objects of interest. Lust, or love from all those around them, from friends to enemies. Their hair is soft and wavy (and may be long or short), their eyes are large and expressive, their bodies are slender yet muscular, and they look far too good to be true. They are often involved in doomed or tragic relationships, ones which society or common sense will not allow. And they can make splendid characters — assuming that other players are prepared to run with it. (Telling a angsful bishonen to "snap out of it and cheer up" rarely succeeds, and is likely to result in a waved katana and a muttered, "Die.") Ambivalence in some area is a strong character trait. Is it

right to be an assassin, even if they kill evil people? Should they undertake this destined mission which will probably kill them? Was the deal with the devil really a good idea?

Bishonen are glamorous. They are beautiful, competent, and usually vulnerable in some way. They can be in painful situations, and suffer for it. They often have a threatening edge — one isn't necessarily sure that they're the "good guys" (and sometimes they're not). They can undergo trauma, physical and mental, and be carried out bleeding, and have the scars decades later. If they're evil, they're seductively evil — they can make being pierced by a thousand swords sound like a good thing. (In anime, a bishonen villain usually has the *seiyuu* (voice actor) to sound really seductive, too.) Whether as alienated hero (Aya in *Weiss Kreuz* or Genjo Sanzo in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*) or compelling villain (Akio in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* or Muraki in *Yami no Matsuei*), as vulnerable youth (Kamui in *X/1999*) or older assassin (Seichirou Sakurazuka in *Tokyo Babylon*), or as mysterious stranger (Kujaku in *RG Veda*) or family friend (Yukito in *Card Captor Sakura*) they draw attention and deserve it. They make excellent player characters or major NPCs.

Bishoujo

Bishoujo, though "beautiful girls" just as bishonen are "beautiful boys", fail to have the same glamour as the opposite sex. While bishoujo may be literally extremely beautiful, their virtues tend to be those of true love, honesty, sincerity, open-heartedness, constancy, and occasionally brainless enthusiasm. They lack the decadent glamour possessed by many bishonen. As such, they may be less than satisfactory to players who want both the female gender and the fascinating ambivalence of bishonen. (The beautiful hair, slim build, and huge eyes are all standard issue, though.)

There are cases of bishoujo heroines who are more complex than the standard variety, closer to "female bishonen". We have examples such as Juri in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, the leader of the fencing team, a cool, self-possessed woman who is in a relationship which she knows is bad for her, living in a school which she knows is a forcing-house for unhealthy romance and fixations, cold
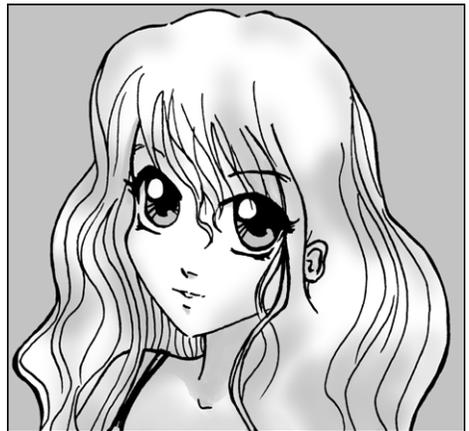
and decisive as her sword, admired by others, but bitterly depressed within. She continues to remain at the school and follow the manipulations of Ends of the World, rather than choosing to break free like Utena and Anthy, but ignores the seduction of Touga, and knows that she is manipulated. We also have strong figures like Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune in *Sailor Moon*: they are prepared to kill if necessary (though troubled by the morality of it), they are self-confident, cool, and stylish, and the Inner Sailors are uncertain for a long time whether they're on their side or not. Or there is Yaone in *Gensomaden Saiyuki*, the very competent private chemist to Prince Kougaiji, who serves him with a samurai's devotion to duty. She is a kind, polite young woman, deeply in love with Kougaiji, and fighting the heroes for his sake. She is also almost pitiful, dedicated to a cause she doesn't truly believe in (waking the demon king) because of her devotion to one man.

Finally, one of the best examples of the genre (though hard to find) is in *O-niisama e* (Brother, Dear Brother) which takes place entirely within a female boarding school, and which has three strong female characters who are bishonen by any other name. Miya-sama, the head of the Society which controls the school, is a beautiful but cold older sister figure to the rest of the school, and wields her power over others with calm viciousness. St-Juste (real name Rei), a calm flute-player with an apartment full of mirrors, a bracelet to hide the scar of an attempted suicide on her wrist, autonomy from the Society, self-destructive tendencies, and a strange fascination over everyone except the woman she loves (Miya-sama). And Kaoru no Kimi (literally "Prince Kaoru"), clear-eyed and rational about the school and the Society, presenting an example of moral force against Miya-sama's manipulations and worldview, someone who would save St-Juste if she were savable, but herself suffering from some severe physical ailment.

Bishoujo can be "female bishonen". They can have the glamour, the ambivalence, the crises, the pain, the potential for corruption, the potential for salvation. It's up to players and GMs to create them.

Relationships

Intercharacter relationships are an important part of shoujo, whether they are PC-PC, PC-NPC, or NPC-NPC. These may be purely romantic, or may be paternal/maternal, simple friendship, possessive protectiveness, sadistic attention, observation as a future project, respect for elders, teacher-student, affectionate or bitter rivalry, or simple enmity, with the codicil of "nobody gets to kill her but me."

Here are some common examples of relationships.

Romantic

✤ Two "normal" people finding common ground amid the chaos.

✤ An angst-filled tormented character (hero or villain) finding comfort and understanding with an innocent, pure-hearted, loving character.

✤ A predatory type (hero or villain) stalking a vulnerable hero.

✤ Two villains whose sole virtue (apart from personal style) is their affection for each other.

✤ A hero and villain who realize that they cannot possibly have a relationship, yet love/are obsessed by each other.

Parental/Teacher

✤ An older and far more competent teacher with a younger pupil who looks to him for moral lessons, and who will be scarred by his death.

✤ An older teacher with appalling personal morals but great skill, who is viewed as a personal curse by his long-suffering pupil.

✤ A beloved parent with a loving child who looks to them for emotional support. (Suggestion to GMs — if this is dark shoujo, remove the parent traumatically.)

✤ A very distant ancestor or relative who provides cryptic guidance to his descendant in emergencies.

Friendship

✤ Two good friends who can rely on each other whatever may happen, even if they both fall in love with the same person.

✤ Members of the same elite force or destined group.

✤ An older-younger sibling pairing, where the younger partner admires the older one, and the older one protects the younger.

✤ A heroic figure at school and the fellow classmates she protects.

✤ Older and younger siblings. (An *extremely* strong bond in shoujo.)

Professional

✤ A scientist and the escaped lab subject she's finally managed to track down.

✤ A sorcerer and the young prodigy who can provide vital assistance in his schemes.

✤ A megalomaniac and his trained assassin sidekick.

✤ A heroine and her contacts in the government.

✤ A hard-boiled detective and his criminal friends.

✤ A divinely guided scion of prophecy and the angels who advise her.

Enemy

✤ Bitter enemies from childhood, feuding through school, each yearning to vanquish the other once and for all.

✤ Long-term enemy of an entire family line, and latest scion of said family.

✤ Once best friends parted due to rivalry over romance.

✤ Assassin who has marked the hero as his personal prey, due to obsession or the desire for a challenge.

✤ Psychotic seeking to wipe out all examples of hero's race, nation, sorcery, skill set, or religion.

✤ Two pawns of prophecy, one fated to save the world, the other to destroy it.

✤ Villain who wants to allow his race of demons to take over the world, and heroine whose duty is to stop him.

Player Comfort

Players should feel comfortable with the game. If a player is uncomfortable with relationships between his character and NPCs, then the GM should fix the situation, after finding out what it is that the player dislikes. This may involve altering the NPC's attitude towards the player's character, or outright removing him from the game. Players create characters and play them in order to enjoy themselves, not to be forced through painful situations when they don't want to be. Some players may simply not want to roleplay same-sex relationships, or to deal with particular sorts of in-character harassment or trauma. This is understandable, and should be respected. Disagreements between players about interactions between their characters ("Well, I think that my character has a crush on you,") are more awkward, and may require discussion between both involved players, with the GM as a moderator. If it makes a player uncomfortable, don't do it.

Same-sex relationships — Yaoi and Yuri

Yes, shoujo has plenty of same-sex relationships — yaoi (male-male) and yuri (female-female). A sub-genre of yaoi is shonen ai, literally translated as "boys in love," which tends to imply emotional pain and trauma for those involved. This isn't universal, and it doesn't mean that every series has to have its quota of (real or theorized) same-sex relationships, but it happens, and it can provide interesting roleplay, if the players are comfortable with it.

Same-sex relationships in shoujo don't reflect genuine Japanese attitudes, which tend to be a great deal less accepting. In shoujo, if two people of the same sex happen to love or desire each other, then that's accepted — unless it's the focus of the storyline that this happens to be a forbidden love, two people of the same gender cannot hope to be happy together given society's attitudes, and so on. (Of course, other people who happen to yearn for one of the pair may strike heavy attitudes about the situation, but that's more often a case of personally thwarted desire than particular prejudice.) The other Sailors in *Sailor Moon* don't object to Uranus and Neptune on the grounds that they're lesbians. They object on the far more sensible and well-founded principle that the two Outers keep on refusing to share vital information and trying to work on their own. Tsuzuki doesn't recoil (languidly) from Muraki's pursuit in *Yami no Matsuei* because they're both male, but because Muraki is a psychotic, sadistic killer.

Yaoi Terminology

In yaoi relationships (and in yuri, though this is less obvious) there is usually a dominant partner and a submissive partner to the pairing. This does not necessarily refer to bondage or sadomasochism, but more to force of personality and decisiveness. The dominant partner is often referred to, in discussions of the genre, as the seme or "pitcher", while the more submissive partner is the uke or "catcher". This should not be construed as the seme having ultimate authority, or as a master/slave bond; the uke can be (and generally is) a strong character himself, though he is usually the one who makes accommodations or has the "gentler" character of the two. While this terminology is used by fans discussing the genre rather than by characters in the genre itself, the seme/uke split is visible in a lot of shoujo yaoi relationships — and an even stronger element in the fan-produced *doujinshi* (comics) or fiction. The reader or viewer may not want to play with such a relationship, but it is an accepted part of shoujo, and is not necessarily unhealthy or bad for the characters involved. Obvious seme/uke pairings in shoujo include Kunzite and Zoicite in *Sailor Moon*, the Sakurazukamori and Subaru in *Tokyo Babylon*, Fuuma and Kamui in *X/1999*, Touya and Yukito in *Card Captor Sakura*, and Juri and Shiori in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

Yaoi and yuri relationships can be just as loving or affectionate — or just as obsessive, bitter, and possessive — as heterosexual ones in shoujo. The lovers can argue, disagree, angst, make up, and have frenzied sex all over the bed. Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune can disagree over whether they should involve the younger Inner Sailors, and how far their mission justifies the means. Kunzite and Zoicite, in the same series (*Sailor Moon*), share a loving tenderness despite being villains, and Zoicite goes to the older man for comfort and reassurance. Muraki stalks Tsuzuki in *Yami no Matsuei*, playing him at cards for his body for the night and presenting him with an armful of red roses. Juri in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* wears a golden locket with a picture of the girl she's in love with but who doesn't care for her, and fights to disprove miracles — she can't have them, and so nobody else will. Kagetsuya in *Earthian* flatly disagrees with his partner and lover Chihaya, then comes after him to save him from trouble anyhow. Gateau Mocha in *Sorcerer Hunters* gives Marron Glace frequent admiring glances, drawn to his beauty, regardless of his sex. Eagle in *Magic Knight Rayearth* resolves to sacrifice himself to save Lantis, in a pure and simple act of love.

BOB

Chapter Four

It had been fifteen minutes, and Igraine Tatsu, cyborg secretary to the secret Troubleshooting Department of the Coding Commissioning Corps, was still going strong. "Safety regulations demand no more kettles in the office, no more radios, no more artwork on the walls. From now on there will be work, work, work! I don't care about your missions, but when you're back here, I want to see you at your desks from eight till six!" The neon lights gleamed on her chromed shoulder-pads and wavy gilt hair. "Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

Eric King, Department playboy, raised one lazy hand from where he sprawled on his chair. "Does that include expresso machines?"

"Everything!" the cyborg hissed, a thin trail of smoke drifting from one ear as the emotion control circuits cut in. "And that includes non-work Internet access!"

Prudence Mount, computer genius and commercial entrepreneur, looked up from the screen of her laptop with a gasp of horror. "No! Not my connection!"

Igraine smirked, and opened her mouth to speak again. She was cut off by a sudden crackle of bullets that came splintering through the window, which thudded into her cyborg body and knocked her to the floor. She lay there, twitching and smoking gently.

The four human members of the Troubleshooting Department had hit the ground smoothly, with the experience of long practice. "Assessment?" barked Joan, the cold-blooded team leader, brushing fragments of glass from her trim skirt.

"Five of them," reported Francisca, Department sharpshooter, as she snapped her sniper rifle together with firm precision. "Must be fallback from that last espionage mission. Pity they won't take no for an answer."

"Right," Joan ordered. "Francisca, keep them pinned down. Eric and I will get round the back and take them by surprise. And, Prudence . . ." She nodded towards the cyborg secretary. "Reboot job, and see if you can get us a bigger budget while you're reprogramming her. Coding Commissioning Corps go!"

— Code Or Die, episode 7

Shoujo Campaigns

Campaigns involve continuing character history — the heroes attempt to achieve their goals, interact with those around them, deal with old enemies, make new ones, and maybe achieve some degree of maturity. Given that shoujo focuses on emotional interaction and growth, and the effects of past history, shoujo works far better in campaigns, even episodic ones ("and today's monster of the week is . . . "), than in one-shot adventures. However, many of the normal rules for running good campaigns and good roleplay apply just as well in shoujo as they do elsewhere. GMs should take what they want from other RPG sourcebooks, as well as from their personal stocks of shoujo manga and anime.

A shoujo series (both anime and manga) can often be divided into episodes and arcs. An episode is a single part of the story, and advances the action to some extent, or explains something relating to the past, or both. An arc covers a period of the story which is spent in a particular location or resolving a particular plot thread. GMs may find this a convenient way of viewing a campaign; each session of the game is a single episode, but an arc may take up a number of sessions. A campaign itself will probably involve several arcs.

Character Objectives, Character Pain

Everyone wants their character to get to be a hero, if not *the* hero. This is entirely right and proper in shoujo, where usually all the characters get a moment in the spotlight, a plotline to resolve, a trauma or phobia to come to terms with, a lover to accept or reject, and a choice which may well change the course of the storyline. GMs should do their best to give their players this sort of play. Players, on the other hand, should try to take some of the workload off their GMs by creating (and remembering) a good history for their character**s**, keeping track of relationships with other PCs and NPCs, and by letting other characters have a share of the spotlight.

Shonen vs Shoujo

Shonen (boys) manga is now almost as rare in the pure form as shoujo is; nowadays, many shonen manga and anime show traces of shoujo imagery or concepts, just as shoujo itself has broadened from pure "young girls" romance. However, the shonen genre does have certain traditions (many of which also show up in shoujo manga and anime with shonen influences), as follows:

✿ Men don't talk to each other about their feelings. They frown and ponder, then grunt incomprehensibly, or burst out in a brief declaration of friendship or hatred.

✿ Fight scenes are vitally important, and should span several episodes.

✿ Many cool power names, martial arts moves, and big guns are needed.

✿ Honor, courage, loyalty, and friendship are the most important virtues.

✿ Past traumas may be agonized over briefly and then ignored, unless they provide vital impetus for the current fight or action sequence.

✿ Being tough and brash shows your honest character, rather than meaning you're horribly rude.

✿ Instead of having character biographies, star signs, blood type, and favorite food lists in the back of the manga, there are fold-out diagrams of the heroes' armors.

Notable examples of shonen include *Dragonball Z*, *Nineteen*, *Saint Seiya*, and *Flame of Recca*.

This concept of letting everyone have their time as center stage cannot be emphasized strongly enough. While it is proper for shoujo characters to care about each other's wellbeing, most players don't want their dilemmas conveniently solved for them. Shooting another PC's particular enemy and thus putting an abrupt end to the stalker/stalked bitter revenge storyline removes all possibilities for further interaction between the hero and villain. Attempting to conveniently cure another character, and remove all her traumatic memories and deep-seated psychoses, may be "efficient" but will take away most of the player's fun in playing that character. PCs should try to help each other, but ultimately everyone must resolve their own dilemmas and deal with their own enemies.

Of course, this is more a general guideline for campaign play than a moment-by-moment set of rules. If the villain is in front of you and about to attack, by all means shoot. If your character's best friend is traumatized, let her weep on your shoulder and do some bonding. If the game's brooding bishonen is pondering his sword in his bedroom and looking suicidal, then his friends should be breaking down the door and reminding him of his duties to society, organisation, and comrades. But ultimately, it's up to the GM to give the players a chance to work out their character problems with a suitable amount of deep roleplay — and it's up to the players to remember that everyone should have their own starring role, and to give each other space to play it.

Character Development

Characters should be allowed to develop emotionally. Players also generally want their characters to grow in terms of the power they command, whether this is a case of sorcery, psychic powers, mecha upgrades, martial arts moves, or simply progress through school and into the adult world. These different sorts of development require different handling.

Emotional development, such as the mastery of old traumas and phobias, coming to terms with past heartbreak, developing maturity, learning caution and humility, can all take place during play. An important thing to remember here is that the player will doubtless wish her character to retain interesting character quirks, while removing the actual disadvantages which cause her to recoil in fear against the wall every time the villain refers to a particular past event. Allowances should be made for the player who describes her character as "well, she still feels hurt about the past, but, you know, she's letting go of it slowly."

Allow the character to develop a new maturity in play, and introduce new pains and heartbreak. Has she come to terms with losing her first ever boyfriend, so that she no longer compares every boy she meets to "my old sempai"? Give her a new romantic involvement and see how it develops. Is she no longer an innocent who blindly trusts the vet who showed her kindness? See where the new cynicism takes her. Don't penalize the character because the player makes her vulnerable, but give her some good roleplay because of it. If she's willing to describe herself as emotionally traumatized by the villain to the point that she's backed up against the wall and trembling from the past, then the GM should give her a suitable reward — a tense conversation with the villain, some veiled threats, a reminder of the past, and a promise for the future.

Shoujo characters generally develop new powers and skills in two kinds of situations. The first is after a lot of hard work and practice (particularly recommended for new martial arts techniques, mecha parts, or psychic powers), and the second is in an emergency when there seems to be no hope left. ("He's shrugged off all our attacks — but if I can remember the spell that the old master once mentioned, the Great Word of Power — burn, cosmo-energy, and give me the strength for this final blow!") Naturally, once discovered, new powers may be used freely. It is also possible for shoujo characters to hone natural attributes or normal skills by practice; characters may become stronger or smarter, develop basic martial arts or computer skills, learn how to play the violin, and so on. (See chapter 5 for further suggestions on developing abilities through experience, or strengthening emotional bonds and personal obsessions.)

Finally, when it comes to developing new powers and abilities, there is always the classic explanation that the character was subjected to an

unusual process, which has boosted her abilities or developed unusual new ones. This may range from a deliberate scientific or psionic experiment, to an accidental presence at ground zero of several colliding spells or potions, but generally involves outside forces being applied to the character — and frequently against his will. Players wishing to spend some stored experience points on developing a totally new power should consult privately with the GM to make sure that it fits the campaign in general. (Note that villains may also develop new powers and abilities this way!)

Settings

Any sort of setting can be used for shoujo. In published material, one can see everything from pre-Revolutionary France (*Rose of Versailles*) to a demon-haunted cyborg-inclusive future (*Silent Moebius*), or from teenagers at boarding school (*Brother, Dear Brother* and *Here is Greenwood*) to Heaven and Hell (*Angel Sanctuary*). It's the characters that make the shoujo, not the backdrop of period and science or sorcery.

The GM and players are therefore free to explore their wildest dreams. Perhaps they want to investigate the tragic lives of vampires, and the secret agency which hunts them (*Hellsing*)? Or maybe they'd rather be secret agents with supernormal powers (*Read or Die*)? Would they like to be more-or-less noble heroes, hunting down evil sorcerers (*Sorcerer Hunters*)? Are they children still at school, fighting crime or committing it (*Saint Tail*) or seeking a magic which has been released on the world (*Card Captor Sakura*)? Or are they members of a group brought together by fate, chosen to save or destroy the world (*X/1999*)? Angels? Demons? Humans who died violently and now have the task of investigating unnatural deaths? Psionics? Cyborgs? Teenagers with crushes from outer space? Martial artists protecting their town from evil undead sorcerers? All of the above have been done as shoujo, and can be done again.

Putting Together A Campaign

Ideally, the GM and players have a simultaneous psychic flash detailing precisely the type of game they'd like to play. In the absence of such a flash, the GM may wish to suggest a background concept and general tone (light or dark). If the players like it, they can start to detail their characters. It may be useful for them to do so as a group, to make sure that they dovetail together conveniently. ("Oh, if you're being a cold-blooded assassin, can I be a light-hearted amnesiac computer expert who helps investigate our targets?"). They should at least all consult the GM, so that the GM can make sure that there are no gaping holes in the group's base of skills, and no characters who will be impossible to use together. (A reckless chainsaw-wielding maniac does not usually fit well with a cute wand-waving magical girl, nor does a deeply brooding emotionally scarred bishonen work well in a light shoujo high school setting. Ultimately, the GM always has the right to say no to her players — though she can try to find a similar character for them which *will* work in the setting.)

The GM can now get down to serious work on the background. Using the characters' histories, and her own thoughts on suitable themes to explore, she can design villains, major NPCs, and lay the ground for at least a couple of plot threads. If the players have been good enough to leave useful holes in their character background ("My father vanished when I was six years old . . .") then they should be exploited in such a way as to promise good future roleplay and emotional involvement.

And so to play. Many future plot threads will be created during the course of the game. The GM may wish to keep notes on interesting lines of plot opened by the characters themselves. If one of them chooses to spare the sidekick doctor who has been forced by the villains into refining opium, and talks the doctor into atoning by exercising her profession, rather than by committing suicide or by giving herself up for execution, then note the doctor down for a recurring NPC. Possibly even have the doctor show up at some point in the future, when the hero is (for plot-related reasons) in despair or trauma, and remind the hero of past events!

Example Settings

Here are a few sample settings, with appropriate characters and suggested plot threads.

Mallrats Psi

It's the summer holidays, and five of the teenagers hanging round at the mall have made an interesting discovery — they're psychic. They must come to terms with their new powers, and with their new friends, as they face the perils of summer jobs, curious parents, and, worst of all, other teenagers. Who is the strange man in dark glasses who keeps on watching them? Why is the woman in the antique shop so curious about their ancestry? Will they have enough money to buy the latest CDs? A campaign about looking cool, having fun, and growing up.

Characters

The main characters are the five kids who've begun to develop strange mental powers, and who feel somehow drawn to each other. Their particular adversary is Mordecai, a boy who's also developed psionic powers (empathy and telepathy) but is more interested in building a gang of followers than in trying to understand the nature of the powers, or in cooperating with others. The strange man in dark glasses who appears on the periphery of the action from time to time is part of a government project attempting to locate young psionics, and may be a future threat to the heroes. The woman in the antique shop believes in nature spirits and their descendants having strange powers, and is a psionic herself, though she thinks it's a form of magic. Parents and siblings will also be regular allies — or problems — for the heroes.

❧ **Tsubaki**, an arrogant ballet dancer and an only child from a rich background, but devoted to her friends and school, telekinetic, very protective of James.

❧ **James**, honest and sincere, from a poor background with several siblings; a tai chi practitioner, and an empathic peacemaker, who treats Tsubaki like an older sister.

❧ **Anneki**, bubbly and cute, fond of breakdancing, who can communicate with animals and is everyone's little sister. It would take a direct hit from a nuke to slow her down.

❧ **Haruka**, quiet and studious, a kendo practitioner who can create illusions. She lives alone, and is scorned or distrusted by many of the other teens.

❧ **Ikki**, practical joker, bright enough that he doesn't need to work hard; he can communicate telepathically at a distance, and is fond of mischief. A pest, he but always comes through in a crisis.

Plot Threads

❦ The group accidentally run into one another at the Mall, as events cause them to display the powers which they have just discovered. They also encounter Mordecai, and are forced to work together to deal with his gang.

❦ Tsubaki and James have to work together on a summer project; their constant arguments are misinterpreted by the other characters as signs of first love. (And perhaps they even are?) Tsubaki gets to know James' siblings.

❦ Anneki gets lost trying to find some ferrets which escaped from the pet store, and everyone has to find her.

❦ A mysterious man in dark glasses is watching the characters from a distance, and tries to provoke situations where they will use their powers.

❦ Mordecai's gang is getting more aggressive. Mordecai himself is trying to persuade Ikki into joining him.

❦ The woman at the antique shop promises to teach Haruka about her powers. Will Haruka share this with the rest of the group? Can the woman be trusted?

❦ Excavations for a new shop in the mall disturb an old pet cemetery, causing zombie and skeleton animals to stalk the mall that night — which just happens to be the night that the teens had planned for a midnight disco.

❦ Midsummer party in the mall. Mordecai's planned "fun" with the fireworks and pageant goes badly wrong, as scaffolding collapses, pets escape from the pet shop, and parents are likely to spot powers being used. The teens must hide their powers, sort out the party, handle Mordecai, avoid the man in dark glasses — and make sure that all their holiday work is done in time for school next week.

Demon Upload Crisis

Four renegade demons have escaped from Hell, during an accidental computer link from the local university to the main mother computer of Sheol — and they don't want to go back. In order to evade pursuit, they've possessed several old suits of armor and weapons in the local museum. Four young men found the possessed weapons, and used them to fight back a group of Hades Police who came in pursuit of the renegades. Now a member of the Angelic Inquisition is on the case. Can the demons redeem themselves and win places in Heaven by serving the cause of righteousness? Can the heroes wielding these powerful weapons deal with their new supernormal powers? Is the Hades Police going to stop trying to capture them? (Of course not.) And what precisely is going on in the local genetics supercorporation?

Characters

The young men now using the weapons are the main characters. The demons themselves have only vague, androgynous personalities, as they are using all their strength to empower the magical weapons — they may provide occasional guidance, but no more than that. The representative of the Angelic Inquisition is a cold-blooded, strict angel, who appears as a beautiful blonde woman when in mortal guise, and who finds a job as a teacher in order to keep an eye on the heroes and their weapons. The Hades Police will have several regular members, who become running villains. They also have a distant superior, who will intervene at the climax of the campaign.

The four young men are:

♣ **David Suzukami**, leader of the group, literature student, warm-hearted and noble, always busy taking care of his two younger sisters. He is the bearer of the Spear of Flame, which is possessed by the demon Zhekalle.

♣ **Alexander Escuido**, temperamental hothead, motorcycle rider, lazy computer student, in love with Robert but unwilling to acknowledge it. He is the bearer of the Sword of Wind, which is possessed by the demon Phariella.

♣ **Robert Eagle**, gentle and understanding, hard-working computer student, deeply in love with Alexander but not realizing that it's returned. He is the bearer of the Noose of Water, which is possessed by the demon Immisce.

♣ **Ken Makedge**, cold-blooded and sensible, efficient business student, unwilling to admit to emotion, dislikes confrontations, rarely starts fights because he goes berserk when he loses his temper. He is the bearer of the Shield of Stone, which is possessed by the demon Maskedole.

Plot Threads

♣ Why is the local genetics company so keen to get blood samples from the heroes? (It thinks they're mutants and wants to exploit them.)

⚜ Why is the Angelic Inquisition member suddenly ill? (She has been infected with demonic blood by one of the Hades Police, and will need an angelic counter-transfusion — can the PCs find her colleagues and persuade them to help?)

⚜ Robert attempts to hack into the Sheol mother computer. You just know this is going to go wrong.

⚜ Will a hot-blooded young female friend of the heroes listen to a member of the Hades Police who offers her power to fight evil? (And could he possibly be telling the truth?)

⚜ A friend of David's is suicidal due to exam stress. Does he have the time to help his friend as well as fighting evil? Which is more important? What about his own exams?

⚜ When Ken starts trying to use more powerful attacks, he begins to be tainted by the demon's personality, falling into evil ways. Can the other characters help him — or should they be trying to talk to the demon?

⚜ A strange, beautiful androgynous woman shows up. Apparently she was once the lover of Immisce. Will she wreck the forming relationship between Alexander and Robert? And what is she really after?

⚜ Climax. End of the campaign. Big showdown. It turns out that the four demons were originally angels who fell, and were the living weapons of the four Archangels, Raphael, Michael, Gabriel, and Uriel. Now they must either return to Heaven or to Hell, for their time on Earth has run out. Can the heroes (and their weapons) avoid both angels and demons? And are Heaven and Hell the only choices, or are there other options?

Cabal Of The Twilight

In a world of Renaissance fantasy, duellists and sorcerers meet by night beneath the city in a hidden Cabal which works for justice and righteousness. Ceremonial magicians, saber-wielding tortured heroes, lonely night-haunting thieves and scholars, and society demi-mondaines must join forces to save the world from the dark creatures which lurk behind corrupt rulers and evils from the depths of time.

Characters

The main characters are the local group of Cabalists in the city, and well-known in the general organization as troubleshooters and experts. While they may have met through coincidence, or been assigned together by a higher authority, they will become friends — eventually. Other major characters include the local head of police, handicapped by corruption in his department, but grateful for the Cabalists' private help, a brooding scholar with a secret past as a fashionable duellist, and a barmaid who runs the meanest bar in town and who knows everything that's going on — for the right price. Villains include the vampire who controls a society of

necromancers, the team of assassins ("Blood Spiral") who offer their services locally, and who have cover identities as gardeners, and the cult which serves the Dark Master — a being from outside time and space who plots to enter our reality and dominate it.

The heroes are:

✤ **Damien Souldark**, a duellist with a heart of ice who fights for justice, and who saw his sister corrupted by the forces of evil. His innate distrust for sorcery wars with his growing affection for Ofana Lizabeta.

✤ **Ofana Lizabeta**, a sorceress and dancer, with a flying carpet and a taste for high society. She comes from the mysterious land of Arabia, and commands strange magics which few locals understand. While she cares for Damien, she hesitates to reveal to him — or to the others — that she once served the secret society of Assassins.

✤ **Stefan Sepharo**, a dashing thief and catburglar, loved by every woman he meets — or so he tells it. While he likes the group, and acts as a calming influence a lot of the time, he is still deeply involved with local crime, and joined the Cabal in the first place to escape some very persistent police.

✤ **Sara Yvesa**, a scholar and nun, who knows far too much about the powers of darkness for her peace of mind or safety. She constantly struggles with the temptations of her knowledge, and with the urge to call upon forbidden powers for the greater good.

Plot Threads

✤ The group is assembled by a higher-up Cabalist. Naturally, they don't get on well. Can they carry out their first mission (investigating a mysterious necromancer) without killing each other in the process?

✤ Stefan has gone off on a private theft, but Damien discovers that it's actually a trap by someone who knows that the thief is a Cabalist. Can the others stop him before he's caught, or rescue him if he falls into the trap?

♣ Damien receives messages from his sister, begging him to help her, saying that she wants to change her ways. Is she salvageable? (No, but the youth who's carrying messages for her is innocent and must be saved from the evil cult's corruption.)

♣ Another scholar has sent Sara a set of old documents, which she is spending all her time working on. Might the information be useful? (Yes, very.) Is this dangerous to her mental health and a risk of corruption? (Oh yes.) Will the others notice in time?

♣ The evil vampire has set his sights on Ofana. So have the group of assassins which she once served, who want her back. Can she escape both of them, and is she willing to reveal her past to the team?

♣ At a society gala, a disguised member of Blood Spiral challenges Damien to a duel. It's clearly a setup of some sort, but what's really going on? (The vampire has kidnapped one of the Blood Spiral team, and is forcing them to dispose of Damien.) Are the Cabalists prepared to help the assassins, once they find out the truth?

♣ The evil cult finally makes its move, planning city-wide sacrifices, dark ceremonies, and a great Opening of the Gate to let the dark entity which controls it into the real world. Can the four Cabalists work together against assassins, vampires, and demons and save the world?

Chrom Kreuz (Chrome Cross)

In a post-apocalyptic setting, a group of tough women try to save innocents from the turmoil and chaos with the help of a secret cache of cyber-armor hidden beneath the small abbey where they live, and their psionic powers. They must struggle against the corrupt local authorities, a secret organization of mutants, and the remains of a mega-corporation controlled by a computer intelligence which intends to dominate the new world! Torn by their emotions, confronted by family ties, struggling against the forces of darkness which seem to be found everywhere in the corrupted world, can they hope to protect the innocent and to bring about a new order?

Characters:

The main characters are the five heroines, each with their own powers, and each with their own problems. The pre-nuclear war computer which runs their secret base has its own personality — a domineering, scolding one — but does its best to protect them. Local allies include a travelling doctor/geneticist who refuses to discuss his past, or why he knows so much about the mutant group which they frequently have to fight. Enemies include the decadent biker ganglord Wesson, the psychotic mutant leader Tristesse and her twin lieutenants Agone and Ecstase, the cold-blooded corporation head Davison, and the megacomputer intelligence behind him.
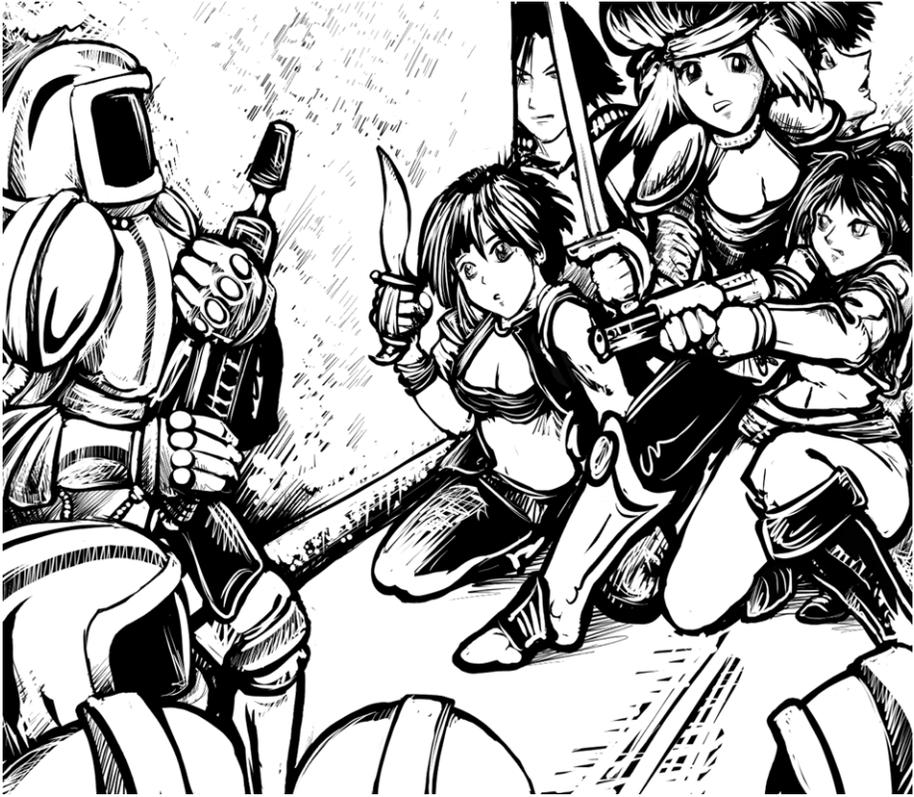
The heroines are:

☘ **Absinthe Jones**, a green-eyed hard-bitten ex-gambler, quick with her paired pistols, and even faster with her teleportation. The firm, decisive teamleader, she hides an painful secret — Davison and she love each other.

☘ **Phyllis Marie**, a fragile woman with techno-augmented reflexes and a pair of psychic knives, a ruthless killer in hand-to-hand combat. Her fellow teammates worry about her mental stability, and fear the occasions when she goes berserk. Nobody knows that she was once a member of the mutant organization, forced by blackmail to serve as an enforcer and assassin, though she has no personal mutations.

☘ **Elizabeth Demise**, gentle nature-loving woman with empathic powers. Her great strength makes her deadly, but her kind nature makes her try to spare opponents. She has a personal grudge against Tristesse.

☘ **Emily Rose**, short but lively computer expert, buzzing with energy, able to mentally "link" into computer data banks, the base computer's favorite. She uses a sniper rifle from a distance in combat, but refuses to admit her addiction to computer use.

❧ **Joanna Regal**, sensible and practical, laser-saber user, with psychic powers which can heal or destroy living flesh. She conceals the fact that Weston is her brother.

Plot Threads

❀ The team is still newly formed, and must learn to co-operate — will exploring their newly-discovered base and interacting with the dysfunctional base computer help matters, or make them worse?

❀ Can the group befriend the local travelling doctor, and if so, will he help them contact other local leaders? And why is he so eager to get tissue samples from them? (He's being blackmailed by Tristesse and her mutant gang.)

❀ Weston wants the team to act as enforces for him, and to attack another local warlord. Will this make the region generally more stable? His attempts to romance Phyllis aren't helping.

❀ The supercomputer manages to attack the base computer — and harms Emily Rose, who was linked into it at the time. Are her teammates prepared to enter her mind and face her personal demons to save her?

❀ Absinthe's relationship with Davison continues, as the two still love each other, though the group is now at open war with the corporation . . .

❀ Tristesse starts to harass the group; she wants Beth as her personal playtoy, and she's trying to blackmail Phyllis into helping her.

❀ Can the group handle a conference of local warlords, and persuade them into a coalition? (There will be multiple sabotage attempts from the corporation and from Tristesse.)

❀ The corporation makes its move. It turns out that Davison has been a cyborg all along, a mere puppet of the supercomputer. Can Absinthe deal with her personal grief? Can (and should) the team make a temporary alliance with Weston and Tristesse to get into the bunker which houses the supercomputer and destroy it? And can they be sure it's really gone for good?

Chapter Five

Endgame

The blade in her hand felt heavy, cold, and dead, and the weight kept dragging the golden tip back into the dirt when she tried to lift it. But Rekka was strong, and her will was harder iron than the armour of her enemies. Slowly, the bronze blade was brought back up into a proper place, quivering slightly, but pointed straight for the bastard who'd destroyed her family.

For his part, Shao Khan was unimpressed. One fourteen-year-old girl stood ringed about with mages and sorcerers of the most ancient order. Every hand was raised and power gleamed on every fingertip. And what did she have? An old bronze long-sword, some dusty Greek armour, and a sharp tongue that he would cut out soon enough. The warm wind blew off the burned town, years-old ash behind them all, skeletal ribs of the long-house in the middle exposed to the sky, gutted and cold. Khan's time was at hand and he could finally remove the source of his annoyance over the past three years, alone, and undefended.

Why, then, did he feel so cold inside when he looked into her sparking green eyes?

"Give it up, Alisa Rekka. Your family is dead. Your home is long burned. Your friends are gone." Shao Khan flicked a long, elegant hand free of his calf-skin glove to better gesture. "My magi will soon have your soul, and then I will have your body." He allowed himself a cool, thin smile. He deserved that.

Rekka did nothing more than stand, fingers sweating on the hilt of her blade for a moment before whispering, only loud enough to the wind could carry the words over the grave of her family, "Shao Khan - you are about to die. Your magi will be broken. Their souls will be forfeit. Their hearts, empty. Their minds, blank. And your palace, a shell broken under my foot."

Shao Khan took a half-step back at the understated violence in the quiet words. The wind whipped around his cloak, fluttering, as if trying to escape.

Rekka's answering scream was an explosion of anger: "My family cries in their graves for your blood, Shao Khan! And they will have it!"

The battle only lasted a minute, hardly more. Rekka stood over the body of Shao Khan, looking as if she'd taken a punch to the gut, though no hand had touched her.

His last words were, "I truly loved you."

— Blade of the Lost, Episode #22, Endgame

Mechanics

In the simplest analysis, Big Eyes Small Mouth needs very little in the way of mechanical modification to really support the shoujo meta-genre. After all, shoujo is as much about the players' take on the events that occur during a session as the events themselves. Nevertheless, there are always certain issues that are best handled from outside the framework of simple common agreement, even if that handling is only recording and allowing the actual interpretation to be worked out.

In the interest of helping GM's run shoujo-flavoured games more effectively, we introduce a new optional mechanic called Ties and Bonds, and discuss both the other optional rules that might be useful for achieving various ends as well as some specific discussion of combat, how to both emphasize and de-emphasize it.

Ties and Bonds

A great deal of the core of shoujo literature centers around the emotional and personal drives which push and pull characters into various situations, whether it be hunting down the cruel villains that butchered their families, or trying to work up the nerve to ask the cute jock to the prom. Traditionally, these kinds of personal issues have been left up to little more than the whim of the GM and players to occasionally guide the development of plot, but there is much to be said for actually having mechanical impact of these linchpin traits, if only to more often encourage players' detail. Increasing the degree of mechanization of such things tends to focus more of the players' attention on using those media of expression for results. Further, having mechanics often illuminates choices and options that the player may not have otherwise have thought of and improves the overal quality of the game as much as it gives the player a greater feeling of control.

Ties and Bonds give the player more options in the course of both describing their characters, and having their personality make a real difference in what their characters accomplish in the course of a given

story. Ties and Bonds cost no points and are not directly affected by any Attribute or Defect, but will sometimes change the results of an Attribute check. Ties and Bonds are much like a mixture of Attribute and Defect, in that they provide both benefit and impediment, and are a wholly optional system in *Hearts, Swords, and Flowers*; they will not be appropriate for every game.

What They Are

Ties and Bonds are the things characters care most deeply about, acting both as a well-spring of energy and force for the character to draw on in times of need, and as a weakness that provide issues the character cannot overlook. At the same time, they provide a way for a player to signal to the GM, "Hey, I want this issue to be important to my character and come up in play!" The latter is often as important, or even more so, than the first, since they provide a set of instant hooks for the GM to pull on to involve the character in a given situation.

Ties and Bonds are rated as **Interest**, **Motivation**, **Drive**, or **Obsession**, in increasing order of intensity. Each one has a focus, the target of that feeling, and a manifestation, something other characters could tell in behaviour or appearance that would hint at the presence of that Tie or Bond. Each intensity rating is also associated with a value, which is both the maximum size of the focus die pool and target number for success tests..

An Example

Focus	Manifestation	Rating
Avenge the Deaths of My Family	Long scar across the bridge of my nose	Drive/9
Find My Lost Sister	Amulet containing photo of sister worn on wrist	Motivation/6
Eat Whenever Possible	Drooling whenever near food	Motivation/6
Get Rich	Talks about money a lot	Interest/3
Find a Boyfriend	Frequently carries a battered romance novel	Interest/3

Note that the manifestations are not necessarily physical — the character may have a certain verbal trait, or only perform some act when near the target of their obsession. This differs from the Defect of "Easily Distracted" in that the Tie or Bond can actually help the character acquire or attain the focus, and not simply be enthralled with it. (A Bond with a focus needn't be a trigger for Easily Distracted; if it is, then the GM should feel free to introduce situations where the character is distracted by the focus without returning points to the Tie or Bond (see page 74, Ties and Bonds in Action).

Keep an eye on the breadth of the focus picked. Too broad, and it will be very easy to trigger it in frequent circumstances (though this is somewhat made self-correcting by the limit of what can be done with the points). Too narrow, and it will difficult for the GM to bring the focus into play on a regular basis, which is rather the point of declaring it here in the first place.

A character may have interests, drives, and even obsessions which aren't covered under Ties and Bonds. The ones listed here are the foci the player is explicitly indicating to the GM that he wants to be both brought up in play frequently, and to have a measurable game-mechanical effect.

How Much They Cost

A character may take up to 12 points worth of Ties and Bonds. This allows them to purchase one all-consuming obsession, or several minor concerns, without being too overwhelming to the personality. The GM can certainly adjust this to suit the mood of her campaign; in some settings (like *X/1999* or *Weiss Kreus* characters are often

Rank	Points
Interest	3
Motivation	6
Drive	9
Obsession	12

seen to be highly motivated or obsessed by a number of different foci. For these settings it is suggested to start with 18 to 24 points of Ties and Bonds in order the mimic the highly-twisted personalities seen therein.

A GM must keep in mind that characters with too many foci can go well beyond limits into incoherency. This may be perfectly fine for villains (who, like Zagato in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, is Obsessed with both destroying Cephiro and his love for Princess Emeraude), but can be detrimental to the central figures of the piece. Don't be afraid to allow the players a personal challenge, however. Some of the best roleplay can arise from the interplay of conflicting drives, especially in the shoujo genre.

Ties and Bonds can usually only be changed freely between episodes (see "The Passage of Time", below). Whole obsessions may melt away and be replaced by another or a number of minor interests come together into a drive to another goal. Caution is warranted, to avoid the appearance of schizophrenia (unless that's the point of the character), but its certainly often better to say yes than no in this case; the mirroring of dynamic changes in the character in accordance with the player's wishes is one of the goals here.

Bonds and Ties in Action

Each Tie or Bond has a pool of points, or Focus Pool, associated with it. The number of points in your focus pool at the beginning of an episode is equal to the the target number for that focus (ie, an **Obsession** gives you a 12 point focus pool, while an **Interest** gives you a 3 point pool). Characters spend points from this pool to create various results GMs can call on the focus to create complications, but return points to the pool for doing so.

Player Options

The player may use the Focus Pool to these ends:

Invoke

When a character's focus becomes an issue in play, the player may spend points from the Focus Pool in order to enhance a Stat or Skill roll. Each focus point the player spends either adds -1 to a die roll or a +1 to the Stat+Skill target number, at the player's choice. Note that this can grant a Critical Success, by buying the roll down to 2, so you'll often see players buying down the roll in preference to boosting Stats or Skills. This is an instantaneous purchase, only affecting the outcome of a single roll (and thus somewhat less effective that the longer-term expenditure of Energy Points to the same end).

Example: *Sister Anna confronts the tentacle-demon Lao-Nazu. Lao-Nazu reveals that he has kidnaped the good sister's acolyte, Cindy-ko, which activates Sister Anna's "Defend My Friends" Drive. Her player rolls a 8 on her attempt to dismiss the demon, but burns all 6 points of her Tie to bring it down to a 2, and thus, a critical success, leaving Anna shouting, "My friend's soul cannot be touched by filth like you, demon!" Lao-Nazu reels in agony as he ignites in holy fire!*

Healing

Like Energy Points, Ties and Bonds can be used to recover from damage, with each point of the focus pool spent adding two points of Health. This can only occur when the character is hurt in the course of pursuing or achieving their focus. If the wound was acquired in any other context, the Focus Pool cannot heal it.

Example: *Lao-Nazu is **Obsessed** with "Punishing the Holy", and Sister Anna's dismissal almost destroyed him! The GM burns all 12 points in his Focus Pool to restore 24 Health, cackling insanely all the while, and Lao-Nazu rebuts, "In the name of the darkened moon, I will punish you!"*

Learning

The devotion of a character to their interests, fascinations, and drives often pays off in the discovery of an affinity for related skills. Between sessions or episodes, whenever the GM generally allows buying up Stats, Attributes, and Skills, the player can invest points from his Focus Pool to replace experience points. Every three focus points spent reduce the required experience point total for one purchase by one. This cannot bring down the cost of a new investment below 1 Experience Point, however. Points spent in this way are not replenished at the beginning of the next session.

Example: *Sister Anna is alone in the abbey, reading through the library, and indulging her **Interest** in "Scientific Curiosity". Her studies of one of the few books on engineering in the library are made easier by this; her player spends all 3 points in the focus pool and buys the first level of Engineering (a 2 point per level Skill in her setting) for 1 Experience Point. Next episode, however, she won't be able to spend those focus points on any task until they're built back up.*

Reality Editing

Perhaps the most potent ability of the Focus Pool, an expenditure to edit reality will let the player add some facet to the immediate environment that was either unnoticed or simply not present before, as long as its related to the focus. This can be a difficult ability to manage, so the GM should feel free to keep a handle on it, but be aware that, again, its much easier to say yes than no. For a given effect, the GM defines how many points to charge. Relatively minor or atmospheric changes might be 1 point, or even free (a

soft fall of cherry blossoms as the "character who is **Obsessed** with death" walks through the park), up to 12 points for truly egregious changes in reality ("I, too, have a giant robot in this fantasy universe!").

Example: Sister Anna meets Lao-Nazu on the center span of the Bridge Over Sorrow Drowning River for a final showdown; both are exhausted and near spent. Anna's player considers her options and states that he wants to edit in a collapse of the bridge's supports in the raging river, using Anna's knowledge of Engineering bought with the help of her "Scientific Curiosity" before last session (and the points since recovered). Since the river's state was never brought up, its fair game for editing, but the GM feels collapsing the demon into the river might be a bit much for the 3 focus pool points. Unless, of course, there are complications. After some discussion, the player agrees, and as Anna stares in horror, the whole bridge collapses into the river. Now both she and the demon are caught in the wild swirling water. Can she survive?

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1 point: Trivial or very minor changes to the setting.

You find a photograph of your mother.

Lightning crackles overhead at a dramatically appropriate time.

3 points: Minor changes to the setting, or significant changes with drawbacks.

You find a convenient handgun, but there are no bullets obviously nearby.

Your friends call to invite you out to a group dinner.

6 points: Significant changes to the setting, or major changes with a noteworthy drawback.

You're under fire but find a conveniently loaded and ready shotgun taped under a nearby desk.

Your mortal enemy is summoned to the principal's office, leaving you free to have lunch with the target of your heart's desires — but you find yourself becoming nauseated.

9 points: Major changes to the setting, or egregious changes with a dire drawback.

A stray shot ignites a barrel of industrial cleaner, raising a wall of fire between you and the ninjas coming through the office window.

You return to your home to find your parents gone, leaving you fully in control of the household — but their stuff is gone and your sister is a catatonic.

12 points: Totally egregious changes to the setting.

The entire building you're in collaspses, but you're easily able to flee it, leaving the man who killed your father behind in the rubble.

You receive a mysterious package that contains a powerful mechanical suit with built in weaponry from a mysterious benefactor.

Its very important that reality editing *cannot* cause direct damage to another character. A building collapsing on their head will leave them dusty and discomfited, assuredly, but not actually hurt in any way.

Decision

A player may not be able to decide on the next course of action for their character. Sometimes there is simply a desire for a bit of randomness, but often there's a legitimate conflict between two (or more) of a character's Ties and Bonds. If there is some doubt, the player can take the max Focus Pool size as a target number and roll against that value to determine what the character wants most. If more than one focus rolls a success, the one that made it by most is the foremost.. If there are *no* successes, no Bond is sufficiently roused to matter to the current situation; its suggested the player roleplay the results actively.

Example: Sister Anna is both **Driven** *to defend her friends and* **Interested** *in science. When Cindy-ko disappears on the very same day that a travelling montebank promises to demonstrate a perpetual motion machine, Anna is torn about which to pursue. On the one hand, Cindy-ko isn't exactly known for hanging around all the time, and on the other, she could be in trouble. But there's a perpetual motion machine! Anna's player rolls first versus the* **Interest** *of 3 then against the* **Drive** *of 9, and receives a 2 for science and a 10 for her friend. Anna decides that Cindy-ko's earned an acolyte's day off and goes on to the demonstration.*

Impediments

As a player, you can actually suggest an opportunity for your Ties and Bonds to become an impediment for your character, introducing a new complication or plot twist for the GM to use. Interesting complications, whether introduced by the player or GM are the only ways to regenerate the Focus Pools. Creating interest in the game for both players and GMs is one of the goals of RPGs. Besides, doesn't it seem strange that the most angstful of shoujo characters seem to bring it on themselves? Now its clear why!

Example: Cindy-ko and Sister Anna are traveling through a small village when Anna's player realizes he needs to regenerate some points in her "Scientific Curiosity" Focus Pool. He declares that Anna is fascinated by the blacksmith's work, to the point where she's interested in giving a turn at the anvil herself. Imagine the scandal! Since it's a minor side-plot, Anna's GM awards her 1 point for the Focus Pool, but depending on how things play out, she might earn more if things turn bad over her actions.

GM Options

The GM has a much narrower span of options that she can employ directly, but she also controls one of the most powerful parts of the Tie and Bond system: when the points return to a Focus Pool. There are a myriad of options for spending points, and only one way to regain them, and that's through the focus becoming an obstacle to the character.

Challenge Focus

This is the big one, the action that gives the GM a controlling hand. The only way to recharge a Focus Pool is for the focus to become an issue in the ongoing session, providing an obstacle for the character to overcome. When it does, the GM will put anywhere from 1 point in a pool to a complete recharge, depending on how important it is to the ongoing plot. Don't be afraid to let the players themselves suggest an opportunity for this to come into play, however; that's one of their actions, after all.

Example: Sister Anna receives a letter from her friend, Brother Cadwell, in Avingon. He calls for her help in his crusade against a plague of incubi which seem to be tormenting a rural village, up in the mountains. If she begins preparations, her GM awards her 2 points each for "Defending Her Friends" and her "oppose the Devil's Work" **Drive***. Of course, just completing the preparations for such a trip might both require her to spend points from her Focus Pools and to refill them.*

Player Reward

Don't be afraid to just give out focus pool points to reward the players for keeping the game going, making the GM laugh, bringing the snacks or any other behaviour worth encouraging. Players will be going through Ties and Bonds at a break-neck pace if the game is both challenging and paying-off emotionally. Take advantage of that and be generous with the rewards.

Example: Cindy-ko's player brings the chips, and Anna's player gives the GM a write-up of her Holy Order. The GM rewards them both with a full recharge of the focus pool of their choice at the beginning of the session.

Villainous Activity

The villains of the piece have access to the same Focus Pool actions that players do! This can be very important for capturing the feel of shoujo, since in many cases the only difference between the heroes and the villains of a given piece is their motivations. Make sure any opposition to the characters worthy of getting their own name (as opposed to "Guard #3") has at least some kind of Tie or Bond that they can turn to, or even just bring up, in their interaction with the characters. The focus manifestations can be exaggerated and over-pronounced with the villains, but needn't be.

Example: The Demon Lao-Nazu is **Obsessed** with punishing the holy, and derides their beliefs at every opportunity. He's also **Interested** in increasing the number of virgins in the world (to facilitate their sacrifice to him, of course), so can sometimes be seen protecting a particularly virginal young girl ... which can be very confusing to the heroes!

Always keep in mind that the GM's primary role, especially in this genre, is as a facilitator, not as opponent. The GM facilitates the progression of the story arc, the exploration of the characters, and the development of relationships. The conflicts may be physical, but are more often a clash of beliefs and expectations. Use the Ties and Bonds system to make those conflicts clear and manifest, and explore the space between them.

Other Optional Rules

There are a number of optional rules given in the main Big Eyes Small Mouth book, some of which are more suitable than others for the shoujo genre. Its worth looking at these sections one at a time to judge their applicability to your specific situation.

Point-Based versus Random Creation

There are any number of approaches to this question, and most of them have been tediously argued for over two decades both online and off. There's no need to do so here as well. The majority of shoujo characters are very coherent, holistic creatures. Their features of note are typically very resonant with their thematic intent in the context of the story. Because of that, it's usually less advantageous to go with a form of random-character creation, not because of balance issues but because it can lead to a sense of unplanned creation.

Shock Value

Shock Value and the effects of Shock are found on p. 73 and p. 229 in *Big Eyes Small Mouth*. The overall effect of Shock is to make it easier to do non-lethal damage that nevertheless takes the target out of the combat. As such, it's applicable to the wide majority of shoujo settings, where characters take massive amounts of damage and are often left sprawled in the dirt by the villains.
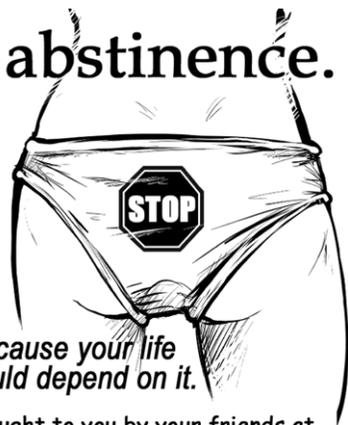
Note that Ties and Bonds can affect the result of a Shock Roll for consciousness; it's not unusual to see a character rise to their feet, again and again, if their friends are threatened.

Critical Injury

Critical Injury is not recommended for use in most shoujo settings because of the degree of lethality it brings. Unless there are special circumstances, shoujo protagonists often lose a lot of blood but do not greatly suffer for it. Usually, the threat of unconsciousness is sufficient to cause concern in combat; critical injuries that can leave characters bleeding slowly to the point of death is overkill.

There are settings in which such situations are appropriate, however. *X/1999* is a fine example of one; the environment is gritty and dark, and character mortality should be reinforced with the threat of a slow, angst-laden death. *Demon City: Shinjuku* is another example in that vein, though not quite shoujo.

Why Skills?

An option that is not in the 2nd edition of *Big Eyes Small Mouth* but was the default in the 1st is whether or not the Skill system is necessary at all. In the original BESM, there were no Skill costs at all, nor Skills; all rolls were either based on CV or on a raw Stat. This simplified the system and, particularly, the resolution system enormously, at the cost of character detail.

In the shoujo genre, it's worth looking at this option as a choice for campaigning. Shoujo characters are typically at least basically proficient in any act they set their hands to, unless explicitly reasoned why not. This can be modeled very well by eliminating Skills altogether and defining a new set of Attributes and Defects to cover being particularly good at a Skill.

New Attribute: Enhanced Talent

Description: Your character exhibits an innate ability to excel at a given skill. This may be an accident of birth, genetic engineering, or years spent practicing. In rolls which are related to the talent, you add your level of Attribute to your Stat to determine the target. Come up with some kind of expression (like a Ties and Bonds focus manifestation) that shows the world your ability.

Cost: The same as the given Skill in the appropriate list for your genre.

Example: Sister Anna has always been particularly good with her voice; its said her song can charm birds from the trees. Her player buys "Enhanced Talent: Singing" to 3 for 3 points; the manifestation is defined as a low, soft voice that sounds musical even when she speaks. Anna is also particularly adept with a sword, thanks to a life as a mercenary before entering the convent, so she also purchases "Enhanced Talent: Swords" at 2 for 10 points (going by the Medieval Fantasy costs); however, because its an Enhanced Talent and not a Skill, this applies to judging swords, making swords, or anything else related to swords, as well as attack and defense. Sister Anna will get her Attack Combat Value + 2 with a good blade in her hand. As a manifestation, Anna's player decides she always has a quip about someone else's sword, either its construction or its history.

New Defect: Decreased Talent

Description: You're just not so good at something. This might be because of a physical limitation, or a simple inability to wrap your mind around it. In rolls related to the talent, you subtract the level of the Defect from your Stat to determine if you succeed or not. Come up with some kind of expression (like a Ties and Bonds focus manifestation) that shows the world your incapacity.

Cost: -1 point per level. Maximum -2.

Example: Cindy-ko is a complete and utter buffoon in combat; not only does she have the Defect "Inept Combat" but she is particularly egregiously bad with the "nun's staff." (Ie, she has "Decreased Talent: Nun's Staff.") Unfortunately for her, the nun's staff is not only the symbol of she and Anna's Order, but she has an Interest in becoming adept with the thing, so she carries one as her weapon preferentially. In combat with it, she rolls with a target of her Combat Value - 1 for "Inept Combat" - 1 for "Decreased Talent." She'll be lucky if the broad side of a barn doesn't dodge her.

The Passage of Time

Time in RPGs has always been a problematic issue. On the one hand, "the play's the thing," and there is an overwhelming desire to have time pass solely as appropriate. On the other, there is a subtle undercurrent of desire to mimic the passing of time accurately, to mimic the ticking away of hours, minutes, and seconds in order to achieve a strange parity with "reality."

Luckily, shoujo frees us from the latter concerns. Time in the vast majority of shoujo literature and anime is even more stylized than elsewhere in the creative arts; its very often purely a matter of convenience how long a trip takes, or even how long a battle takes, since all is subject to the rule of the heart. To that end, the following categories cover common periods and intervals in shoujo.

Moment

Equivalent to 1 combat turn, the moment is the time it takes to have one single exchange, whether it be an exchange of blows or a few barbed comments. Some moments are longer than others; if the character has to leap thirty feet to cleave the shackles of a bound friend while shouting out a complex formula to invoke their mystic strength, it's still only one moment. Some moments are very short — if a character is concentrating on a silent exchange of sword thrusts and parries nearly too fast for the human eye to follow, that too is a single moment.

If there's a problem where two actions are taking place simultaneously that might require a different length of time to actually accomplish ... ignore it. They all take one moment.

Scene

An uninterrupted series of moments in one place is a scene, just as in movie and book jargon. As long as the characters are all in one place and doing roughly one set of related things, a scene is still going on. Notable scene boundaries are at the beginning and end of combats, and generally sunrise and sunset. That's not to say that if you're in combat just before sunrise, that its a whole different scene once the sun is up, but it very well could be.

Generally, there's little reason to keep track of smaller increments of time than this. Any powers of Attributes that drain Energy or some other resource at a per-minute rate should, instead, simply pay 10x that amount in a lump sum and simply have the power last the duration of a scene. This may seem to overpower some abilities and underpower others, but on the average the decrease in the amount of bookkeeping is worth it.

Day

Once all the scenes that are going to play out in a given sequence are done, the day is through. This can be as few as a single scene, or the entire events of the session can play out in a single day, just as it can sometimes seem that a whole season of episodes play out in the space of only a few days for the characters.

The day is a good measure of time for healing to occur in; instead of recovering 10 Health an hour, go with the optional 10 points a day. This captures the feeling of most shoujo anime, where a wound has been known to linger for months, until it is no longer crucial to the plot.

Session

A session is simply a single given period of gaming with your friends. Sometimes this is only a few hours, other times it might be a 35-hour gaming marathon.

Some people who have a good feel for how much they get through every session may elect to have the focus pools of Ties and Bonds refresh at the beginning of every session, but that isn't the default assumption.

Episode

Roughly parallel to the idea of the day is breaking down the progression of the game into individual episodes, a series of scenes that may span more than a single day but which lead from a beginning through a middle to an ending resolution. Shoujo literature tends to be highly episodic, not only because that tends to be the way it's presented (in anime and manga), but because its difficult to focus on a single conflict for too long, and shoujo thrives on wrangling deeply with every conflict that comes along.

An episode typically runs between one and three sessions, depending on how long your sessions run, and between nine and fifteen scenes. For those folks who really want to study the structure of stories, and particularly how to pace episodes of your game for maximum impact, it's certainly worth studying any of the innumerable books on writing film, and then sitting down with your favourite anime and going through to study how it accomplishes the goal. Plus, you get a fine excuse to watch it again!

Story Arc

A story arc is a collection of one or more episodes which together form the beginning, middle, and end of a greater story. This doesn't mean that each episode doesn't have an explicit beginning, middle, and end, but that there should be the promise of a greater resolution in the first episode which is answered in the last. Traditionally, story arcs are two or three episodes, but some have run four or five.

A good story arc can be difficult to pace well, because players are unpredictable creatures and, given sufficient time, will take the story as a whole in wholly new directions, so plotting out a story arc is equal parts creativity and prescience. You have to be careful not to railroad the players into doing what you want rather than what they want. It can be useful to simply conceive as things as a black box, with a desired entry and exit situation, and leave everything between to the characters while you gently persuade.

Season

In a sense, the season is the ultimate expression of the story arc. The season is usually somewhere between 13 and 25 episodes, but could be as few as two or three (for an OAV), or as many as thirty. For many groups, a season corresponds to a literal real-world season, with twelve weekly sessions and an ending weekend-long session to finish the season in a blaze of glory.

Like the episode and the story arc, the season should really be seen as a coherent whole, with beginning, middle, and end. That means that there should be issues which show up in the opening episodes which don't actually get resolved until the ending closes in. That doesn't mean that the opening episodes shouldn't have closure, but instead that there should always be promises made to be kept later. It's vital that the promises the plot makes early be resolved in time, however, because without that, its difficult to retain interest.

As the Russian playwright Chekov suggested, if you see a knife in the first act, it'll be buried in someone's chest by the third. The lesson here is that stories, the good ones, generally open with a set of questions which flow out of the characters and their situation and end with those questions answered. Dangling questions are not, necessarily, a bad thing but if there are no answered turning up for the players it can be a very frustrating story to live through. There are more than a few shoujo stories that end on unresolved notes, but by and large, the majority have a distinct parity between the promises made at the opening and the answers in hand at the close.

Sometimes your players aren't interested in the arc you're currently riding out. While you *could* simply drop what you're doing and leap into a new arc, everyone will feel a better sense of transition if you instead bring some resolution to the questions which opened the arc or the series and then move on to the new beginning. Doing this with style and flare is not easy, but making the attempt is usually sufficient. Your players will remember particularly adept transitions and talk about them for time immemorial.

Series

The crowning glory of any serious campaign is to go through a number of seasons with the same setting and end up with a series. The ambitious among the readers are already trying to think of ways to work in story arcs and structures that span multiple seasons (inspired by JMS's success with the strangely shoujo *Babylon 5*, no doubt). It's certainly possible to accomplish, but requires a rare skill and dedication.

The series usually, but not always, keeps the same protagonists from season to season. An interesting variant on that idea might be to have a recurring set of villains every season, and the protagonists must rise again in every age to stop or banish them (such as found in *Phantasy Star* or *Ultima*).

Whatever method you choose, it is sure to be a valid and worthwhile goal, as long as everyone is having fun.

Appendix – Character Checklist

   The following list of questions may be of use to players in creating background for their characters — or to GMs in providing background for the unsuspecting, hapless innocents who are about to undergo the emotional pain and wonderful art which is shoujo.

Family

   Do you love your parents?
      If not, why not?
   Are your parents both still alive?
      If one or both is dead, did they die under suspicious circumstances?
 Has this given you a permanent phobia, mania, or amnesia, or caused you to vow never to love anyone again?

Relationships

   Are you or have you ever been in love?
      Is the object of your affections in love with you, or with someone else?
 Did finding this out blight your life and cause you to swear never to fall in love again?
   Do you regard members of the opposite sex as being: repulsive? no big deal? intriguing? gorgeous?
      Despite responding yes to one of the first two, do you still find there's just something about the new boy/girl in your class?
   Would your friends all reject you if they knew your dark secret?
      Would your family reject you if they knew your dark secret?
 Would the world possibly come to an end if your dark secret were public knowledge?
   Are you in love with someone who you can't possibly have because they're a close relative or because they're already in love with a friend of yours?
   Are you in love with someone who's a bitter enemy?
      Have you reason to believe they're secretly in love with you?

Hopes and Fears

   Is your greatest dream in life to live a normal life without all these bizarre and embarrassing things happening to you?
   Is your greatest dream in life to escape this utterly boring 'normal' life to some great adventure?

Problems

Are you subject to involuntary (under specific circumstances) changes of sex or shape?

If so, whose fault is it?

Have you sworn your loyalty to a specific master or organization?

Do you suspect that you have made a tragic mistake and that they are evil?

Is this going to force you into conflict with other friends?

Do you have a cool spandex/silk outfit, with optional trenchcoat to hide the larger weapons?

Do you have some sort of small cute companion (animal, bird, robot, fairy, angel, imp, ghost)?

Do you have reason to suspect that said companion is hiding vitally important secrets about your past?

Have you ever sworn an oath that you later regretted?

Or that you suspect you may be going to regret?

Have you ever been accidentally transported to another world, an alternate dimension, deep space, the past, the future, Heaven, or Hell?

Did you find out, once you got there, that you had a destined role of some sort?

Did you also meet the one true romance of your life?

And were they a close blood relative?

Do your parents have mysterious magical items in the attic?

Body

Are you a genetic crossbreed with unknown DNA?

Do you have a hereditary responsibility, such as running a martial arts dojo, hunting demons, or serving secret ninja masters as an assassin?

Do you have premonitions?

Bad ones?

About the Apocalypse and the end of the world?

Have you been told that you are one of a special group who is fated to either save or destroy the world?

Did you try to run away, and are you now hiding in hopes that "they" won't find you?

Did you have to leave behind your family and/or true love to do so?

Are you half-demon?

Do you really want to become full demon or full human?

Is your characteristically brusque and cold demeanor really a shield to stop yourself getting hurt again after a past tragedy?

Does it work?

Do you feel that you protect your friends best by telling them the truth about your past, or by concealing your past in order to stop them interfering?

Have you had a mysterious weapon/sword/magical item/book passed down to you by an unspecified ancestor?

Do you feel a particular affinity with any element?

Is there a mysterious conspiracy going on at your school?

Are you absolutely sure about that?

Do people around you ever display strange magical/psychic powers or unusual items of technology?

Are the excuses they give for this remotely convincing?

Or do they suggest some horrific secret?

Do you have nightmares suggesting that something happened to you when you were younger which you can't remember now?

Do any of your friends appear in these nightmares?

Have you any reason to suspect that you are the reincarnation of a superhero, warrior, or similar hero/heroine from a long-lost golden age?

Have your companions and/or long-lost love also appeared?

More to the point, have your enemies also turned up?

Were there any particularly traumatic circumstances involving you becoming a cyborg?

Are you unusually gifted in some area?

Has this affected your social life?

Are you part of a team which works to fight crime / assassinate villains / defend the earth / help true lovers find each other / etcetera?

Does your team have themed secret identities / uniforms / codenames?

Does your team have a nemesis (either an individual or an opposing team)?

Are you a ghost who has returned from the dead for a specific purpose?

Which is more important to you, love or honor?

Are any of your family or friends hospitalized or dead, causing you to seek revenge?

How important is this revenge to you?

Attribute or Skill	Level	Points
Extra Attacks - Surprisingly fast	2	2
Focused Damage - Bokken, "Front strike!"	1	1
Kensei - Blind Fighting, Judge Opponent, Katanaspace	3	3
Norm Total:		**[6]**
Psionics - Energy Manipulation	2	8
Spec Total:		**[8]**
Final Total:		**[14]**

Psi Attributes

	Level	Points
Illusion - Up to house-sized, all senses	3	18
Sixth Sense - Detect Evil, Sense Spirits	2	2

Total: **[20]**

Haruka Saito
Japanese High School Student

Age: 13   Sex: Female
Height: 135 cm

Character Points: 25
Skill Points: 0

Body	4
Mind	4
Soul	5
Health	45
Energy	45
Shock	9
ACV	4
DCV	2

   Haruka Saito is a vague-looking girl with lank black hair, a bag of books, and a talent for pulling a wooden bokken (kendo practice sword) out of thin air to hit her friends with when they say something stupid. She is prone to brooding and research, or kendo practice, and often needs to be dragged out of her studies by her friends so that they can do something important, like go shopping. Her comments tend to be cynical, gloomy, and accurate.

   Due to her parents getting divorced, Haruka lives alone -- though her grandparents, who own the local kendo dojo where she practices, keep a close eye on her. She's a neatnik, and reacts very badly to guests being untidy. Haruka has a strong belief in the supernatural, and is sure that her talent for creating illusions means something very important. She's not sure what yet.

Defect Bonus	Points
Ageism - She's 13!	1
Easily Distracted - Fascinated by the supernatural	1
Total:	**[2]**

Tie or Bond	Intensity/Pool
Discover supernatural heritage	Drive/6
Practice kendo	Interest/3
Look for purpose in life	Interest/3

Attribute or Skill	Level	Points
Animal Friendship -Talks with the animals	5	5
Appearance- Incredibly cute!	3	3
Damn Healthy! - +30 HP	3	3
Norm Total:		**[11]**
Psionics - Psionic Sheath (40pts)	2	8
Built using OBM/Magic hybrid		
Spec Total:		**[8]**
Final Total:		**[19]**

Psi Attributes

	Level	Points
Basic Sheath Stats: 80 HP, 7 Def Armor, 30 Def FF 100kph run, 75kph fly, +2 Init, +2 DCV		
Light Armor - Damage Reduced by 7	3	3
Flight - Up to 75kph (4EP to invoke/turn)	1	4
TK Field - Force Field, Lvl 1, Blocks Incorporeal Limited (Ranged Only), 30Def, (3EP to invoke)	2	6
Ground Speed - Incredible Speed, 100kph (4EP to invoke)	2	4
Heightened Senses -8 to both Sight and Hearing (4EP to invoke)	4	4
Summonable - 2d6 turns to invoke, 8EP	1	4
Toughness +40 HP	2	8
Manuver Bonus: +2 Init, +2 DCV, Ground	4	4
Telekinetic Punch Weapon Attack, Accurate x3, Backblast, Short Range, Extra Energy, 15 Dam (8EP to invoke)	1	4
Awkward Size - Bulky, doubles her size	1	-1
Total:		**[40]**

Anneki North
Japanese High School Student

Age: 13   Sex: Female
Height: 143cm

Character Points: 25
Skill Points: 0

Body	4
Mind	4
Soul	4
Health	70
Energy	40
Shock	8
ACV	4
DCV	2

Anneki North may, in fact, be one of the cutest creatures on the planet Earth, from the top of her spiky-green hair to the tips of her green-nailed toes. Really, her obsession with the colour green is only an affectation, despite the fact that 99% of her closet space is deeply verdant. She's short, perky, bouncy, and all-around fun to be with.

At least until she loses her temper, and her psi-sheath manifests itself, cloaking her in bright green emerald crystals shaped like an ancient samurai, dragonfly wings spread to either side. When the sheath is active, Anneki can fly to the sky, run as fast as a car, and channel her rage into telekinetic blasts from her tiny balled-up fists even as bullets are shoved away from her. When this girl gets a head of steam, you might need a nuke to stop her. The sheath is tremendously exhausting, however, and she only can fuel it with anger for so long before she burns out.

Given all this, you'd never guess that her psionic potential was never meant to be, but the results of her parents' genetic tinkering before her birth. Not even Anneki knows that, but somehow she suspects it, deep inside, and longs for someone "real" to come along and make her feel real, too.

Defect Bonus	Points
Ageism - She's 13!	1
Bane: Copper - -10HP/turn on touch	1
Marked - Easily detectible as a Psi	1
Phobia: Fire - Terrified of large open flame	1
Skeleton in the Closet - Anneki is a synthetic psi; if discovered, she would undoubtedly be under even more scrutiny and probably vivisected !	2
	1
Total:	**[6]**

Tie or Bond	Intensity/Pool
Loves animals	Interest/3
Wants a real boyfriend	Drive/9

Attribute or Skill	Level	Points
Heightened Awareness - Empathic feel for all situations, avoids surprise	2	2
Unique: Psi Control - Relatively capable with psi powers, more from intense desire than practice	2	6
Psionics - Empathic Psionics (10pts)	1	4
Norm Total:		**[13]**
Spec Total:		**[4]**
Final Total:		**[17]**

Psi Attributes

	Level	Points
Empathic Burst - Art of Distraction, Lvl 3, Silent, Still (12EP to invoke)	3	3
Empathic Scan - Sixth Sense, Lvl 1, Silent, (4EP to invoke): Empathy, Truth	2	2
Empathic Control - Mind Control, Lvl 1, Silent, Still (12EP to invoke): All minds, only to create emotions	1	3
Empathic Shield - Mind Shield, Lvl 2, Silent Still (8EP to invoke)2 2	2	2
Total:		**[10]**

James Tobisji	Body	4
Japanese High School Student	Mind	3
	Soul	8
Age: 15 Sex: Male	Health	60
Height: 172cm	Energy	55
	Shock	12
Character Points: 25	ACV	5
Skill Points: N/A	DCV	3

Tall for his age, James is entering that "awkward stage" of puberty, where his arms and legs seem just slightly too long for him to control. An unruly mop of bright red hair and a scatter of freckles across his nose give him a certain boyish cuteness, though he seems oblivious to both its presence and effect.

Despite the relative recentness of the rise of his powers, James has done a fine job of getting a handle on them. Most of this is self-defense; his Empathic Burst can disorient a small group if he loses control, and an uncontrolled Empathic Scan when he first discovered his powers (to his deep embarrassment) caused him to leave his last school.

Defect Bonus	Points
Ageism - He's 15	1
Awkward - Pubescent Clumsiness	1
Total:	**[2]**

Tie or Bond	Intensity/Pool
Protect and care for his siblings	Motivation/6
Avoid the spotlight	Interest/3
Develop more skill with his psionics	Interest/3

Attribute or Skill	Level	Points
Appearance - Better than average rugged looks	2	2
Aura of Command - Leads a gang with almost supernatural charisma	4	4
Combat Mastery - Innate sense of combat methodologies	4	8
Damn Healthy! - +20 HP, incredible boosted ability to take damage	2	2
Flunkies - Street-level punks love him	5	5
Heightened Awareness - +2 to Stat checks for perception	1	1
Organizational Ties - Gang leader	5	5
Personal Gear - Access to borderline illegal toys	2	1
Norm Total:		**[28]**
Psionics - Psi-Soldier, -8 Power Points	3	9
Servant - Can throw a 30pt thug at the PCs every story	6	12
Spec Total:		**[21]**
Final Total:		**[49]**

Psi Attributes

	Level	Points
Life Support - He cannot be stopped by something as minor as no air, Silent, Still 8EP to invoke	2	2
Light Armour - Hidden, 5Def, unnaturally resilliant 5EP to invoke	5	5
Mind Control - Can only induce a feeling of loyalty, 7-20 people, 10EP to invoke	5	10
Mind Shield - +8 to Mind/Soul to resist psi assault 4EP to invoke	4	4
Special Movement - Balance, Cat-Like, 2EP to invoke	2	2
Stealth - +1 to hiding from vision	1	1
Total:		**[22]**

Defect Bonus	Points
Easily Distracted - Small fuzzy animals (he loves them)	1
Girl/Guy Magnet - Everyone in the gang vies for his attention	2
Nemesis - Strike Force Zero agent (the Man in Black)	1
Skeleton in the Closet - Unknowing gov't synthetic psi, smuggled out as a baby	2
Special Requirement - Must eat more often than most to fuel metabolism	1
Wanted - The cops know his name	1
Total:	**[2]**

Tie or Bond	Intensity/Pool
Be biggest gang power in the city	Interest/3
Protect his gang members	Interest/3
Avoid the government	Interest/3
Seek his origins	Interest/3

Mordecai deVri
Japanese Gang Leader

Age: 22   Sex: Male
Height: 184cm

Character Points: 54
Skill Points: 0

Body	5
Mind	4
Soul	5
Health	70
Energy	45
Shock	14
ACV	8
DCV	6

Mordecai is big. Built like a wrestler, he's never had to work hard to have an incredible physique, or even watch his diet; he seems to naturally possess a clear complection, piercing dark eyes, and perfectly spiked hair at all times. Mordecai's dusky skin matches the almost continual scowl he wears whenever out in public, clad in the street's favourite uniform: a leather vest, beat up jeans, and big black leather boots.

He remembers nothing before waking up on the street at about 15, desperately hungry and almost dead from dehydration. He remembered nothing of who he was or where he was from, only that he wanted to live. In the course of that life, he found out that, when he had to, he was good in a fight and people looked up to him, wanted to do what he said. And a good thing, too, because the city was a dirty, ugly place, and dangerous to the unwary. Mordecai appointed himself judge, jury, and executioner when it came to the streets, and he knew the only way to protect the people at the bottom was to organize them to hit back at the people near the top.

What Mordecai doesn't know is that he was never born to parents, but was the result of genetic tampering by a government lab looking to create the ultimate psionic soldier. And they're very keen to find the baby smuggled out of the lab by some unknown person. The Strike Force Zero agent that is constantly getting in the way of Mordecai's plans baffles him, since he has no idea who the Man in Black is or why he even cares. The new brats hanging around the mall in his turf are another problem altogether; there's something strange about them, and they could be useful tools. If they get in the way, of course, he'll encourage them to leave.

Attribute or Skill	Level	Points
Appearance - Very pretty	4	4
Aura of Command - Acts with authority	3	3
Organizational Ties - Member of all the best school cliques	2	2
Personal Gear - Money Buys Lots of Things	1	1
Psionics - Telekinesis, Force Field	1	4
Norm Total:		**[10]**
Spec Total:		**[4]**
Final Total:		**[14]**

Psi Attributes

	Level	Points
Telekinesis - Up to 1000kg/car, all elements	4	8
Force Field - Shield Only (45Def, wall)	1	2
Total:		**[10]**

Tsubaki Shinta
Japanese High School Student

Age: 13   Sex: Female
Height:140 cm

Character Points: 25
Skill Points: 0

Body	5
Mind	5
Soul	5
Health	50
Energy	50
Shock	10
ACV	5
DCV	3

   Tsubaki Shinta is tall and graceful, with black hair down to her waist and huge eyes. She's beautiful, and she knows it. Her school uniform is always in perfect order, her out-of-school clothes are chic, and her ballet gear is never less than gorgeous. She's talented, charming, and psychically talented, and she knows it; to her mind, center stage is her rightful place, and a brilliant career can't be long in coming. This frequently comes across as bossiness or arrogance to others of her age.

   However, she compensates for this to some extent by genuinely caring about her family and school, and having a genuine dislike of bullying or viciousness. She is particularly fond of James (though she refuses to admit it) and wishes that she had sisters as cute as his. She's an only child, and her parents have always made it clear that they have high expectations of her.

Defect Bonus	Points
Ageism - She's 13!	1
Guy Magnet - "Hey, Tsubaki, wanna date?" "No!"	1
Recurring Nightmares - Of failure	1
Total:	**[3]**

Tie or Bond	Intensity/Pool
Come top in all the exams	Motivation/6
Support school	Interest/3
Protect the bullied	Interest/3

Bibliography

The following are manga or anime titles — or both/in the case of a manga series which was turned into an anime series. Some are pure shoujo/a few are shonen/and most lie somewhere between/being shoujo with shonen elements/or vice versa. All repay investigation. This is by no means an exhaustive list/and the reader/viewer is urged to do her own research and to spread the meme.

Unfortunately/not all of the following titles are available in English. The internet can be helpful in providing sources/fan translations/or copies of the manga or anime; ebay in particular offers a wide variety of anime DVDs. We can only hope that at some point all of these will be available in English/as they're all worth the reading or watching. All names of authors are given in the Japanese style/with surname first.

Angel Sanctuary © Kaori Yuki/Hakusensha/"Angel Sanctuary" Committee; manga forthcoming from Viz: anime available from Central Park Media

Angelic Layer © CLAMP/TV Tokyo/Bones/Dentsu Inc./ADV Films; manga translated by Tokyopop: anime available from A.D. Vision

Card Captor Sakura (Card Captors) © CLAMP/Kodansha/Nakayosi/MOVIC; manga translated by Tokyopop: anime available from Geneon Entertainment

Chobits © CLAMP/KODANSHA/"CHOBITS" PARTNERSHIP; manga translated by Tokyopop: anime available from Geneon Entertainment

Clamp Campus Detectives © CLAMP/Asuka Comics/Kadokawa Shoten/Bandai Visual/Studio Visual/TV Tokyo; manga translated by Tokyopop

Darkside Blues © Akita Shoten/Toho Co./Ltd./J.C. Staff.; manga not translated: anime available from Central Park Media

Demon City Shinjuku (Demon City Hunter) © Hideyuki Kikuchi/Asahi Sonorama/Video Art/Japan Home Video; manga translated by ADV: anime available from Central Park Media

Dragonball Z © Bird Studio/Shueisha/Fuji TV/Toei/Blue Water Studios/Funimation; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Funimation Productions

Earthian © Youmex Inc/AnimeWorks/Kouga Yun; manga not translated: anime available from Anime Works

Escaflowne © Sunrise/TEREBI Tokyo/Emotion/Bandai Entertainment/Kadokawa Comics.; manga translated by Tokyopop: anime available from Bandai Entertainment

Final Fantasy © Square Enix Co./Ltd.

Flame of Recca © Nobuyuki Anzai/Shogakukan/Studio Pierrot/Fuji TV; manga translated by Viz: anime not available

Fushigi Yugi (Mysterious Play) © Studio Pierrot/TV Tokyo/Pioneer USA; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Pioneer Video

Gensomaden Saiyuki © Kazuya Minekura/Issaisha/Saiyuki Project and TV Tokyo 2000; manga translated by TokyoPop: anime available from ADV

Haunted Junction © Mukudori Nemu/Media Works/Studio Deen/Bandai Entertainment; manga not translated: anime available from Bandai Entertainment

Hellsing © Kouta Hirano/Young King Comics/Geneon; manga not translated: anime available from Geneon Entertainment

Here is Greenwood ©Yuki Nasue/Hakusensha Inc./Victor Entertainment/Inc./Pierrot Project.; manga not translated: anime available from Cpm/Software Sculptors

Inu-Yasha ©Takahashi Rumiko/Shonen Sunday Comics and Sunrise Studios; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Viz

Irresponsible Captain Tylor © Yoshioka Taira/Hiroshi Yukiyoka/Kadokawa Shoten/Tylor Project/A.D. Vision; no manga: anime available from A.D. Vision

Magic Knight Rayearth © CLAMP/Tokyo Movie Shinsha; manga translated by Tokyopop: anime available from Media Blasters

Maho Tsukai Tai (Magic Users Club) © Ohta Tami/Triangle Staff/Bandai Visual. Licensed by Media Blasters; manga not translated; anime available from Anime Works

Nineteen © Kitagawa Shou/Shueisha; manga not translated

O-niisama E (Brother/Dear Brother) © Riyoko Ikeda/NHK Enterprises Inc./Ikeda Riyoko Productions/Tezuka Productions/Shueisha/Choukoro-sha; manga not translated: anime not available

Oh My Goddess! © Fujishima Kosuke/Dark Horse Comics/AIC/Kodansha/KSS/TBS/Oriental Light and Magic. Licensed by AnimEigo and Geneon Entertainment USA; manga translated by Dark Horse Comics: anime available from Animeigo Inc.

Project A-Ko © Soeishinsha/Final-Nishijima; manga translated by Central Park Media: anime available from Central Park Media

Ranma 1/2 © Fuji TV/Kitty Film/Shogakukan Productions Co./Viz Communications/The Ocean Group; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Viz

Read Or Die © Aniplex/J.C. Staff/Studio Orphee/Studio DEEN/Sony Music Entertainment; manga not translated: anime available from Wea Corp

Revolutionary Girl Utena © B-Papas/Saito Chiho/Shogakukan/Shou Kaku Committee/TV Tokyo/Viz; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Software Sculptors

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Rurouni Kenshin © Watsuki Nobuhiro/Viz/Studio Gallop/Fuji TV/SME Visual Works/Bang Zoom! Entertainment.; manga not translated: anime available from Anime Works

Sailor Moon © Naoko Takeuchi/Kodansha/TOEI Animation. English Language Adaptation © DiC Entertainment/Geneon Entertainment and ADV Films; manga translated by Tokyopop: anime available from A.D. Vision

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Saint Seiya (Knights of the Zodiac) © Masami Kurumada/Viz/Toei Animation/ADV Films/DiC Entertainment; manga translated by Viz: anime available from A.D. Vision

Science Ninja Team Gatchaman © Narushima Hirokoku & Suzuki Toshimitsu/Tatsunoko/Gallerie International Films/Sandy Frank Productions; no manga: anime available from Urban Vision

Silent Mobius © Asamiya Kia/Studio Tron/ Kadokawa Shoten/Bandai Visual/Sotsu Agency/TV Tokyo; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Geneon Entertainment

Slayers © H. Kanzaka/R. Araizumi/Kadokawa/TV Tokyo/SOFTX/Marubeni; manga translated by Central Park Media: anime available from Central Park Media

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Tenchi Muyo (No Need for Tenchi!) © AIC Entertainment/Pioneer LDC/TV Tokyo/SoftX; manga translated by Viz: anime available from Pioneer Video

Tenshi na konamaiki (A Cheeky Angel) © Hiroyuki Nishimori/Tokyo Movie Shinsha/TV Tokyo ; manga not translated: anime not available

Tokyo Babylon © CLAMP/Shinshokan/MOVIC/Sony Music Entertainment (Japan) Inc.; manga forthcoming from Tokyopop: anime available from Central Park Media

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FOURTH MILLENNIUM
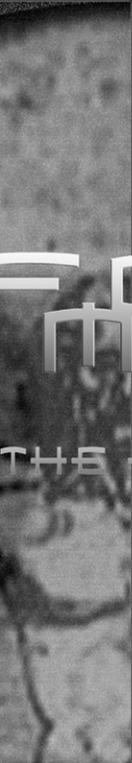
THE END OF HISTORY BEGINS IN 2004

Hearts Swords Flowers is a game supplement for the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* system which explores shoujo (literally, Japanese for "girls literature") in depth - how to capture the mood and attitude of genki girls, angstful guys, tormented heroines, and destined heroes caught up in dire situations, be it saving the world or surviving prom night. Included is an extensive section on gamemastering shoujo stories, new mechanics that capture the importance of personal wants and desires for shoujo characters and several example settings to get your games up and running quickly!

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