

THE  
MOUNTAIN  
WITCH

# THE MOUNTAIN WITCH



timothy kleinert

The Mountain Witch

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# Foreword

THE MOUNTAIN WITCH was originally written for the Son of Iron Game Chef (IGC) RPG design contest<sup>1</sup> held at the Forge website in April of 2004. The contest, which was organized and judged by Mike Holmes, challenged designers to write a (complete) **fantasy** RPG in under a week that incorporated at least three of four following elements: **ice**, **dawn**, **island**, and **assault**.

Early inspiration for the game came from another contest entry, Jonathon Walton's Seadog Tuxedo.<sup>2</sup> What impressed me about the design was how the characters – pirate penguins – seemed to embody the contest elements of **ice**, **island**, and **assault**. As this seemed like a good contest strategy, I set out to do the same.

The obvious choice was to make the characters warriors (**assault**) of some sort. Inspiration then hit while listening to Wu Tang Clan. The characters could be martial artists – no!... Samurai – wait!... Ronin. Masterless warriors from the **island** of the rising sun (**dawn**). Not bad.

While brainstorming ways to incorporate the various contest elements, I was reminded of the famous line, “No man is an **island**.” I wanted the characters to be socially and emotionally isolated or “cold” (**ice**) towards one another. (The concept of the outcast ronin fit perfectly with this.)

Fresh on my mind was the idea of a “trust” mechanic

1 [www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=10762](http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=10762)

2 [www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?p=115462#115462](http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?p=115462#115462)

3 [www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?p=112186#112186](http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?p=112186#112186).

Interestingly, THE MOUNTAIN WITCH was not the only IGC entry to use Rich's trust idea. Alexander Cherry's Frigid Bitch ([www.twistedconfessions.com/atheneum/frigid.php](http://www.twistedconfessions.com/atheneum/frigid.php)) also uses a version of the mechanic.

II proposed by Rich Forest for a gangster heist game.<sup>3</sup> Players would gain “trust points” for helping each other out, which could later be used to back stab the other characters. This idea of trust, of characters constantly questioning each other’s motives, was just what I needed to make the design work.

Intrigued by the paradox of good people who do wrong, I wanted the characters to confront an evil within themselves. I wanted the characters to undergo a personal or emotional change, to experience a spiritual “dawn” if you will. From this I developed the idea of the dark fates, inspired by the use of fate in Steve Darlington’s RPG, “There Is No Spoon.”<sup>4</sup>

As I was developing the game, I had two pressures bearing down on me. The first was the general desire to write a concise, focused design. The second was the inherent time crunch of the contest. Due to these pressures, I decided to center the game around a single situation: an **assault** on a mountain fortress. I reasoned that a mountain would act as a natural boundary for the game, serving as a figurative island. And what other Japanese mountain should be used, except Mount Fuji?

As the contest challenged designers to write a **fantasy** RPG, it seemed only natural that the characters would have to face a supernatural element of some sort. This worked perfectly with concept of dark fate. The characters would have to fight both literal demons in the present, and figurative demons from their pasts. Thus the Mountain Witch was born.

There were a number of mechanical concepts I had encountered at the Forge that wanted I to try out. One was Fortune-in-the-Middle conflict resolution. Another was aggressive scene framing. Having just seen Kill Bill, I was also very interested in emulating “cinematic” combat, as had been discussed in a number of Forge threads.<sup>5</sup> So I decided to formally divide play into “Scenes,” later renamed “Chapters.”

4 [www.steved.org/roleplaying/rules/MatrixRPG.pdf](http://www.steved.org/roleplaying/rules/MatrixRPG.pdf)

5 Particularly this one: [www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=6688](http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=6688)

Resolution would use a standard opposed roll for all conflicts.<sup>6</sup>  
Damage would be temporary and based on margin of success.  
The system was then rounded out by character zodiacs and abilities, which grew out of my need to differentiate characters from one another.

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Amazingly, that original contest entry stood on its own. It definitely had its rough edges, but the core of the system was developed in those first 7 days. For those who are interested, the original contest entry is presented free to public, and can be viewed at Timfire Publishing's homepage:

[www.timfire.com/MountainWitch/IGC.html](http://www.timfire.com/MountainWitch/IGC.html)



## ABOUT THE TEXT

Though the text is intended to be self-explanatory, the scope of the book is necessarily limited. Viewing a samurai film or two – such as Seven Samurai or Ninja Scroll – would be very helpful for enhancing a sense of the subject matter and genre. Likewise, exposure to role-playing in the past would be helpful in understanding the game, as the text utilizes a number of common role-playing conventions.

If you would like to know more about either the samurai genre or role-playing in general, Appendix I “Further Reading,”<sup>7</sup> lists a number of resources that provide more information. In case that you are new to role-playing, Timfire Publishing provides a primer on the hobby at its website:

[www.timfire.com/articles/whatisrpg.html](http://www.timfire.com/articles/whatisrpg.html).

<sup>6</sup> Resolution was heavily influenced by Mike Holmes' “standard rants” on combat systems ( [www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=2024](http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=2024) ) and opposed rolls ( [www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=2695](http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewtopic.php?t=2695) ).

<sup>7</sup> Page 128.

## A “Reasonable” Standard

Very often, the text leaves certain aspects of play up to what would be considered “reasonable.” Exactly what is and is not

### Designer Notes

Throughout the text, sidebars (such as this) will appear from time to time.

These sidebars are designer notes.

The purpose of these designer notes vary. Sometimes they are used to explain a particular design choice and its function in the game. Occasionally, designer notes are used to explain a given topic in greater detail or in more practical terms. Still other times they are used to express special advice, either about the game itself or about role-playing in general. Regardless, designer notes are used to communicate ideas that do not necessarily fit within the formal rules, but are nonetheless important.

reasonable or plausible is largely left to the discretion of individual groups. If what is “reasonable” is ever in question, or if individuals have specific concerns, the group can simply discuss the matter among themselves.

## Notation

### Mechanical/Thematic

**Notation:** THE MOUNTAIN

WITCH has many game elements that serve both mechanical and thematic purposes, such as “trust,” “conflict,” or “fate.” To differentiate,

mechanical elements are always capitalized, while thematic elements are not. For example, the statement “the character uses **Trust** to help his friend” would refer to the formal mechanics of Trust, while “**fate** is forever bearing down on the samurai” would refer to the theme of fate in the game.

**Gender in the Text:** To help the reader differentiate between the players and the **Game Master (GM)**, the text often refers to players (and their characters) as male, while the GM is referred to as female. This notation is used simply for clarity’s sake, and does not mean to infer any inherent gender roles.



# SPECIAL THANKS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Ron Edwards

Above all, I would like to thank Ron Edwards for all the help he gave me while developing the project. Besides helping to playtest the game, Ron also gave tons of feedback and numerous suggestions for the design (the rules for dead characters were largely his idea, for example).

I also have to thank Ron for encouraging me to pursue publication. I am not sure that I would have taken the game this far if it were not for him.

Thanks again, Ron!

## The Forge ( [www.indie-rpgs.com](http://www.indie-rpgs.com) )

I have to thank the Forge, and everyone that contributes to the forum. The Forge has influenced my thinking on role-playing and game design tremendously. Most of the mechanics of the game can be traced back to threads I read on the forum.

## Mike Holmes

I want to thank Mike Holmes for organizing and judging the IGC competition. Obviously, if it were not for that contest THE MOUNTAIN WITCH would never have been written.

I also have to thank Mike for all of his “standard rants,” which influenced the resolution mechanics of the game, as well as my general understanding of game design.

## Rich Forest

I want to acknowledge and thank Rich Forest, who originally proposed the idea for the Trust mechanics, which formed the cornerstone of the game.

## **My Wife, Tiffany**

I want to thank my wife for all her patience, as well as for her help editing the book.

## **Seadog Tuxedo, by Jonathon Walton**

Though there is no direct mechanical influence, I wanted to acknowledge Seadog Tuxedo, as the game was nonetheless influential to THE MOUNTAIN WITCH's initial phase of development.

## **There Is No Spoon, by Steve Darlington**

I wanted to acknowledge There Is No Spoon for inspiring the use of dark Fate in the game.

## **Rob McDougall**

I wanted to thank Rob for suggesting the "Scene" to "Chapter" terminology switch, as well as for suggesting the "Poker Chip" Trust option.

## **Emily Care**

I wanted to thank Emily for giving me early feedback on the game.

## **Mark Hoover**

I would like to thank Mark for letting me bounce ideas off of him, both during the IGC and during post-contest development.

## **Julie Stauffer, Tod Olson, & Maura Byrne**

I wanted to thank you guys for all of your great feedback, as well as for providing me resources on Japanese mythology, folklore, and superstitions.

## **Clinton R. Nixon**

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I wanted to thank Clinton for helping me promote the game.

## **Brennan Taylor**

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## **Andy Kitkowski**

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## **My art and design crew – Ethan Harper, W. Don Flores, and Joshua Newman**

Thanks for all your hard work.

## **My Life with Master, by Paul Czege**

Last, but not least, I wanted to acknowledge My Life with Master. Though there is no direct influence (well, maybe a little bit with character epilogues), the game nonetheless broke a lot of ground, and paved the way for designs like THE MOUNTAIN WITCH.



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As you watch the night sky start to gray over a sea of clouds, you recall the events that brought you to the icy slopes of Mount Fuji. As a ronin, you were used to a hard and lonely life, traveling from village to village, looking for whatever employment you could find. So naturally, when you were approached this time you quickly accepted the offer, not fully realizing what you were getting into. Now you find yourself far from help, preparing for an assault on O-Yanma, the Mountain Witch himself. At your side is a group of men you neither know nor want to know – a group of men who all carry a similar story to yourself.

Who knows what the dawn of this day will bring?

## I. WHAT IS “THE MOUNTAIN WITCH”?

THE MOUNTAIN WITCH is a self-contained role-playing adventure in which players take on the role of **ronin** (“masterless samurai”) in mythical medieval Japan. Outcast and unemployed, these ronin accept a deal that no one else would take – to assault and kill the dreaded O-Yanma, the Mountain Witch of Mount Fuji.

These characters, haunted by their pasts and by dark fortune, have found themselves in a desperate situation. Though their reasons all differ, they all find themselves standing on the brink of losing everything. Only the payoff of this mission can restore their hope of a normal life and of regaining some of what they have lost. But can these men, with both everything to lose and everything to gain, be

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**trusted?** Can they overcome their differences and together move forward against the Witch? Or will they let dark fate overwhelm them?

## The Mountain Witch in Film

For a sense of what a game of THE MOUNTAIN WITCH should look or feel like, trying checking out these three “essential” films:

### Seven Samurai (1956)

Possibly Akira Kurosawa’s best known film, this movie tells the tale of seven ronin hired to protect a poor village from a group of marauding bandits. A great introduction to the samurai genre, as well as a beautiful film to watch. Of particular interest, Seven Samurai is also an excellent example of a drama that seamlessly interweaves a large number of plot lines and characters, as occurs frequently in THE MOUNTAIN WITCH.

### Kwaidan (1965)

A collection of four Japanese ghost stories, adapted to film from the Lafcadio Hearn book of the same title. A good introduction to traditional Japanese folklore and superstition. What is also interesting about this film is how each of the characters’ pasts plays into their encounters with the supernatural, very similarly to Fate in THE MOUNTAIN WITCH.

### Reservoir Dogs (1992)

The film for examining what Trust should look like in the game. When a seemingly perfect heist goes terribly wrong, the surviving hitmen are left alone to figure out who among them is a police informant.

Will the game end in triumph or tragedy? Probably a little of both. Some characters will leave the adventure with a new purpose and understanding of life; while others will collapse under the weight of their fears, doubts, and regret. Many characters will die, some by the hand of the Witch, and some by the hand of a so-called “friend.” Some will rise out of the ashes of their old life as a servant of the Witch himself, while others will find themselves ending it all with that one final act of dignity.

## THE SAMURAI GENRE

Arguably, the samurai genre is all but defined by the conflict between **giri** (duty) and **ninjo** (human will). The samurai of medieval Japan were raised in a rigid culture that valued loyalty to one’s feudal lord and adherence to societal norms above all else. Naturally, this begs the question: **What happens when the demands of the system conflict with the interests of the individual?**

The samurai genre expresses this conflict in a variety of ways.

Sometimes, the conflict is presented in blatantly moral terms. The protagonist is ordered to do something they know is unconscionable. This conflict is also commonly framed in terms of the rights of the establishment – be it the government, the feudal system or society – versus the rights of the individual. Still other times characters are faced with an internal conflict between what they think they **need** to do, and what they feel they **should** do. This type of internalized conflict is very common for the figure of the ronin anti-hero, who is often torn between a sense of self-preservation and enrichment on one side, and good will on the other.

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But even when *giri* and *ninjo* are both in accord, conflict in the samurai genre is commonly caused by a sense of fatalism inherent to Buddhist thought. This fatalism, combined with the ideal that the samurai should embrace death, commonly results in tragedy and the death of the protagonist.

Technically speaking, any Japanese film depicting the samurai or medieval Japan is categorized as *jidai-geki* (lit. “period theater”). Usually set in the Edo period, *jidai-geki* hark back to a golden age of Japanese culture before the influence of the West. As such, *jidai-geki* often combine influences from a variety of historical time periods. Costumes, subject matter, and even language are frequently taken from earlier feudal periods.

Some people, however, make a distinction between *jidai-geki* proper and what is known as *chanbara*.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes called *ken-geki* (lit. “sword theater”) for its heavy use of swordplay, *chanbara* can be thought of as the action movie equivalent of *jidai-geki*. While later *chanbara* earned a bad reputation for increasingly exploitative use of violence and sex, early *chanbara* was thoughtful in its own right, often expressing the unease and confusion of post-WWII Japan.

Stereotypically, the main protagonist of

<sup>1</sup> The term “*chanbara*” is an onomatopoeia based on the sound of clashing swords over a slow, heavy drumbeat typical of the soundtracks of such films.

a chanbara film is a ronin or ronin-like figure, who seemingly wanders into town and rights some wrong. The focus of the film is on action, typically giving the chanbara a faster pace than a jidai-geki proper. Conflict is inevitably resolved through swordplay, with the climax of the film almost always a showdown between the protagonist and a rival of equal skill.

Jidai-geki proper, however, is typically character-focused, with drama built by mounting tension. These dramas are typically short on swordplay, but heavy with political intrigue, power struggles, and torrid love affairs.

## Other Genres

Other genres of interest, both in regard to *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* and samurai films in general, include film noir and westerns. Having developed in parallel during the post-WWII era, many Japanese directors were influenced by films of those two genres, just as many western and noir directors were influenced by samurai films.

An excellent example of this cross-pollination of influence can be seen in Akira Kurosawa's film *Yojimbo*. Like many westerns, the lone protagonist of the film (who is never mentioned by name) walks into a dusty town overrun by criminals, aids the innocent villagers, and then seemingly walks off into the sunset after a final climactic showdown with a rival swordsman. But with the protagonist's shady character, criminal activities, and double-crosses, the film is also reminiscent of a film noir. Interestingly, this film was remade twice, both as a western (*A Fistful of Dollars*) and as a noir crime drama (*Last Man Standing*).

The samurai genre holds many similarities with both film noir and westerns. The trope of the wandering ronin is very similar to the western trope of the drifting protagonist. Open or dusty landscapes, as well as figures on horseback, can also

be directly traced to the influence of westerns, as this type of imagery was not very common in early Japanese dramas. Also, much like a cowboy's side arm, the samurai's sword comes in many shapes and styles, and how the samurai uses his weapon often plays a large role in the action. The samurai genre also employs many classic noir tropes, such as the double-cross, the McGuffin, the femme fatale, and the contract murder. The fatalism found in many samurai films is also very similar to the theme of many noir dramas.

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## II. GAMEPLAY

The moment - to - moment play of THE MOUNTAIN WITCH is much like other role-playing games. Players each control a character of their own creation, while the **Game Master (GM)** controls the rest of the game world, including the environment and other **non-protagonist characters (NPCs)**. Actual play consists of the players describing the actions of their character, while the GM describes the environment and the actions of any NPCs. General play is more or less free form, meaning any player can jump in at any time and simply declare the actions of their character, given that the action or event is within the relative capacities or boundaries of the character and scene.

This sort of general, free form play is only suspended when the characters are confronted by some sort of opposition, such as enemy opponents, obstacles, or other forms of danger. At this time a “**Conflict roll**” (or simply “**Conflict**”) is called, and dice are rolled to determine who overcomes and who is defeated. Once the Conflict is resolved and the outcome narrated,

general free form play continues until a new Conflict is called.

In **THE MOUNTAIN WITCH**, a major component to the resolution of these Conflicts is the use of **Trust** between characters. Players rate how much their character trusts the other members of the company. Based on this rating, characters receive “**Trust points**” that they can then use to either help or betray the other characters in future Conflicts.

Play itself is divided into segments of time called **Chapters**. Much like chapters in a book, each Chapter in the game represents a new phase of the narrative. **Mechanically** (meaning rules-wise), Chapters serve to regulate the growth and use of Trust throughout the adventure. Between Chapters is a short intermission, in which players re-evaluate their Trust in the other characters. Though the exact number of Chapters will vary from game to game, the average game usually runs 4 to 6 Chapters in length. Again like a book, Chapters themselves are further divided into individual scenes, usually 2 to 4 per Chapter.

Complicating the adventure – which would otherwise be a standard sequence of “attack, kill, plunder” – are character **Fates**. At the start of the game, each character is given one of six dark Fates. Though these Fates are generally described by the rule book, their exact nature is decided by the player. Each player is responsible for bringing their own individual Fate into play. At any time, the player can introduce NPCs, events, and other facts about the game world related to their character’s Fate. Dramatically, each of the six Fates represents a betrayal of some sort, and is meant to force the fated character to question his commitment to the mission and to the company, as well as to force the company to question their trust in the fated character.

The drama of the game comes not from battling the Witch and his minions per se, but rather is driven by mounting

tension between characters. The question is not whether the characters' actions will be successful against the Witch, but how those actions will affect the other characters. In this regard, the drama of the game is particularly character-driven, and centers around the relationships between protagonists.

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This focus on character and character relationships puts the responsibility of building drama and excitement in the hands of the players. Players must be proactive in building tension in their characters' relationships. As such, it is the players who ultimately drive the direction of the story.

The role of the GM, in turn, is to support the players' attempts to create drama. Though the GM controls the game world (more or less), she is still expected to follow the players' lead. The GM's job is to take those story elements presented by the players, via the characters' actions and Fates, and use those elements to push the tension between characters. As such, the GM's role in *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* is much more reactive than in many other role-playing games.

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

**Players:** *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* is designed for 4 to 7 players, including a GM.

**Time:** With the suggested length of 4 to 6 Chapters, a full game of *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* usually takes 2 or 3 sessions to finish. As the average Chapter runs around 2 hours of real time to complete, the entire adventure should run between 8 to 12 hours from start to finish.

**Dice:** Each player should have

### The More the Merrier

When it comes to the number of players, the more the merrier. With more players you will get a more elaborate and complicated group dynamic. As the game is fueled by the interactions between characters, this makes for better drama and excitement.

In this regard, it is important to play with at least three regular players (not including the GM). Without at least three players there simply will not be enough of a group dynamic to make the game work, and the adventure will likely fall flat.

Also, as a special piece of advice, even though the game **will** work with only three players, it is still better to try for at least four.

their own **1d6** (six-sided die). The GM in turn should have several dice, as she will need a die for each individual NPC involved in a Conflict. Though there is no required minimum, the GM should probably bring at least 5 or 6 dice.

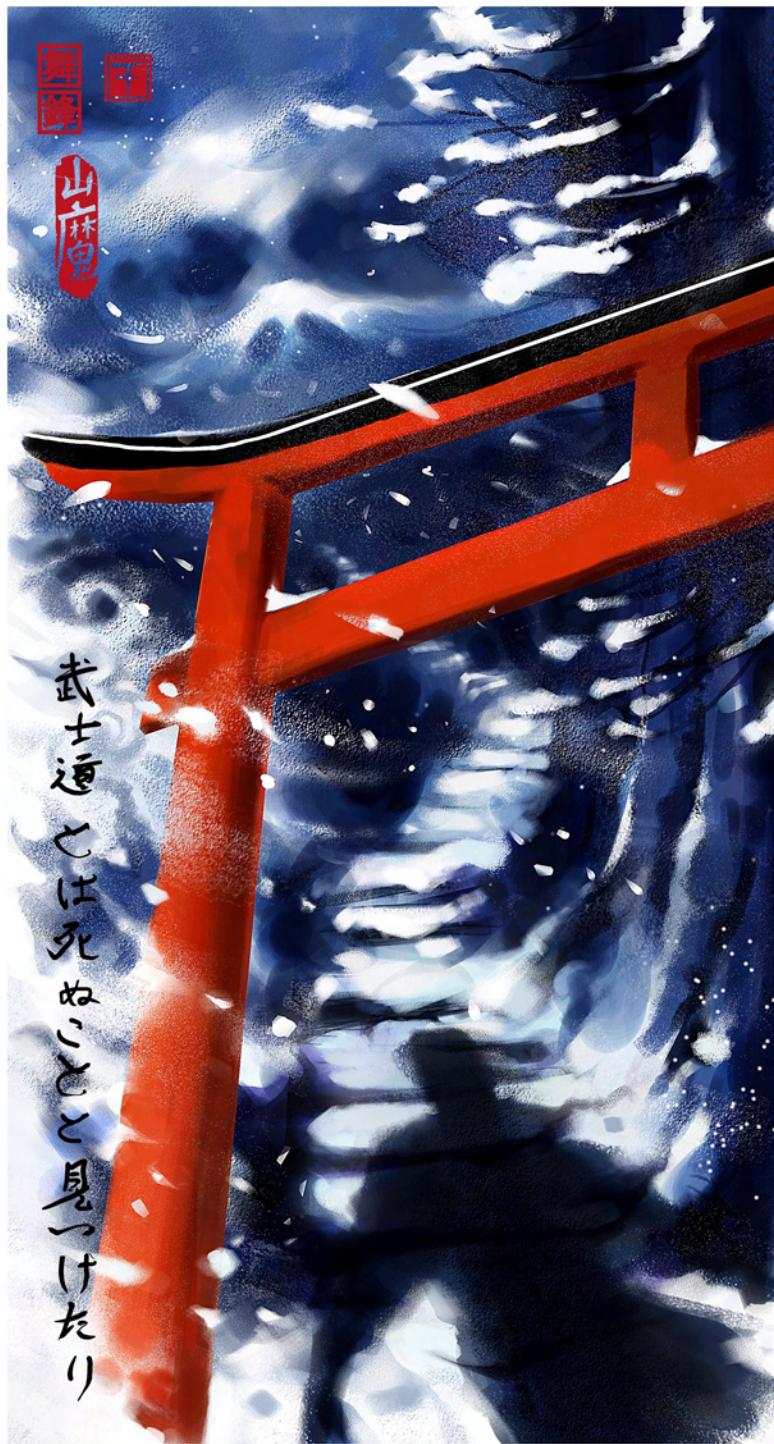
It is also important that the group have at least 6 dice altogether, for the purpose of resolving duels.<sup>2</sup>

### Other Materials:

- **Character sheets, one for each player.**
- **A set of Fate cards.**



<sup>2</sup> See page 43



## III. TERMINOLOGY AND OTHER KEY CONCEPTS

### **(x)d6**

The standard abbreviation for six-sided dice, where (x) refers to the number of dice. When rolling multiple dice, “(x)d6” denotes that the results of the rolled dice are added together.

### **(x)^d6**

“(x)^d6” differs from the standard abbreviation in that it denotes that when rolling multiple dice, only the highest die is kept; all others are discarded.

### **Acts**

Refers to the four informal phases of play. Ideally, each Act serves a different function in developing the overall story arc of the adventure.<sup>3</sup>

### **Adventure**

Used to describe the actual play of THE MOUNTAIN WITCH, from beginning to end. Playing the entire adventure will likely take multiple sessions.

### **Chapter**

Like chapters in a book, play in THE MOUNTAIN WITCH is formally divided into segments of time called “Chapters.” Mechanically, Chapters regulate the growth and use of Trust.

### **Character Sheet**

The form players use to record information about their individual character.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See page 114

<sup>4</sup> A blank, generic character sheet is presented on pages 126 - 127.

Aspects of play and narration that contribute to mood, theme, and atmosphere, but do not otherwise change the imaginary action.

## The Company

Refers to the **protagonist characters** (PCs) collectively as a group inside the imaginary game world.

## Directorial Power (or Privilege)

The power to control the game world, including the environment, NPCs, and **scene framing**. Usually this privilege is given to the GM alone, though players are granted this power for the purpose of developing their character's Fate.

## Failure

The inverse of success, simply refers to losing a Conflict roll.

## GM (Game Master)

The one unique player who controls the game world, including the environment and NPCs. Unlike the other players of the game, the GM does not control a protagonist character.

## The Group

Refers collectively to the players, including the GM.

## In-game

Refers to the imaginary events and objects of the game world, not real world play.

## Mechanics

A standard role-playing term that refers to the rules of the

game. The term “mechanics” is generally used to refer to “hard” rules, rather than mere suggestions. The term also carries the connotation that the rule in question relates to manipulating dice, numbers, or other **meta-game** resources.

## **Meta-game**

Refers to aspects of play that do not directly correlate to in-game events and objects.

## **NPC (Non-Protagonist Character)**

Technically refers to any character or creature other than the PCs. NPCs are usually controlled by the GM, though players can create NPCs via their Fate.

## **Participant(s)**

A term often used by the text to refer to those players whose characters are directly involved or affected by a particular situation. Usually used in the context of a Conflict.

## **Player(s)**

The participants of the game. With the exception of the GM, each player controls a single protagonist character of their own creation.

## **PC (Protagonist Character)**

Those characters created and controlled by the players, who serve as the protagonists of the game. In the case of the **THE MOUNTAIN WITCH**, the term “PC” refers to the ronin hired to assault the Witch.

## Scene Framing

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Refers to controlling the setting and boundaries of a scene, including when, where, and how a scene begins and ends, as well as which characters are included in the scene.

## Success

Used generally to refer to winning a Conflict roll. “Success” is also used specifically to refer to the **effects** of winning a Conflict roll.<sup>5</sup>



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## I. RESOLUTION

Inevitably, the ronin will be forced to confront enemy opponents, obstacles, and other dangers on their quest to kill the Witch. But when these Conflicts arise, how do the players decide what happens? Who will overcome and who will be defeated?

### THE MECHANICS OF RESOLUTION

To resolve such Conflicts, THE MOUNTAIN WITCH uses a **Fortune-in-the-Middle**<sup>1</sup> 1d6 vs 1d6 opposed roll-over mechanic, where the winner of the Conflict narrates the outcome based on the **Degree (margin) of Success**.

But what does that mean? When a Conflict roll is called for, the players involved begin by each declaring generally what they intend to do or what they hope to accomplish. More often than not, a Conflict will pit a player against the GM, but occasionally Conflicts will pit player against player.

After the participants have each made their **“declaration of intent”** as it is called, dice are rolled. Each player rolls 1d6, with the higher roll declared the winner. The losing roll is then subtracted from the higher die, and the difference is used to determine “Degree of Success,” which is simply a

measure of

<sup>1</sup> “Fortune-in-the-Middle” is a technique where the dice (or other forms of randomization) are used to determine the general outcome of a conflict before specific events are narrated. This technique can be contrasted with “Fortune-at-the-End”, where the dice are utilized after the conflict is narrated.



how well the winning character faired in the Conflict.

After the roll is made, the winning player then retroactively narrates the actual events of the Conflict in accordance with the Degree of Success.

**ex. [Otake is exploring the Witch's mansion, looking for the living quarters. However, he spots a guard blocking the path.]**

**Player:** "I want to sneak past the guard, I think I'm going to try hiding behind a table."

**GM:** "OK, well, if you fail, be warned that the guard will attack you."

[They roll, and the player loses.]

**GM:** "As the guard looks away for a moment, Otake jumps from around the corner and crouches behind a table. But as he lands, Otake accidentally bumps the table, alerting the guard. The guard instantly grabs the table and throws it to the side. He then strikes the startled samurai, delivering a wound."

**What Constitutes a "Conflict"?** Generally speaking, a "Conflict" is any situation where the players must overcome opposition or resistance to achieve what they hope to accomplish. This can take a number of forms:

- Active opposition from another living creature, regardless of whether the creature is directly or indirectly opposing the character;
- Some sort of active resistance from a non-living or static obstacle;
- Any situation that carries an associated cost for failure.

More subtly, a "Conflict" represents a **conflict of interest** between characters. One character wants to see one thing happen, and another wants to see something else. A Conflict

roll determines whose interest is realized. Please note that a Conflict roll simply determines **whether or not** the interest is realized, and to what extent. **How** the interest is realized is decided by the narration of the Conflict.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, a Conflict is not about a character's skill, or even a character's individual actions. THE MOUNTAIN WITCH assumes competent characters, and under "normal" circumstances the characters should automatically accomplish any reasonable action within their ability. A Conflict roll is only required when the character is confronted with active opposition or something likewise out of the ordinary. The question is not if a character can physically accomplish the task at hand, but rather can he overcome the forces that are working against him.

Speaking on a meta-game level, because a Conflict roll resolves a conflict of interest between characters, and because the players and the GM control those characters, a Conflict roll is only required when **one of the participants wants there to be one**. If no one cares to contest the current in-game event, then

general play may

## Inanimate objects

For the purpose of resolution, inanimate objects and other non-living obstacles are considered to have "interests" of their own. While they may not technically be able to "act against" a PC, they nonetheless represent a force that must be overcome. As such, a character can be in Conflict with an obstacle or danger – such as a cliff, maze, or snowstorm – just as easily as with any of the Witch's foot soldiers. Likewise, inanimate objects can also be treated as full fledged opponents capable of inflicting and taking Damage.<sup>3</sup>

## Requiring a Conflict Roll

The text assumes that for the most part the motivation of the player will line up with those of the character. But occasionally for dramatic purposes, a player may not want to contest a Conflict, even if the character in-game would. Or similarly, a player may still wish to call a Conflict roll in situations where the character does not seem to care about the outcome. In these cases, the requirement for a Conflict roll is ultimately left to the preference of the real world participants, not the imaginary motivations of the character.

Even though a Conflict roll is ultimately only required when the players want one, it is still a good habit for you to roll the dice whenever a player suggests a course of action that has a reasonable chance of failure. Even when everyone at the table wants to see a character succeed (or fail), adding that random element of the die roll will often push the story in unexpected – and interesting – directions.

2 See page 34 for further discussion on the narration of Conflicts.

3 See page 44 for a detailed description of Damage.

continue uninterrupted. Or similarly, if one of the players participating in the scene ever wishes to oppose a particular character's action, they can simply declare a Conflict and force a die roll.

**What's at "Stake?"** When players begin framing Conflicts, the participants should have a clear understanding of what is **at stake** in the Conflict. In other words, what will the characters gain if they win, and what will happen if they lose? How will the situation change if the players are successful? What if they fail?

Players should consider not just the **how**, but also the **why**. What is the character's ultimate goal in engaging in the Conflict?

**ex. As Matsumoto moves about the Witch's fortress, he comes across a storehouse. The player declares that he wants to break the lock on the door...**

In this example, though it remains unspoken there is a clear implication that the player is trying to break into the storehouse. As such, though the player's immediate reason for rolling is to see if he is able to break the lock, he is ultimately rolling to see if he can get inside the storehouse. A successful roll will allow the character to enter the storehouse, while a failed roll will force the character to remain outside.

Most of the time, the stakes of the Conflicts will be implied – if not explicitly stated – by the player's declaration of intent. For example, if a player were to declare that he wanted to “cut his opponent in two,” it would be reasonable to assume that the player wanted to kill the opponent.

But what if the player declares that he wants to “wrestle his opponent to the ground?” Does the player want to cause the individual physical harm, or does he simply want to subdue the opponent? Understanding the stakes of a Conflict is key because sometimes a character's actions will simply be a

**ex. Maeda and Segawa have a running rivalry between them. Maeda's player decides he wants to try impressing Segawa with his sword skill, so he declares that he's going to showoff by killing a fortress mook.<sup>4</sup>**

In the above example, though Maeda's immediate actions are focused on the fortress mook, the real conflict is between Maeda and his rival, Segawa. Killing the mook is secondary to Maeda's goal of impressing Segawa.<sup>5</sup> If a Conflict is initiated without a clear understanding of what is at stake, the Conflict narrator may inadvertently narrate an outcome that does not match the player's expectations.

Understanding the stakes of a Conflict is also important because it protects the player's victories. The results of a Conflict are intended to be more or less final. With a clear understanding of the stakes, new Conflicts cannot be used to re-angle the situation (either intentionally or inadvertently) to diminish or negate the former victories of other players.

Note that during the framing of Conflicts, the player defines the stakes for if he wins, but the GM or whomever he is rolling against defines the stakes for if he loses. Sometimes the winning and losing stakes will stand in direct opposition to one another ("the character escapes" vs "the character is blocked from escaping"), but other times they will only indirectly oppose one another ("the character convinces the guard to let him pass" vs "the guard attacks the character"). If a player's declaration of intent ever leaves some question as to what the stakes of the Conflict are, then the other participants should simply ask the player to clarify.

**Scope of a Conflict:** How much imaginary "stuff" does a single Conflict roll cover? Usually, a Conflict encompasses the actions a single character takes to

<sup>4</sup> The term "mook" refers to an insignificant, usually personality-less character. Mooks usually exist in high numbers, and are easily disposed of.

<sup>5</sup> In this example, Maeda would actually be faced with two opponents – Segawa and the mook. See page 37 for a discussion of group Conflict resolution.

achieve a simple, specific goal. Any goal that requires multiple, progressive steps should be broken into separate Conflicts for each step.

An appropriate goal for a character in a Conflict might be “defend against the monster,” “Intimidate the spirit,” or “find a place to rest.” However, consider this situation:

**ex. The PCs are attempting to scale a wall. One of the characters, Kinjo, has already made it to the top, but waiting for him is one of the Witch’s**

**sentries. The player of one of the characters still on the ground, Shintaro, declares, “I want to defend my friend!...”**

### “Defending his friend”

Since it has been established that “defending his friend” in the above example would require two steps, how should the situation be mediated? In this particular example, the initial Conflict would likely frame Shintaro against the sentry (and the wall).<sup>6</sup> If Shintaro wins, then he will arrive at the top of the wall before the sentry is able to attack. If he were to fail, however, he would be restricted from joining any follow-up Conflict between the sentry and Kinjo.

In this example, it is fairly clear that “defending his friend” would require two things: First, the character must scale the wall. Only after the character has

scaled the wall can he hope to join and defend his comrade. Such a goal should more appropriately be broken into two separate Conflicts.

Exactly how much is covered by a single roll is something that will differ slightly from group to group, depending upon individual preferences. However, just as a Chapter contains multiple scenes, so should a scene encompass multiple Conflicts.

**Can a Failed Conflict Roll be Re-attempted?** Generally speaking, no, players cannot re-attempt a failed Conflict. Failure should be accepted as a simple constraint and worked into the narrative of the game.

Specifically, the rule is that Conflicts narrated as Damage may be re-attempted, while Conflicts that are narrated as

<sup>6</sup> Again see page 37

a general Success may not. This is because attempting to wound an opponent is always considered a new goal, whereas attempting to achieve similar success is considered to be re-angling an old Conflict.

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Does losing a Conflict then imply that a character can never again attempt the same (or a similar) goal? Not necessarily. If something about the current situation significantly changes which gives the player a reasonable excuse for re-attempting the Conflict, the player should be allowed to do so. Generally speaking, losing a Conflict roll means that the player will have to wait until a later scene or Chapter before returning to the failed goal. Whether or not to allow a character to re-attempt a failed Conflict is a subjective call, and requires the discretion of the GM or whomever the Conflict involves.

## All Conflict is a Form of Combat

The Mountain Witch utilizes a universal resolution mechanic for all types of conflicts and tasks – both mental and physical, lethal and non-lethal. This universal approach underscores an important mindset of The Mountain Witch – while some may consider combat to be just another form of conflict, The Mountain Witch considers all conflict to be a form of combat.

In The Mountain Witch, you are both literally and figuratively fighting for your life. This mission represents your last chance for redemption; everything is on the line. Failure of any kind will mean that you will have no life to return to.

Equally important to understand is that nothing in this adventure wants to see you succeed. Certainly not the Witch, not the supernatural, and sometimes, not even your “friends.” Given the chance, they will just as quickly break your spirit as they would your body. No matter how innocent a Conflict may seem, do not be mistaken, the Witch and his minions mean only one thing for you – death by any means.

## THE PROCESS OF RESOLUTION

The process for introducing and resolving Conflicts actually begins a long time before the dice ever hit the table. Play in *The Mountain Witch* generally follows a specific sequence of events:

### Step 1: The GM Frames the Scene

The birth of a Conflict is found at the very start of a scene.

During the introduction of a scene, the GM should spend some time describing the general situation to the players, making special note of any potential Conflicts.<sup>7</sup> As Conflicts are heavily dependent on PC actions, it is important to start a scene by laying the situation out in the open. The GM should provide all the information the players need to make an informed decision about what their character should do.

Note—at this point a Conflict has not officially been called; the GM is simply setting up potential Conflicts. A formal Conflict roll can only be called **after** the players have had a chance to consider the situation and declare how they want their characters to react.

## Step 2: The Players Declare Their Actions

After the GM has framed the scene, there is an ubiquitous “What do you do?” moment, where players declare how their characters are going to react. This is the official start of a Conflict, when a player makes their declaration of intent.

Though it is possible for the players to go straight to declarations of intent after the introduction of a scene, most likely there will be some space between steps 1 and 2, filled with exposition and other general role-playing.

### What if the Player Refuses to Enter into a Conflict?

Sometimes, players will want to avoid Conflict for thematic reasons. This is OK, and the GM should respect the player’s position and work it into the narrative. However, sometimes a player may want to avoid Conflict simply because they want to avoid the consequences of failure. This type of reasoning is dysfunctional, for failure is simply part of the game.

**Initiating a Conflict:** In this regard, it is the **players** who technically initiate all Conflicts. Conflicts require the buy-in of the players involved. The players must accept the Conflict before any dice are rolled.

While the GM must wait for the players to officially initiate a Conflict, the GM can still effectively demand that **some sort** of Conflict happen through the

<sup>7</sup> See page 118 for further discussion on scene framing.

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framing of a scene. Consider the following:

**ex. [The company is traveling through a courtyard in the Witch's castle...]**

**GM: "As you sneak through the courtyard, you spy a gate up along the path, guarded by a foul-looking apparition. To get past him, a Conflict roll is going to be required..."**

Notice that while the GM has –quite bluntly –stated that a Conflict roll is required, she has not framed the Conflict itself. Will the players try to sneak past the spirit or will they rush the creature and attack? Possibly the characters will try talking to the being in an attempt to convince it to let them pass. Maybe still the players will just decide to backtrack their steps, avoiding a Conflict altogether.

In such situations, the GM should be careful not to frame the scene so tightly that only one course of action is reasonably possible. The GM should leave the players room to frame to the actual Conflict as they see fit.

### **Step 3: The GM Declares Her Reaction**

After the players have made their declarations of intent, then the GM announces hers.

This sequence is important for two related reasons. First, since the person who initiates the Conflict—in this case the players—effectively gets to decide what the Conflict will be about, they have a particular influence over the direction of the story. By demanding that the players always initiate Conflicts, the players are (more or less) guaranteed that Conflicts will center around their personal issues.

More subtly, the person who declares their intent second—in this case the GM—has an advantage in creating adversity, since they can tailor their action in response to the action of the Conflict initiator (the players). By demanding that the GM

goes second, the GM is able to maximize the adversity<sup>8</sup> for the players.

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**Negotiating Conflicts:** After a player has heard what the GM or the other players intend to do, he may wish to amend his plans. This is fine; the participants of a Conflict are allowed to negotiate between one another what each of them wants to do.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it is important to ensure that everyone has settled on what they intend to do before moving on to the dice, as all rolls are considered final.

## Step 4: The Dice Are Rolled

After everyone has settled on what they want to do, the dice are rolled, and the Degree of Success is determined.

## Step 5: The Conflict is Narrated

After the winner of the Conflict and the Degree of Success is determined, the winner retroactively narrates the Conflict.

## (Step 6:) Then What Happens?

After a Conflict is narrated, the whole process begins anew. If the general situation was resolved by the Conflict, then the GM cuts the

## Player vs Player Conflicts

There is nothing that states that a PC cannot challenge another PC in a Conflict. In fact, when Fates and motives clash, it is very likely that PCs will turn against each other. These Conflicts proceed like any other Conflict. One player announces his intentions against another PC. Then, similar to the GM, the owner of the opposing PC announces their reaction. When both players are satisfied with their intended actions, the dice are rolled and success is determined normally.

## When does the imaginary “stuff” happen?

In general play, narration is accepted as soon as the player declares it. But how does this work in regard to resolution? Once players start making declarations of intent (back in step 2), in-game events are more or less suspended until the winning player begins narration.

Although fairly intuitive, it is still helpful to think in these terms to avoid any possible confusion between players about what really happened.

<sup>8</sup> The negotiation of character actions is similar to a “free-and-clear stage” described in Ron Edwards’ *Trollbabe*.

scene and introduces a new one. However, if the situation was not resolved, then the GM re-frames the current scene, incorporating the consequences of the last Conflict, again making special note of any potential spin-off or follow-up Conflicts.

## The Process in Action

ex. [On their way up the mountain, Tohei has chosen to separate himself from the rest of the company, deciding to take the high ground across a series of cliffs, rather than follow the established path like the rest of the company.]

[The GM begins by framing the scene.] GM: “As you make your way across the cliffs, you see up ahead a group of figures waiting around a bend from the other characters. From this distance, though, it’s difficult to tell who—or what—they are.”

Player: “Can the rest of the company see the figures?”

GM: “It’s very unlikely.”

Player: “I could try sneaking ahead to see what you’re doing, but that would probably probably require a Conflict roll... hmm... I could warn the other characters...”

GM: “Of course you can, but you will have to make a roll to see if you reach the other characters before they reach the bend.”

Player: “Can’t these guys take care of themselves? I mutter under my breath. I’m going to try hurrying down the cliff to warn the other characters before they reach the bend in the path.” [The player has made a declaration of intent.]

GM: “Alright, but if you fail, the figures will surprise the rest of the company before you reach them.” [The GM makes a declaration of intent in response.]

[The player narrates.] Player: “I hurry down the cliff so fast I almost fall. The rest of the characters—who are about to turn the bend—turn and see me. ‘What are you doing?’ they ask. I tell them about the figures I saw.

A second player: “This has to be some sort of ambush.”

The first player: “That’s what I thought, too. That’s why I came rushing down.”

GM: “As you all look around, it becomes apparent that this bend would make a good spot for an ambush. Besides simply following the path, there’s not a whole lot you can do. You could try climbing the cliffs and approaching the figures from above. Or you could try backtracking along the path, hopefully finding some other way around...” [The GM re-frames the scene.]

## DEGREES OF SUCCESS

0: Tie/ Ai-Uchi

1: Partial Success

2: Mixed Success

3: Regular Success

4: Critical Success

5(+): Double Success

Degree of Success is essentially a measure of how well a character fares in a Conflict. Degree of Success is determined by subtracting the losing roll from the winning roll, and then using the difference to reference the appropriate Degree of Success from the above chart.<sup>9</sup> Note that the highest Degree of

<sup>9</sup> The chart outlining the various Degrees of Success is also presented on the character sheet (see pages 126 – 127).

Success a character (or group of characters) can achieve is a Double Success, regardless of the margin between rolls.

When interpreting Degree of Success, it is important to realize that Degree of Success always relates back to the player's original declaration of intent. Keep this example in mind:

**ex. As Hideyoshi wanders through the fortress, he comes across a garden. On the other side of the garden is the path to the Witch's keep. However, the garden is home to one of the Witch's servants, a ghostly spirit cursed to forever irrationally tend the garden.**

Hideyoshi's player declares that he wants to sneak through the garden without being caught. The GM declares that the spirit will attempt to find him...

## Regular Success

A Regular Success is the base unit of success, and represents those times when things go more or less according to plan. Simply put, the winner succeeds as intended.

For the above example, a Regular Success for the player would mean that Hideyoshi was able to sneak through the garden, totally undetected. A Regular Success for the GM, in turn, would mean that the ronin was spotted before he was able to cross through.

## Partial Success

A Partial Success can be thought of as a "half" success. A Partial Success represents those times when full success is hindered for some reason, or when the character's attempts simply did not work right, though the outcome was still in his favor.

To appropriately interpret a Partial Success, players must consider their declaration of intent. Players must imagine an outcome that works in favor of their intended goal, but still

does not quite succeed properly. When a Partial Success does not make sense given specific circumstances, the outcome can be narrated as some sort of Damage.<sup>10</sup>

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An appropriate Partial Success for the GM in the above example would likely mean that the spirit detects someone, but is not sure where or who they are. A possible Partial Success for the player might be that Hideyoshi was able to sneak around the garden, but due to some unforeseen factor—possibly the movements of the ghost—he is not able to exit. He remains undetected, but cannot pass the creature.

## Mixed Success

What about narrating that Hideyoshi passes through the garden, but the spirit hears him as he does so? This would not make a very good Partial Success because since the guard wanted to find the character, such a narration would essentially grant him a Success. This is where a Mixed Success comes in.

A Mixed Success represents those times when success is complicated or when success must be bought at a price. Technically speaking, a Mixed Success grants the winner a Regular Success, while simultaneously granting the loser a Partial Success. When mutual success is irreconcilable due to conflict of interests—such as when characters are directly opposing one another—a Mixed Success can be narrated as success with Damage.

When narrating a Mixed Success, both characters' declaration of intent must be considered. In the example, the GM wanted the spirit to find the character, while the player wanted his character to sneak undetected through the garden.

Narrating that the spirit hears Hideyoshi as he sneaks through the garden would make a good Mixed Success for the player. The spirit knows that someone passed through the garden, but

10 See page 44 for a discussion of narrating Damage.

does not necessarily know who it was. The character passes through the garden, and at least for the moment remains undetected (though the spirit will likely start looking around for whoever made the noise).

Working out a good Mixed Success for the gardener is a little tougher. One possible narration would be that Hideyoshi makes it through the garden, but as he does the spirit sees him and follows. Hideyoshi still makes it through the garden, but the spirit has him in sight.

Note that a Mixed Success for the player and for the GM is very similar, and often times finding an appropriate Mixed Success takes subtle discretion on the part of the narrating player.

## Critical Success

A Critical Success represents those times when things go

better than expected and can be thought of as success with a “little” something extra. Technically, the winner is granted both a Regular Success and an extra Partial Success. This extra success does not need to be related to the character’s original goal, and can be declared during narration.

In the above example, a Critical Success for the player would obviously mean that Hideyoshi sneaks through the garden, the same as with a Regular Success. However, how the extra Partial Success the Critical grants should be used is totally up to the narrating player. Suppose that in addition to sneaking through the garden, the player also wants to find a

### “Extra Success”: The Power of a Critical or Double Success

A Critical or Double Success is much more powerful than they first appear. Because the “extra Success” these rolls grant are not tied to the player’s declaration of intent, they effectively grant **directorial power**. In other words, the narrating player can use these extra Successes to create or control (either overtly or through implication) aspects of the game world, including the environment and NPCs. To illustrate this point, suppose the player in the above example used his extra Success to declare that Hideyoshi spots a shortcut to the Witch’s keep. Such a shortcut did not exist until the player used the extra Success to create it.

While they must still adhere to the technical limits of a Regular and Partial Success, exactly what is an appropriate use of an extra Success is largely left to the standard of individual groups.

way of disposing of the spirit. One possible use for the player's extra Partial Success would be to declare that as the character moves about the garden, Hideyoshi throws a stone that confuses the creature, sending him to investigate. The spirit will likely return, but for the moment Hideyoshi would be free to move around the garden without fear of detection.

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## Double Success

The difference between a Critical and a Double Success is largely a matter of degree. A Double Success represents extraordinary success, and can be thought of as success with a "big" something extra. Technically, the winner is granted two Regular Successes. As with a Critical, this second success does not need to be related to the character's original declaration of intent and may be declared during narration.

In the example, an appropriate use of a GM Double Success would be to not just detect the sneaking character, but to attack the samurai as well, delivering a wound.

## Tie & Ai-Uchi (Mutual Strike)

When a Conflict roll results in a tie, the Conflict results in a stalemate. Neither party is able to make any headway towards their respective goal. Ties are narrated by the GM.

A Tie is usually easy to narrate, simply because nothing happens. In the above example, a Tie would mean that Hideyoshi can not make it across the garden, and that the spirit cannot find the ronin.

## Special Case: Re-attempting a Tie

When two opponents are directly opposing one another, narrating a Tie can be difficult. For example, suppose one character wants to "cross a bridge," and the opponent wants to "stop him from crossing the bridge." Narrating that nothing happens would effectively grant the "stopping" character a Success, as his entire goal was to prevent the "crossing" character from crossing.

In such a situation, it is permissible to narrate a temporary stalemate, and allow the characters to re-attempt their actions in a new Conflict (if desired, of course).

However, when a Conflict roll ends in a tie, players have a choice. They can either choose to accept the stalemate, or they can choose to declare what is known as an “Ai-Uchi” (lit. “mutual strike”). An Ai-Uchi represents those times when a character self-sacrifices their own safety in order to achieve their goals. Note that this “self-sacrifice” does not mean to imply altruistic motives. It simply means that the character pushes for their goals without concern for their own well-being.

Technically speaking, an Ai-Uchi grants mutual success to both parties involved in the Conflict. Both parties receive the same Degree of Success, either a Regular, Critical or Double Success (but never a Partial), as decided by the player who declares the Ai-Uchi. When mutual success is irreconcilable due to conflict of interests, like a Mixed Success the Ai-Uchi is narrated as success with Damage.

Similar to a Mixed Success, an Ai-Uchi is sometimes difficult to narrate, which is why they are commonly narrated as success with Damage. In the case of the above example, one possible way to interpret an Ai-Uchi (with mutual Regular Successes) would be that Hideyoshi just goes running through the garden, without any concern of the spirit. The spirit, seeing the character, starts chasing after him.

In addition, an Ai-Uchi can also be declared before the actual Conflict roll. Declaring the Ai-Uchi before the rolled bypasses the actual die roll, automatically setting the Conflict as a tie.

Important to note, only **players** can declare an Ai-Uchi, never the GM. Subsequently, an Ai-Uchi automatically grants narration to the player that declared it.

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## NARRATING SUCCESS

The winner of a Conflict is granted the right to retroactively narrate the actual events of the Conflict. This most often means that players narrate character success, while the GM narrates character failure. Alternatively, players not involved in the Conflict may spend a point of Trust to gain the right to narrate the outcome of a Conflict, for either the success or failure of the characters involve.<sup>11</sup>

While narration may seem straightforward at first—simply describe the characters’ actions—narration actually has a subtle and potentially powerful influence on the game. Though the general outcome of a Conflict is determined by a combination of the Degree of Success and the player’s declaration of intent, the narrating player actually has some freedom in deciding how the event plays out.

To use an example, suppose a player declared that they wanted to “attack the monster.” What does that mean? Such a conflict can easily be narrated as a straightforward strike with the character’s weapon. But just as easily, the Conflict can be narrated as a long, drawn out struggle, where blows are exchanged by both sides before that one, final, decisive strike is delivered.

Narration can be used to add more than just color. Narration is the official account of a Conflict, and as such, dictates the actual in-game events. In other words, narration decides **exactly** what happens. Suppose that a player declares that they want to “subdue the enemy.” Again, what does this mean? This can be narrated both as a physical conflict, where the character wrestles the opponent into some sort of hold or pin, or as a mental conflict, where the winner intimidates his opponent through sheer force of character into backing down.

Conceptually, it is important to understand that while the dice (in combination with a player’s declaration of intent) generally decide **what** happens, narration decides **how** it happens. In

<sup>11</sup> See page 60.

other words, though the dice decide the general aftereffects of a Conflict, how that effect is achieved is totally open to the interpretation of the narrating player. Within reason, the player can narrate whatever they want, given that it fulfills the requirements of the Conflict roll.

In fact, the mechanical success of a player in a Conflict need not be connected to any sort of narrated in-game success at all. To illustrate this point, suppose a character is fighting a monster in a crumbling temple, and the player declares that he wants to kill the creature. They make a Conflict roll and the player wins. Even though the player has mechanically “succeeded” in defeating the monster, the player decides to narrate that the character is completely overwhelmed by the monster, and “fails” to defend against the monster’s attack. The player continues to narrate that the monster throws the character to the ground, but at the moment the creature moves in for the kill, a weakened pillar collapses, falling on top of the monster. Notice that the player’s goal, to “kill the creature,” is realized, even if the means by which it came about was

not the character’s doing.<sup>12</sup>

So exactly how much freedom does the player have in interpreting

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## Freedom in Narration

Working out a narration that appropriately fits the player’s declaration of intent and Degree of Success can sometimes be difficult, especially if the narrator has a particular statement he wishes to make. In these situations, the narrating player can gain a little extra freedom by considering the general stakes of the Conflict, rather than strictly following the player’s declaration of intent.

Consider the example earlier in the chapter, where the player wants to break the lock to a storehouse.<sup>13</sup> Even though the player declared that he wanted to break the lock, the general stakes of the Conflict were whether or not the character would be able to get inside the storehouse. As such, it would be acceptable to narrate the Conflict as the character sneaking through a window, rather than breaking the lock.

Deviating from the player’s declaration of intent, however, takes discretion, as it raises the potential of **de-protagonizing**<sup>14</sup> the player in question. That said, considering the general stakes of a Conflict is often helpful when **Buying narration rights**<sup>15</sup> through Trust, when the purpose is often to move the narration in a new direction.

12 Would this narration be a Mixed Success, because the character “failed” to defend against the monster? No, because the “failure” did not cause any lasting effect on play. The character did not receive Damage or any other negative consequence as a result. In this example, the “failure” served only color.

13 The example on page 18.

14 “De-protagonization” refers to the feeling that a player’s input into the game have been invalidated, blocked, or otherwise made ineffective.

15 See page 60.

the outcome of a Conflict? Though ultimately this will vary from group to group, the amount of freedom the narrator has is largely determined by the player's original declaration of intent. Declaring that the character wants to "hurt the monster" obviously offers the narrating player significantly more freedom than stating that the character wants to "chop off the monster's head." The character could "hurt the monster" in several different ways ranging from an outright attack to possibly some sort of emotional harm. "Chopping off the monster's head," however, could only mean one thing—a strike at the monster's head. How broad or narrow one should make his declaration of intent is a decision that will differ from individual to individual and, very likely, from Conflict to Conflict.

**Success: The Currency of Narration:** Generally, narration is constrained by the Degree of Success. But technically, narration is constrained by the number and type of Successes the Degree of Success grants. Each Success allows the player to narrate basically one thing—one change in the game world.. A Partial Success allows the player to narrate one "small" thing, while a Regular Success is used to narrate one "big" thing. A Critical, Double, or Mixed Success predictably grant a combination of Successes. These Successes act as a currency of sorts for narration.

Note—though Successes can be combined in the case of a Critical or Double Success to narrate something "exceptionally big," individual Successes themselves cannot be broken up. In other words, a Regular Success cannot be broken into two Partials. This issue is particularly significant for group Conflict resolution, where there exists a potential to spread success and failure among multiple characters.

## **Narrating Damage**

In lieu of normal success, players may opt to declare Damage as the consequence of a Conflict. Though Damage is most often

described as a physical injury, Damage may also be interpreted as a complication for future Conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

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Important to understand, general Success and Damage have a very fluid relation in *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH*. Though narration is limited by a player's declaration of intent, for the most part any Conflict can be narrated as Damage; or likewise, Conflicts that should seemingly cause Damage can be narrated as a general Success.

How is it decided if the outcome of a Conflict will be Damage or a general Success? Interpreting the outcome of a Conflict is a matter of narration, and is explicitly decided by the narrating player.

## GROUP CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Though the discussion of Conflict thus far has largely been in terms of an individual against another individual, in actual play, Conflicts in *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* will more often than not involve several individuals who are all acting simultaneously. Sometimes these characters will be working together, but not always. Sometimes a single individual or group of individuals will be confronted by opposition from multiple directions. For the most part, the procedure for resolving these group Conflicts follows the same rules as normal resolution between two characters, but with a few additions.

Group Conflict resolution is informally divided into **rounds**. These rounds serve purely meta-game purposes and do not directly correspond to any specific length of in-game time. The action of a specific round is assumed to happen more or less simultaneously, though exactly how a round plays out is a matter of narration.

A round begins like a normal Conflict, with each player involved making a declaration of intent. (If the GM is controlling multiple

16 For a full definition of Damage, see page 44.

NPCs who are all involved in the Conflict, she will make an individual declaration of intent for each character.) Similar to a normal Conflict, within each round individual characters are allowed to attempt only “one thing”. Once declarations are made, characters are separated into groups according to shared goals. More specifically, characters are grouped together according to shared **targets**. If multiple parties are all acting against a single target, those parties are grouped together for the purpose of resolving the Conflict, even if their actions have no in-game relationship.

**ex. Hamada is confronted by a tengu as he attempts to traverse a decrepit, crumbling wall. The GM declares the tengu will try to kill Hamada, while at the same time the wall threatens to crumble from under the samurai's feet...**

In this example, Hamada is battling two opponents: both the **tengu**<sup>17</sup> and the crumbling wall. Because both of these opponents are acting against Hamada, for the purpose of resolving the Conflict, these two agents are considered to be acting together.

If their actions have no relationship in-game, then how are their separate intentions and goals reconciled? At times, the grouping of certain characters may seem counter-intuitive. How all these forces interact is worked out through the narration of the Conflict, depending upon who wins. Consider again the above example. If Hamada wins, his player would likely narrate the outcome as the death of the tengu, probably by his own hand but possibly by narrating that the tengu fell off the crumbling wall. If the GM wins, however, how the narration plays out will likely depend on whose roll was higher, the tengu's or the wall's. If the tengu's roll was higher, then likely the Conflict will be narrated with the tengu overpowering the character. But if the wall's roll is higher, then the GM would likely narrate the outcome as the character falling off the wall.

<sup>17</sup> See page 105 for a description of a tengu.

After all the characters are grouped together, the participants should find themselves separated into a number of individual Conflicts that are all occurring simultaneously. For example, a Conflict involving characters A, B, C and monsters X, Y, and Z might get broken into character A facing off against monsters X and Y, while characters B and C face off against monster Z. It is important that each individual Conflict only have two sides. Again, if a single group is being confronted by multiple parties, those parties should be condensed into a single opposing group.

Please note—a character's participation in a Conflict is only required when they are directly challenged. As long as the individual is not directly threatened, the player can choose to simply sit out of that round of the Conflict. Any character not involved in the current round can always choose to join the Conflict in a later round.

After everyone is divided into groups and individual Conflicts are established, everyone rolls their dice simultaneously. While players are only allowed to each roll their one single die, the GM is allowed to roll one die for each individual NPC she is controlling in the Conflict. After all the dice are rolled, within each group the dice are compared and only the highest is kept; all others are discarded. The highest die from each group is then compared with the highest die from the opposing group, and Degree of Success is determined normally. It is important that all the dice are rolled before any narration begins, as this allows narrating players—if desired—to weave together their separate narrations.

## **The Significance of Group Resolution**

Since players are only allowed to attempt “one thing” in any given round, The Mountain Witch’s team-based approach to group resolution forces the player to choose. Will you help your friend in need, or will you pursue your own agenda? When multiple companions are threatened, who do you value more? Who will you help, and who will you let fend for themselves?

## Narrating Group Conflicts

Like normal resolution, the highest die for each individual

### The Buck Stops Here: Sharing Narration

Technically speaking, the narrating player can narrate whatever he wants. But this does not mean that other players cannot contribute to the narration. Any player may suggest whatever he wants for the narration of a Conflict. However, the narrating player has final authority over what is included in the official narration.

How much non-narrating players are allowed to contribute will vary from group to group. However, especially when narrating a group Conflict, it is important for you to at least consider what each of the other participants intended their character to do, so you may incorporate that into the narration. By taking their intent into consideration, you can avoid making the other players feel de-protagonized by accidentally taking control of their characters.

Conflict dictates who will narrate the outcome. In the event that multiple players are tied for the highest roll, then a spin-off roll or some other contest can be used to determine who narrates.

As with other matters of narration, how success or failure is distributed among the characters involved—including the distribution of Damage—is explicitly decided by the narrating player. In this regard, it is important to remember that individual Successes cannot be broken up. This rule purposely limits the consequences of group resolution—for both success and failure—to one or two characters only, regardless of the size of the parties involved.

### Special Case: Ai-Uchi in

**Group Resolution:** When an Ai-Uchi is declared in the middle of a group Conflict, for the most part the Ai-Uchi is resolved normally. However, an Ai-Uchi in a group Conflict is automatically interpreted as success with Damage, and subsequently, that Damage is automatically inflicted on the character that declared it.

## Aiding<sup>18</sup>

By spending a point of Trust, players may **Aid** another character in a Conflict. When Aiding, rather than simply taking the highest die, the Aiding player's die is **added** to the Aided

<sup>18</sup> See page 58 for a full discussion of Aiding.

It should be noted that for resolution purposes, the two added dice are considered a single roll. So suppose that within a single group, two characters are Aiding each other while a third character is simply grouped with them without Trust. After the dice are rolled, the third character's single die would be compared to the two combined rolls, the same as if the combined roll were a single die. Per standard group Conflict resolution rules, the higher of two results would be kept, and the other discarded. The combined roll would likely be higher, but not necessarily. In the event that the single die resulted in a higher roll, then the single die would be kept, and the two combined dice would be discarded.

In regard to narration rights, the **Aiding** player never narrates. In the event of a success, narration rights are automatically granted to the player who is **Aided**, regardless of what the two players rolled relative to each other.

## Alternative Methods for Handling Group Resolution

Standard group resolution purposely limits the consequences of success and failure to one or two characters at a time. For the most part this feature works well. But in certain circumstances, even when multiple characters are involved in a Conflict, this limitation is not preferable. When there is some sort of general

## The Significance of Aiding

Aiding has a tremendous impact on resolution. No matter how many dice the GM rolls, the highest result she can ever achieve is a 6. However, just two characters, standing back-to-back so to speak, helping each out, can roll a 12. The GM can literally throw everything she has at the players, and given the characters have the Trust to spend, they will take it and keep coming.

This advantage only grows the more players choose to Aid one another. Two characters working together with Trust will succeed most of the time, though admittedly it is not guaranteed. (Though it will cut down on the GM's Degree of Success.) Three characters using Trust will almost always succeed, though it is not guaranteed that they will Take Out<sup>19</sup> the opponent. Four characters working together are a Conflict killer. It is all but guaranteed that they will win and Take Out the opponent, making it almost pointless for the GM to even roll.

19 See page 50.

force working against the company that has the power to affect each character individually, logically each character should face the potential of failure. For example, suppose that the PCs are walking along a mountain path, and an avalanche is triggered; or suppose that the company walks into a room full of rotting corpses, and the characters are overcome by a sense of fear or nausea. Limiting the consequences of failure in such situations would not seem appropriate.

Generally speaking, these situations are handled by treating each character's struggles as an individual Conflict. There are two suggested methods that work well for this purpose, depending upon specific circumstances and individual preferences. The first method is to literally handle each character separately. The GM calls for an individual Conflict with each player, which is then resolved as if no one else was around. The second method attempts to retain some of the group-feel of traditional group resolution. In this second method, the GM makes a single roll representative of PCs' opposition. The players, in turn, each make a roll of their own. But instead of taking the highest roll, as in standard group resolution, each player's roll is individually compared to the GM's single die. Degree of Success is then determined individually, and the results are applied separately to each character.

In either case, players are still free to provide Aid to one another's characters. In the latter method (GM rolls a single die), Aiding is simple. The combined rolls are compared to the GM's single die. In the former (a separate roll is made for each character), when the GM is rolling against a group of Aiding characters, the GM is allowed to roll one die for each character in the group. Then, as in standard group resolution, the GM keeps the highest die and discards the others. Thus, for example, if two characters are working together, the GM rolls  $2^{\text{d}6}$ . If three characters are working together,  $3^{\text{d}6}$ ; etc.

These situations are still organized into rounds like normal group resolution. In other words, players are still limited to “one thing” per round. Either the players face the Conflict by themselves, or they use Trust and help out a friend.

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## SPECIAL OPTION: THE DUEL

In lieu of a normal Conflict roll, players have the option of challenging opponents to a **Duel**. As implied, a Duel is the quintessential, mano a mano battle of skill and wit. Mechanically, a Duel is a Conflict between two and only two participants. Furthermore, a Duel is set apart from other conflicts in that players are forbidden from using Trust of any kind. Players roll the dice and take what they get.

The text assumes that a Duel will represent a physical fight to the death in stereotypical samurai fashion. However, other forms of contests, both mental and physical, are acceptable. Regardless of how exactly the Duel is represented, the stakes of the Conflict are central. A Duel is specifically meant to determine one character’s dominance over another, and as such is intended to represent a battle to the death or some equally extreme measure.

**Exception: Dead PCs:** The exception to the “no Trust” rule are dead PCs, who can always Aid, **Betray**,<sup>20</sup> and Buy narration rights freely.<sup>21</sup>

### The Mechanics of a Duel

Assuming a stereotypical Duel to the death in samurai fashion, characters begin by standing at a distance, facing each other down with swords drawn. Players begin by each taking 3d6. Players each then simultaneously take one of their three dice and secretly roll it.

Here players choose—they can choose to charge with just the

<sup>20</sup> See page 60.

<sup>21</sup> See 51 for discussion of dead PCs.

die they have rolled, or they can keep it and make a second secret roll. If either participant decides to charge, then both participants charge.

If both players choose to wait, then the Dueling players make a second roll, adding the result to the first. After this second roll, again players choose whether to charge with the results they have so far or whether to make one last secret roll. Again, if either party decides to charge, then both parties charge.

If both players decide to wait again, then a third secret roll is made. After this roll, however, the characters immediately charge.

Whenever the characters charge, the secret rolls are revealed and the results are added together. Degree of Success is then determined according to each player's total sum. Note—any Damage a character may suffer is only applied once, after the all the results are added together.

After the Duel is resolved, players are free to take any course of action they desire, including, but not limited to, a standard Conflict or another round of Dueling.



## II. DAMAGE & DEATH

### WHAT IS DAMAGE?

Mechanically-speaking, Damage is a cumulative (-1) penalty to all Conflict rolls. How long this penalty remains in effect depends upon the severity of the wound—in other words, the Degree of Success.

But what does Damage mean inside the game world? How is Damage narrated? Generally speaking, Damage represents some sort of hindrance imposed on the character. Though Damage has a very specific mechanical definition, it can be narrated almost any way the player wishes. Damage may be physical in nature (injury, poison, illness); mental (demoralization, confusion, distraction); social (fear, intimidation, loss of social standing); tactical (bad footwork, bad timing, losing or breaking one's weapon or armor); magical (the effect of a spell)—practically any sort of hindrance appropriate to the situation in question.

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Note that a high amount of Damage has the potential to lower a roll to a negative result. In this case, Degree of Success is still determined normally.

As was discussed earlier, Damage and general Success have a very fluid relationship. Within the boundaries of the particular situation, any Conflict may be narrated as Damage; or vice versa, any Conflict that would seemingly cause Damage may also be narrated as a general Success.

However, the outcome of a Conflict cannot be narrated as both Damage and a general Success. Consider, what would happen if a character were to break his leg? Some might think that if a character were to lose his ability to walk (a general Success), he would also have to suffer some sort of mechanical penalty due to a loss of mobility (Damage).

But conceptually, it is important to view these as two separate effects. As such, narrating both of these would effectively be granting two Successes. In such a situation, the narrating player would have to choose whether to restrict the character's ability to walk—in which case he

## **Reconciling Effect and Damage**

The seeming disconnect of effect and Damage that is caused by a situation like breaking one's leg is reconciled through the role-playing of the character. In other words, if the character were to lose his ability to walk (general Success), the player would be expected to role-play pain. Likewise, if the character were to be inflicted by a mechanical penalty (Damage), the player would be expected to play his character as if the character only had limited mobility. Note, however, that such role-playing would only serve color.

would not suffer any mechanical penalty –or whether to dictate a mechanical penalty –in which case the character could still move around more or less freely.

**Ability Damage:** In lieu of a normal Wound, narrating players may opt to declare Damage against one of the character's Abilities.<sup>22</sup> Rather than imposing a mechanical penalty, damaging an Ability removes that Ability from play for the duration of the Wound.

Like a normal Wound, how exactly the Ability is "damaged" is interpreted by the narrating player.

## **TYPES OF WOUNDS**

### **Flesh Wound**

**Duration:** One Conflict roll. A Flesh Wound automatically heals after the character's next Conflict roll, whenever that may be.

### **Chapter Wound**

**Duration:** One Chapter. If the Chapter Wound is inflicted towards the beginning of a Chapter, the Wound automatically heals at the end of that same Chapter. If the Wound is inflicted towards the end of a Chapter, the Wound carries over and stays in effect until the end of the following Chapter.

**Conditional Wound:** In lieu of a Chapter Wound, narrating players may opt to declare the Wound "Conditional". As implied, the Wound is caused by some specific condition, and the effects of the Wound–meaning the (-1) penalty–remains in effect until an appropriate action is taken to address the Wound, whether that be immediately (if appropriate) or several scenes later.

22 See page 80.

An appropriate example of a Conditional Wound might be a poison that would continue to weaken the inflicted character until an antidote is taken.

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Note—a Conditional Wound can only be declared if the character in question has reasonable access to the appropriate treatment.

## Permanent Wound

**Duration:** The remainder of the adventure. A Permanent Wound can not be healed.

## Take Out

The severest form of Damage that can be inflicted on a character is a “Take Out”. A Take Out implies that the character’s plot immunity has been removed, and is most often interpreted as **incapacitation** or death.<sup>23</sup>

# INFILCTING DAMAGE

When battling the Witch’s minions and the other dangers of Mt Fuji, different creatures and obstacles have different levels of resistance to Damage. Each opponent the samurai face is given one of three “Strength” ratings,<sup>24</sup> which measure how easily the opponent is harmed: **Weak**, **Able**, and **Strong**. PCs are always rated as “Strong”.

An opponent’s Strength measures more than just its physical fortitude, it also measures the creature’s significance in the narrative. Since Damage and general Success have such a fluid relationship, even if the players are not inherently trying to harm the creature, at any time the players can choose to Take Out the opponent and remove it from play rather than take the general Success they might have been originally pursuing.

What this means

<sup>23</sup> See page 50 for a further discussion on what being Taken Out means.

<sup>24</sup> The suggested strength rating of various creatures are given in “The Adventure” chapter, starting on page 100.

is that weaker creatures have less of an impact on the narrative since they are more easily steamrolled by the players.

## **Special Case: Double Success on a Able Creature**

Scoring a Double Success against an Able opponent is the one exception to the “splitting Success” rule. Scoring a Double against an Able creature will Take Out the creature, as well as grant an extra Partial Success.

## **Risk of Being Taken Out**

Since a PC’s opponent needs a Double Success to score a Take Out, you should notice that the only way for your character to be killed or incapacitated is for you to roll a {1} and your opponent a {6}. Wounds themselves do not directly cause a Take Out – hypothetically you can take an infinite number of Wounds and keep going.<sup>25</sup> Rather, Wounds make it increasing more likely that the result of your opponent’s roll will be a Take Out.

While a Conflict roll will occasionally result with a {1} / {6}, in actual play the threat of such a outcome is fairly low. More often than not, you will need to take a couple of Wounds before the threat of a Take Out becomes significant.

## **Weak**

**Partial Success:** Chapter Wound

**Regular Success:** Taken Out

## **Able**

**Partial Success:** Flesh Wound

**Regular Success:** Chapter Wound

**Critical Success:** Taken Out

## **Strong/ PCs**

**Partial Success:** Flesh Wound

**Regular Success:** Chapter Wound

**Critical Success:** Permanent Wound

**Double Success:** Taken Out

25 That is, as long as the character is being helped by the other PCs he can continue in the face of ever increasing Damage. Any character who is working alone can only take so many Wounds before it becomes a mathematical guarantee that the character is Taken Out.

## An Example of Damage

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ex. The Chapter begins on the side of the mountain with the ronin posed to tackle the icy slopes. But as the company marches forward, they are surprised by a sudden snowstorm. Without time to look for shelter, the company is forced to endure the storm and continue onwards. In this Conflict, one of ronin, Fukazawa, is thrashed about by the harsh wind. The storm rolls a Regular Success. Fukazawa survives the ordeal, but is inflicted with a Chapter Wound.

In the next scene, while the company tries to recover from their battle with the storm, the samurai are spotted by a group of kijo.<sup>26</sup> obviously scouts of the Witch. Fearing that the ogres might bring reinforcements, Fukazawa along with a couple of the other ronin pursue the creatures, eventually catching up.

A fight ensues. In the first round of the melee, Fukazawa and the kijo both roll a 5. However, because of the (-1) penalty Fukazawa suffers from his Chapter Wound, his roll is lowered to a (4), resulting in a Partial Success for the kijo and another Flesh Wound for Fukazawa.

Fukazawa now suffers a (-2) penalty, but he continues to fight. The kijo rolls a (2), but Fukazawa only rolls a (4). After Fukazawa's (-2) penalty is subtracted, the roll results in a Tie.

One last time, Fukazawa engages the creature. With the sting of the Flesh Wound now healed, Fukazawa's penalty returns to a (-1). Fukazawa rolls a (6) and the kijo a (2). Even after the (-1) penalty is applied, the ronin still scores a Regular Success – a strong enough attack to Take the ogre Out!

After the kijo are disposed of, the characters alongside Fukazawa decide to regroup with the others who are still down the mountain side. After a brief scene of arguing between the PCs over why some choose to stay back, the GM decides to cut the Chapter and start a new one. With a new Chapter in place, Fukazawa's Chapter Wound now heals, returning him to normal, unhindered function (-0).

26 See page 104 for a description of a Kijo.

## “TAKEN OUT”: INCAPACITATION & PC DEATH

The severest type of Wound a character can receive is a “Take Out”. A Take Out removes a character’s plot immunity, which means that the player can no longer engage in any sort of Conflict. Without this ability, the character is helpless to resist the intentions of others. By definition, once a character has been Taken Out his opponents can do whatever they want with him. Most often, a Take Out is interpreted as either incapacitation or death.

Death is just that—the character is removed from play. Incapacitation is generally narrated as some sort of life-threatening injury or an equally severe condition. Note that even though an incapacitated character is restricted from engaging in a Conflict, they are still free to interact with other characters. Incapacitated characters can also attempt to recover from the condition once per Chapter.

When dealing with PCs, the default interpretation of a Take Out is incapacitation. In fact, if the intention of the GM (or another player) is to kill a PC, it must be announced before the character is committed to the Conflict, so that the owner of the PC may choose whether or not they want to engage in the Conflict. A PC cannot be killed without first warning the player that the intention is to kill.

**Recovering from Incapacitation:** Once per Chapter, beginning the Chapter after the incapacitation, players may attempt a Conflict roll to recover from the injury. For the purpose of the recovery roll, incapacitation is treated as a Weak opponent that must be Taken Out. If the character recovers, then he returns to normal function, albeit with an additional Permanent Wound plus any Damage he may have taken in the recovery Conflict.

For purposes of the recovery roll, any pre-existing Wounds the character may suffer are ignored, though any Wounds the character may take during the recovery Conflict are counted in future attempts. If the character recovers from the incapacitation, then all Damage—both pre-existing and taken during the recovery—are put back in effect. Also note that for purposes of the recovery roll, any Mixed Successes are treated as a simple Partial.

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## Dead PCs

In *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH*, just because a PC is killed does not mean that the player is removed from play. Even after a character is killed, the player of the dead PC may continue to give and receive Trust, as well as spend Trust points to Aid, Betray, and Buy Narration. Actually, the Trust-related influence of dead PCs is greater than the influence of living PCs, as dead PCs may freely spend Trust in any situation without restriction, even in Duels.

Note that the Trust-related activities of the player do not necessarily mean to imply some sort of ghostly presence of the dead character. Rather, the activity of the dead PC can be thought of as the memory of the fallen samurai giving strength to his comrades or causing guilt for his rivals. Another possible interpretation for the activities of a dead PC could be as the influence of karma on the lives of the company.



### III. TRUST

In *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH*, one of the driving forces of the game is the use of Trust between characters. Throughout the adventure, players are given the opportunity to numerically rate how much their character **trusts** the individual members of the company. Based on this rating, the individual characters are granted “Trust points” that their players can then use to influence the resolution of the giver’s Conflicts, for both good or ill. Obviously, Trust is a double-edged sword. Players can choose how much influence they want the other members of the company to have over them, but they cannot choose how those characters will use that influence.

Each character has a individual relationship with each of the other PCs in the game, and players record how much Trust each of the other players give them separately. When a character receives Trust from a specific company member, that character’s player can only spend those Trust points on the character that gave the Trust.

**ex. Ito receives (2) Trust points from Hidaka, (4) from Matsuo, and (0) from Oichi.**

If Ito wished to Aid<sup>27</sup> Matsuo, for example, Ito’s player would need to use (1) of the (4) points that he received from Matsuo. (This would leave Ito with (3) other points to spend on Matsuo in the future.) In that case, the points given to him by Hidaka and Oichi would remain unchanged. Note that since Oichi chose not to give Ito any points at all, there is no way for Ito to influence Oichi’s Conflicts.

In this way, Trust is always given out individually. Choosing to change the Trust that is given to one character would not affect the Trust that was given to another.

Trust points are given out on a per Chapter basis during the short intermission between Chapters. That is to say, at the end of a given Chapter, players evaluate how much Trust they

27 See page 58.



山林鬼

舞峰下

真の恐怖が訪れる

want to give out for the following Chapter. Once Trust points are awarded, there is no way to change those levels of Trust until the next intermission. If a player spends all the points given to him, he must wait until the next Chapter before he can receive more. Or, if the recipient of Trust begins to use those points against the giver, there is no way for the giving player to revoke those Trust points until the end of the Chapter. At the end of the Chapter, any points that remain unspent are discarded; Trust points do not carry over from Chapter to Chapter. After the Chapter the process begins anew; players award each other Trust and points refresh to their newly re-evaluated level.

## Recording Trust

To record Trust, players should begin by recording the name of each of the other characters in the “Trust” section on the character sheet (under the “Character” heading).<sup>28</sup>

When it comes time to award Trust, players first write down how much Trust they want to give out to each of the other characters. This is written to the left of the character’s name, under the “**Your Trust**” heading.

After players have written down how much Trust they want to give out, they then record how much Trust they are receiving in respective character. This is written to the right of the character’s name, under the “**Their Trust**” heading.

Once the players have recorded the amount of Trust they are receiving, they then copy the “**Their Trust**” scores into the far right column marked “Points”. This column records the actual Trust points the player has to spend on the character in question. Note that as play progresses and players begin actually spending Trust, points are subtracted from this far right column. The “**Your Trust**” and “**Their Trust**” scores should remain untouched except for those times when Trust is re-evaluated.

28 See pages 126 – 127 for a generic character sheet.

# AWARDING TRUST

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During the intermission between Chapters when players are re-evaluating the Trust they want to give out, players can choose one of three options:

- **Raise the Trust they are giving a specific character by (1pt);**
- **Keep their level of Trust for a character the same;**
- **Drop their Trust in a given character by any amount.**

Again, changing the Trust that is given to one character does not inherently change the Trust given to another; each character is evaluated separately. Note that if the player chooses to drop their Trust in a given character, that Trust can only be re-built by normal means—in other words, by (1) point per Chapter.

**Starting Trust:** The starting levels of Trust between characters are dependent upon the characters' **Zodiac** signs.<sup>29</sup> Normally, characters with neutral Zodiacs begin the game with (2) Trust points each, while characters with **ally** signs begin with (3) points and characters with **enemy** signs none.

Please note that before the first Chapter, players do not evaluate how much Trust they want to give out. Also, once the adventure officially begins, Zodiac signs cease to influence Trust levels between characters (officially, at least).

## Methods for Awarding Trust

There are two general methods players can use to decide how much Trust they want to award others. Either method is fine, but the group should discuss which method is preferred and decide together which one to use before beginning play.

<sup>29</sup> See page 74 for a more detailed discussion of Zodiac signs.

**Default –Evaluated Secretly:** At the start of the intermission, players each individually consider how they wish to adjust the Trust they are giving to the other characters. As they do, players secretly record the amount of Trust they plan on giving out (again, this would be written under the “Your Trust” heading). After all the players have recorded how much Trust they want to give out, each player takes a turn announcing how much Trust they are awarding to the other players. It is important, though, that once announcements begin, players cannot change the amount of the Trust they previously decided to award.

**Alternative –Negotiated:** Alternatively, players can choose to openly negotiate how much Trust they are giving one another. When choosing to award points this way, the choice of how much Trust to give out ceases to be an individual statement as it is when Trust is decided secretly. For groups that prefer more collaborative play, this method may be preferable.

## Optional Rule: Poker Chips

Optionally, players may use poker chips to track Trust points. As usual, players record how much Trust they want to give out and how much Trust they are given on the character sheet. But instead of tracking the character’s actual Trust points on the character sheet (under the “Points” heading), players are each given a pile of poker chips.

At the start of the game, each player is given a unique color of chips. The number of chips that each player will need will vary depending on how many other players are participating in the game; about 5 chips per participant.

During the intermission between Chapters, when players announce how much Trust they are giving out, players hand out a number of chips equal to the number of Trust points they are awarding to each respective character. During the Chapter, when players choose to spend those Trust points, they hand back the respective chip to the appropriate player.

# An Example of Trust in Play

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There are three characters: Nakamura, Saito, & Yoshida.

**Nakamura & Yoshida are enemy Zodiacs.**

**Nakamura & Saito are neutral Zodiacs.**

**Saito & Yoshida are ally Zodiacs.**

At the start of the game, the character sheets would read as follows :

**Nakamura's Character Sheet:**

- (Your Trust: 2) Saito (Their Trust: 2) : 2pts
- (Your Trust: 0) Yoshida (Their Trust: 0) : 0pts

**Saito's Character Sheet:**

- (Your Trust: 2) Nakamura (Their Trust: 2) : 2pts
- (Your Trust: 3) Yoshida (Their Trust: 3) : 3pts

**Yoshida's Character Sheet:**

- (Your Trust: 0) Nakamura (Their Trust: 0) : 0pts
- (Your Trust: 3) Saito (Their Trust: 3) : 3pts

During the first Chapter, Nakamura is impressed by the courage displayed by both Saito ,who Aided him when he became lost in the forest below Mt Fuji, and Yoshida, who never left his side in a Conflict with a group of tengu. After the Chapter, Nakamura's player declares that he is going to raise the Trust he is giving both characters.

Unlike Nakamura, Saito's friendship is hard won. Though both characters spent Trust to Aid him in various Conflicts, he is still wary of strangers. After the Chapter, Saito's player decides that that he will keep his levels of Trust the same.

## Beginning Trust

At the beginning of the game, "Your Trust" and "Their Trust" will look the same since beginning levels of Trust are based on the characters' Zodiac signs. However, these two scores will quickly start moving in different directions as players decide if the other characters are trustworthy or not.

**Yoshida** comes out of the first Chapter with mixed feelings. While he felt **Nakamura**, who never backed down from a Conflict, proved his ability as a warrior, **Yoshida** was frustrated by **Saito**, who actually spent a point of Trust to Buy narration and narrate **Yoshida**'s failure as Damage. As such, **Yoshida**'s player announces that he is going to raise his Trust in **Nakamura**, but lower the Trust he is giving **Saito** by (1).

So going into the second Chapter, the character sheets would appear as follows:

### **Nakamura's Character Sheet:**

- (Your Trust: 3) **Saito** (Their Trust: 2) : 2pts
- (Your Trust: 1) **Yoshida** (Their Trust: 1) : 1pt

### **Saito's Character Sheet:**

- (Your Trust: 2) **Nakamura** (Their Trust: 3) : 3pts
- (Your Trust: 3) **Yoshida** (Their Trust: 2) : 2pts

### **Yoshida's Character Sheet:**

- (Your Trust: 1) **Nakamura** (Their Trust: 1) : 1pt
- (Your Trust: 2) **Saito** (Their Trust: 3) : 3pts

And so the characters' levels of Trust would flux up and down as the adventure progresses...

## **Interpreting Trust Scores**

What is interesting about the matrix of Trust scores is how at any given time, you can simply look down at your character sheet and see a numerical representation of your character's relationships. For example, consider **Nakamura**'s Trust scores going into the second Chapter. It can be seen that **Nakamura** has a decent relationship with **Saito** (3pts/ 2pts) but a questionable relationship with **Yoshida** (1pt/ 1pt). Trust scores also let you see when there is an imbalance in a character's relationship, as there is a slight imbalance between **Nakamura** and **Saito**. (**Saito** has more points he can spend on **Nakamura** than **Nakamura** has to spend on **Saito**.)

# SPENDING TRUST

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## Aiding in a Conflict (1 pt)

In group Conflicts, players may spend a point of Trust to Aid another PC. When Aiding, instead of rolling along side the other player and then taking the higher die of the two results, the Aiding player's die is directly added to the die roll of the player who is being Aided. Any number of players may Aid a single character.

Any Damage the characters may suffer is applied to the individual rolls before the results are added together. In the event that either the Aiding or Aided player's roll is negative due to the effects of heavy Damage, that roll is ignored. In other words, a negative roll does not reduce a positive one, only the positive roll is used to determine Degree of Success. In the event that both rolls are negative, only the higher of the two results is used.

In regard to narration rights, Aiding players never narrate. In the event of a success, Aided characters always narrate, regardless of the characters' individual rolls.

Important to note, Aiding implies that the helping character directly—and most often physically—acts in favor of the Aided character. Aiding is not a meta-game mechanic; to qualify to Aid, the would-be Aider must be present in the scene and capable of acting in the particular Conflict. In addition, it is generally expected that the Aiding player will declare specifically how his character was attempting to act in favor of the Aided PC.

**ex. While traveling through a cemetery, Tanaka is attacked by a living skeleton. Tanaka's player announces that he is going to attempt to defend against the attacks of the undead creature. The player of Umeki, Tanaka's companion, immediately declares that he will spend one of the**

Trust points given to him by Tanaka and have Umeki Aid Tanaka in the Conflict.

They all roll. The skeleton rolls (5), Tanaka (3), and Umeki (4). As the combined result of Tanaka and Umeki's roll was higher—(7) vs (5)—Tanaka's player proceeds to narrate a Success...

## Buying Narration Rights (1 pt)

By spending a point of Trust, players are granted the privilege of narrating the outcome of another character's Conflict. Buying narration is declared after the physical die roll, but before the official narration is begun. Players may Buy narration regardless of the success of the character in question.

Narration is usually Bought to twist the outcome of a Conflict either in favor of or against the character in question. When Buying narration, players must still abide by all standard rules regarding narration.

ex. Kato is in a Conflict against a Gaki.<sup>30</sup> who has a fetish for silk. The GM declares that the Gaki wants to take Kato's coat and eat it. They roll, and Kato loses. Another player, not involved in the Conflict, declares that he wants to Buy the narration of Kato's Conflict. Rather than narrate that Kato loses his coat, the player instead chooses to narrate in the struggle for the coat, Kato takes a Wound.

Unlike the other two Trust options, Buying Narration does not imply the direct involvement of the character who's owner is Buying narration. With the a few exceptions,<sup>31</sup> a player may Buy narration at any time, whether their character is physically present or not.

## Betraying Bonus [(+1) bonus per 1 pt]

A Betraying Bonus is used to gain a mechanical advantage against another PC in a Conflict. For each point of Trust spent, the player gains a cumulative (+1) bonus against the character

<sup>30</sup> See page 103 for a description of a Gaki.

<sup>31</sup> Namely Duels and Conflicts where the character is a victim of a Betraying Bonus.

in question for the duration of a single Conflict. Any number of Trust points may be spent on the Betrayal.

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Note that using a Betraying Bonus does not necessarily imply that the character in question literally “betrays” another. A Betraying Bonus simply implies that the character in question uses their relationship to influence, deceive, or otherwise dominate another PC, and as such may be used in any Conflict where a player is pitted against another player. Like Aiding, a Betraying Bonus implies that the Betraying character directly acts against the PC in question, and it is generally expected that the Betraying player will declare how his character uses his relationship to gain the advantage.

**ex. Fujiwara stubbornly wants to rush into a situation that Narita suspects is a trap. When pleading with Fujiwara fails, Narita’s player decides to use a Betraying Bonus against Fujiwara and trick him into traveling in the wrong direction.**

Narita’s player has (4) points he can spend on Fujiwara, and decides to use (3) of them on the Betrayal. Narita rolls a (3) in addition to the (+3) bonus from the Betrayal, for a total result of (6). Fujiwara only rolls a (2).

**Having won the Conflict, Narita’s player narrates that Narita –while conveniently reminding Fujiwara of the Wound Narita took protecting him –tells Fujiwara that he has found a “shortcut” that they can use...**

Once a Betraying Bonus has been declared, the betrayed character is restricted from spending Trust on the Conflict. Thus the betrayed character cannot negate the Betraying Bonus by responding with a Betrayal of their own. Neither can they soften the Betrayal by Buying the narration of the Conflict. Note –if any other characters are present during the Betrayal, they can choose to become involved in the Conflict and spend Trust as they see fit.





## I. OVERVIEW

### CREATING A CHARACTER

**Step 1:** Deal Fates

**Step 2:** Pick a Zodiac

**Step 3:** Choose Abilities

**Step 4:** Answer Background Questions

**Step 5:** Round Out the Character Sheet-  
Select a Name and Fill Out the Section on  
Trust

### Other Concerns

**When Should a Character Be Created?** Character creation can be done any time before the start of play, though the text assumes characters will be created immediately



## How Long Does Character Creation Take?

### The Character Sheet

On pages 126 – 127, an empty character sheet is provided that can be easily copied and used for the game. Though using the official character sheet is recommended, it is not required. Any piece of paper can be used, given that it holds all the required information. Timfire Publishing also provides Zodiac-specific sheets, free to download from its website (<http://www.timfire.com/downloads.html>).

Actual character creation usually takes only 15-20 minutes, given that the players already understand the game. (Hypothetically, a character can be created in under 5 minutes, though in practice the process usually takes a little longer.)

**Should Characters Be Created Individually or as a Group?** This is a question that is left to the preference of individual groups. Due to the nature of the

game, an eclectic group of characters made in relative isolation from one another actually works rather well. That said, it is often helpful to coordinate Abilities, as unique Abilities can be used as leverage in conflicts between protagonist characters.<sup>1</sup>

**How Much of a Character's Personality Should Be Developed Prior to the Start of Play?** Though players are free to develop their characters to whatever degree they desire before play, the text assumes that very little character development—if any at all—will be worked out before the start of the adventure. The text assumes that characters will be defined according to their actions in play itself.

## GENDER & THE ROLE OF THE FEMALE WARRIOR

Though the text assumes male characters, there is no rule or reason against creating female characters. In fact, female characters play into the theme of the outcast warrior remarkably well.

Though samurai women were generally expected to remain

<sup>1</sup> See page 80 for more information on character Abilities.

subservient to their male counterparts—a woman was to serve her husband as a man serves his lord—they were nonetheless expected to be courageous and competent warriors in their own

right. Women samurai were raised in the same militaristic tradition and culture as male samurai, and though they rarely served official military positions,<sup>2</sup> women did often serve bureaucratic positions. Samurai women were generally kept from the battlefield, but like pioneer women in America's West, it was a common practice to charge samurai women with protecting the homestead during periods of war or other times when the men of the clan were away.

Samurai women did not carry daisho like their male counterparts, but did carry a short dagger called a *kaiken*, that was worn either in the woman's obi or hidden in her sleeve. Like a man's short sword, a samurai woman's *kaiken* never left her person. Although the dagger could be used in defense, female samurai were not trained to use the blade with sophisticated techniques like the type men used.<sup>3</sup> Rather, the role the *kaiken* (again like a *wakizashi*) was as a tool for committing ritualistic suicide; as it was generally thought better for a woman to kill herself than be captured, raped, or otherwise shamed and abused.

Though it was not uncommon for women samurai to train with a variety of weapons, such as the spear or bow, the primary

## Jigai

Unlike a man who committed *seppuku* by slicing open his abdomen, a woman performed ritualistic suicide—called *jigai*—by cutting open her throat. *Seppuku* was purposely designed to be painful, so to highlight a man's resolve and strength in death. *Jigai*, however, was designed to be as quick and painless as possible, so that the women would be able to maintain her composure in death. As such, a common practice dictated that women bind their feet before committing suicide, so that their bodies would not trash about during the throes of death.

2 Some early chronicles do mention amazing feats performed by warrior women, but it is difficult to find hard historical proof to verify these stories. Regardless of what militaristic roles women might have once filled, by the Edo period gender roles had become almost completely segregated (in no small part to the patriarchal influence of Confucianism), making any official militaristic action by women a practical impossibility.

3 A common *kaiken* technique was for the woman to brace the pommel of the weapon against her stomach while charging her opponent, effectively turning her body into a human spear.

weapon of the female samurai was the **naginata** (“glaive”). Though the naginata was originally conceived as an instrument of the battlefield, the versatility of the weapon made it a favorite for protecting the home. The reach of the polearm allowed women to hold attackers at a distance, equalizing the superior strength and fencing skill of male fighters. Like a man’s longsword, the naginata also served as a symbol of a samurai woman’s role in society. As men were expected to sacrifice themselves for the service of the state, women were expected to sacrifice themselves for the service of their house and family. Particularly in the Edo period when the samurai class found themselves divorced from the battlefield, the study of the naginata served as a method of instilling the idealized values of the **bushi** (“warrior”) class in samurai women, much like the study of swordsmanship for men.



## II. FATES

### OVERVIEW

Restless but tired, you agree that the company should sleep one last time before attempting its dreadful assault. As you slowly drift off, you are surprisingly greeted by memories of times past, of happiness and loved ones. But other memories slowly creep into your vision—memories of heartbreak, hardships, and betrayals. Memories of both yourself and others that you long sought to forget. As the warmth of your heart is slowly drowned in despair and regret, new and unknown visions begin to fill your sleep, visions that soon become nightmares. Visions of the Witch himself and the horrors that might await you.

**What was that, a dream? Whatever it may have been, you know it must be a bad omen. And judging from the tension and unease that seems to have fallen upon the company, you realize you must not have been the only one to have been visited that night.**

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At the start of the game, each character is given one of six dark Fates. Though these Fates are described in a general sense by the text, their exact nature and details are open to the interpretation of the player.

Dramatically, the primary purpose of character Fates is to cause tension and conflict, both for individual characters and for the company as a whole. Each of the six Fates is designed to create opposing loyalties for the individual fated characters, forcing them to question their commitment to the company. Simultaneously, each of the dark Fates represents a betrayal of some sort for the rest of the PCs, forcing the company to question their confidence in the fated character.

These opposing forces generated by the characters' Fates create a tension in play—both a public tension among the company and an internal tension for fated characters. Drama is then built by mounting more and more of this Fate-related tension, until the players can no longer bear it. What will happen when the characters break? Will the characters let their dark Fates overwhelm them? Will the ronin turn on each other? Or will they forget the past and join together?

Fates also serve a secondary dramatic function. Each of the six Fates implies some sort of history. As such, by developing their character's Fate, the player is also fleshing out the character's backstory.

Because players are responsible for both

## **Fate-Related Issues**

Fates also serve one another important function in the game. Character Fates allow the players to declare issues and themes they would like to see incorporated into the overall narrative. For example, if a player's Fate included capture of his character's son, it would be very likely that the player wanted to explore issues of family through the play. In this way, Fates act as a pointer for the GM, effectively telling her, "this is what I want my character's story to be about."

developing these Fates and bringing them into play, players are granted broad directorial power in association with their character's Fate. At any time, a player may simply introduce any game element related to their character's dark Fate, including NPCs, imaginary objects, and other facts about the game world. Players may also use this power to frame scenes and other in-game events. The restriction on this broad power is that players may **only** introduce elements that are somehow connected to their character's dark Fate. In addition, there is the general constraint that players should refrain from introducing elements that de-protagonize other players. Fates may overlap or share common elements, but players should make sure to gain the buy in of the other players involved before connecting their Fate to another's.

**Foreshadowing and Revealing Fates:** The text assumes that at the beginning of the adventure, characters' Fates will remain hidden. Then, over the first few Chapters, the player will slowly begin foreshadowing and hinting at their Fate; until some point around halfway through the adventure when the player will outright reveal their character's Fate.

## DEALING FATE

When dealing Fates to players at the start of the game, the primary concern is that an individual's Fate should remain secret until the time when the player decides to reveal it. As such, there are two suggested methods for distributing the six Fates among the players.

**Default–Randomly Assigned:** At the start of the game, the Fate cards are taken and shuffled. The cards are then randomly passed out, one to each player. After the cards are dealt, the players are given the option of trading in their Fate for one of the unused cards, should there be any left.

After everyone is satisfied with their Fate, the GM takes the unused cards and shows them to the group, revealing which Fates are not in play—and by inference, which cards **are** in play.

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**Alternative-Individually Chosen:** Alternatively, players may desire to choose their own Fate. If so, then the deck of Fates cards should be passed from player to player. When a player receives the deck, he should look over the cards and make a mental note of which Fate he wishes his character to have. After he has decided on a Fate, the deck is passed to the next player.

Though players are guaranteed to receive their desired Fate, the disadvantage of this method is that some characters may share the same Fate, unlike the default method, which guarantees that each character will have a unique Fate. As such, play with individually chosen Fates may end up being slightly less varied than when Fates are randomly assigned.

## THE 6 FATES

### Desperately in Love

**You would do literally anything for the one you care most about. Is it love or obsession?**

The fated character holds some sort of “desperate” love for another individual, the implication being that this love will somehow be at odds with the goals of the company. The player is allowed to declare who the character is in love with, and what the details of their relationship are.

### Love between PCs?

Technically speaking, the fated player may declare desperate love for any character, PC or NPC. However, declaring desperate love for another PC takes some discretion. Many players are uncomfortable with role-playing romance with another player, so it is important to make sure that the player in question is comfortable with that type of play.

## Past Allegiance

**A past allegiance will soon reappear, calling to collect old favors.**

A figure or group of figures whom the character holds a loyalty to will reemerge. Often times, but not always, this past allegiance will be working with the Witch.

## Revenge

**Unknown to the others, one of the company owes you a blood debt. Will you seek to collect it, or will the bonds of trust overcome the past?**

One of the other PCs has wronged the fated character in the past, and now the character wants their blood. Probably the most straight forward of the six Fates, this Fate allows the player to declare the exact details of the “wrong,” as well as which of the other PCs committed this wrong and what the true relationship between the characters is.

## True Motives

**You are one of the few who truly knows what lies ahead in the fortress. Yet you did not come to kill the Witch, but rather to pursue your own purposes. Will you stay with the company or leave them when convenient?**

What is significant about this Fate is that the fated character has no inherent interest in seeing the Witch killed, or otherwise seeing the mission survive. Rather, the character has traveled to the fortress for some other purpose. While all the Fates are open to interpretation, this Fate in particular is rather broad. This Fate may involve simple theft and greed, or may incorporate some greater conspiracy.

Though not required, this Fate implies that the character is familiar with the fortress and/or the Witch. As such, this Fate allows the player to define certain aspects of the fortress and the Witch in ways that the other Fates do not.

**You have made an unholy pact with the Witch himself, and he is a man of his word. He will deliver his end of the bargain, and will expect the same of you.**

Another fairly straightforward Fate. The character has made some sort of bargain with the Witch, and given that he holds up his end, the Witch will also hold up his. In this regard, it is important to understand that the Witch will not betray the character in question; he will only turn his back on the character if the character first decides to abandon the pact. The player is allowed to decide both what was promised by the Witch, and what must be done to earn that promise.

## Worst Fear

**The fear that lingers in your thoughts and haunts your nightmares will soon manifest. How do you continue in the face of what you most dread?**

Some fear of the character's will supernaturally manifest.

To get the most out of this Fate, two things are required, one on the part of the player, and the other on the part of the GM. First, it should be assumed that the Witch **knows** about the fear and will use that fear against the character and, if appropriate, against the company. At the very least, it is expected that once the fear is revealed, the GM will incorporate that fear into the adventure and repeatedly use it against the character. Thus, the fear will not be a one time event, but rather a recurring a theme.

Second, rather than focus on the details of the fear per se, the player

### **Problematic Issue: “Worst Fear”**

“Worst Fear” is a deceptively simple Fate, and can be problematic for some players. It is very easy to author a fear that results in a one time event, such as “getting lost in the woods.” As such a fear can be easily resolved after just one scene, it does not cause much tension among the company. Also, as such a fear does not require much back story, the Fate ends up not being satisfying for the fated player, as the player is not given much spotlight to highlight his character.

However, when players are aware of these pitfalls, the issue can easily be avoided.

should focus on **why** the character has the fear. Obviously, if the character is brave enough to battle the Mountain Witch, they do not scare easily. What would make such an individual cower? What type of personal trauma must the character have suffered? In other words, the player should focus on the backstory behind the fear.

## INTRODUCING FATE

What is important to understand about characters' Fates is the purpose for these Fates in play is to **set up** future conflict. The

### You Do Not Want to Do It All

There is a general role-playing principle<sup>5</sup> that states that when the introduction, resolution, and consequences of a conflict are all decided by the same person, that conflict becomes unsatisfying for the player. This is because the uncertainty of a conflict is perceived as part of its challenge.

Revealing character Fates can sometimes fall into this pitfall as the broad directorial privilege granted by the Fates can be used by the player to decide all three aspects of their Fate. For this reason, it is suggested that players restrict their use of their Fate-given power to just the introduction of Fate-related elements, so that they may still be challenged by the resolution and consequences of the Fate.

revelation of a character's Fate should not represent the end or climax of a character's story, but rather the beginning.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, to get the most out of a character's Fate, players should use their Fate-given directorial power to "introduce" game elements. That is to say, the player briefly narrates the game element into play before handing the control of the element to the GM. The purpose of this handover is so that the GM can take the Fate-related elements and use them to pressure the player and challenge the character's loyalty to the company. Note, this

handover carries the expectation that the GM will do what she can to remain faithful to the player's original intention for the element.



<sup>4</sup> In this way, character Fates function similar to "kickers" in Ron Edwards' Sorcerer.

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes called the **Czege Principle** after Paul Czege, author of *My Life with Master*, who discovered the principle after a particularly uninteresting play session.



欲ゆ生の亡者

舞峰

山林鬼

### III. ZODIAC

Each character is assigned one of the twelve signs of the Japanese Zodiac.

**Choosing a Zodiac:** A character's Zodiac can be decided any way the players desire. Zodiacs may be distributed randomly, or simply chosen by the player. The only restriction is that Zodiac signs are mutually exclusive; no two characters may have the same sign.

**Personality Descriptions:** Along with each sign a short personality description is given. These descriptions are generalizations that have historically been associated with each sign. These descriptions are meant purely as suggestions and serve simply as a jumping off point for character personalities. They are in no way required behavior for the characters; how closely to role-play these descriptions is a matter of personal discretion on the part of individual players.

### Starting Trust: Ally & Enemy Signs

Within the Zodiac, certain signs are thought to have an inherent compatibility, while other signs are thought to have an inherent incompatibility. These signs are known as "ally" and "enemy" Zodiacs, respectively. Please note that the terms "ally" and "enemy" do not imply that characters are literal allies or enemies. Rather, the terms are simply meant to refer to the inherent compatibility between personalities. Like the personality descriptions given with each sign, it is left to the discretion of the player whether or not to role-play these compatibilities, and to what degree.

These inherent compatibilities influence the levels of Trust between characters that players begin the game with. Normally, characters with neutral signs begin the game with (2) points of Trust between each other. Characters that have "ally" Zodiacs, however, begin the game with (3) Trust points, while characters with "enemy" Zodiacs begin with none.

## Rat (Ne)

Charming, imaginative, and ambitious. Though somewhat opportunistic, Rats will work hard for their goals. Rats tend to be overly critical and are known for their quick tempers despite outward shows of control.

**Allies:** Dragon and Monkey

**Enemy:** Horse

## Ox (Ushi)

Patient, conservative, and methodical. Oxen have a gift for inspiring confidence in others and tend to make good leaders. However, Oxen also have a tendency for chauvinism and having their own way.

**Allies:** Rooster and Snake

**Enemy:** Ram

## Tiger (Tora)

Although stubborn, hot-headed, selfish, and sometimes mean, Tigers are also courageous and tend to be deep thinkers capable of great sensitivity and sympathy for those they are close to and love.

**Allies:** Dog and Horse

**Enemy:** Monkey

## Rabbit (Bou)

Affectionate, obliging, and pleasant. Rabbits are smooth talkers, talented, virtuous and reserved. They have exceedingly fine taste, but they also tend to be overly sentimental.

**Allies:** Ram and Boar

**Enemy:** Rooster

## Dragon (Tatsu)

Intelligent, gifted, and full of vitality. Dragons are healthy, energetic, excitable, short-tempered and stubborn. They tend to be perfectionists who must guard against making unreasonable demands. They are the most peculiar of the twelve signs.

**Allies:** Rat and Monkey

**Enemy:** Dog

## Snake (Mi)

Charming, romantic, and deep thinkers. Snakes speak very little and possess tremendous wisdom. They are determined in what they do and hate to fail. It is often difficult for them to keep a sense of humor. They tend to be fortunate in money matters.

**Allies:** Ox and Rooster

**Enemy:** Boar

## **Horse (Uma)**

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Independent and hard workers, horses are quick thinkers, wise, and talented. Though skillful in paying compliments, they tend to talk too much. Horses have a tendency towards selfishness and are very impatient and egotistical.

**Allies:** Tiger and Dog

**Enemy:** Rat

## **Ram (Hitsuji)**

Elegant, artistic, and charming. Deeply religious, Rams are passionate in whatever they do and believe in, though they have a tendency to be pessimistic at times.

**Allies:** Rabbit and Boar

**Enemy:** Ox

## **Monkey (Saru)**

Erratic geniuses, monkeys are inventive and original. They are clever and skillful in grand-scale operations and are able to solve the most difficult problems with ease. However, they must guard against being opportunistic and distrustful of others.

**Allies:** Dragon and Rat

**Enemy:** Tiger

## **Rooster (Tori)**

Hard working, shrewd, yet also extravagant. Roosters are dreamers who are always busy with their work. Having the habit of always speaking their minds, they are usually boastful and often take on tasks which are beyond their abilities.

**Allies:** Ox and Snake

**Enemy:** Rabbit

## **Dog (Inu)**

Extremely honest and loyal, dogs have a highly developed sense of duty and do their best in relationships with others. They know how to keep secrets but have a tendency to worry and find fault.

**Allies:** Tiger and Horse

**Enemy:** Dragon

## **Boar (Inoshishi)**

Brave and intellectual, Boars have tremendous inner strength. They are sincere and honest, but sometimes naive, expecting the same from others. They are short-tempered, yet hate to quarrel or have arguments.

**Allies:** Rabbit and Ram

**Enemy:** Snake





真意を知る時が来まではえう

舞  
峰

山  
林  
鬼

## IV. ABILITIES

As part of character creation, each player is allowed to choose three Abilities for his character. Abilities allow the character

to do something they would not normally be able to do.

However, it is important to understand that Abilities are not a measure of competency, they do not inherently make a character any better at what they can do. In other words, Abilities broaden a character's skill, but do not increase it. Note that the term "Ability" is used loosely, as a character Ability can be interpreted in a number

of ways, including (but not necessarily limited to) a physical ability, a particular skill, a magical spell or effect, or even a special item.

Abilities contribute to play in a variety of ways. The simplest way they contribute is by adding color. Abilities allow the player to personalize their character. Abilities also allow for interesting narration.

Another function that Abilities can serve is as leverage in trust-related conflicts between PCs. Consider the following:

**ex. Mori and Yanagi approach a bridge that they know is rigged with a trap. The only way to cross the bridge is for Yanagi—who possesses a "Spider-like Climbing" Ability—to climb a steep wall and disable the trap...**

Does Mori trust Yanagi to disable the trap alone? What if Yanagi requests a payback for his services, is Mori willing to indenture himself to Yanagi? For this purpose, players are encouraged to select Abilities that are unique among the other characters.

Lastly, Abilities can be used as a tie-in to a character's Fate. Suppose that a character had a Fate that involved the spirit of a dead friend or loved one. Selecting an Ability such as "Speak with the Dead" or "See the Dead" would allow the character to interact with the spirit of the dead loved one or friend.

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**Assumed Abilities:** As the PCs are samurai by both birth and upbringing, characters are assumed to have all the skills and abilities of a normal samurai. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, both armed and unarmed martial arts, archery, horsemanship, literacy, and social etiquette. In addition, each character is assumed to carry daisho.

**Props:** For purposes of color, some players may wish for their character to carry certain personalized items, such as a straw hat or a fan; or to possess personalized abilities, such as a rare martial art. Given that these items or skills only function as color, such Abilities are simply considered "props," and may be freely declared prior to the start of play.

## GUIDELINES

Mechanically, Abilities have three restrictions:

- Abilities never grant a mechanical bonus or penalty on a Conflict roll;
- Abilities never grant automatic success in a Conflict;
- Abilities never allow the re-roll of a Conflict.

In addition, each Ability only covers a single effect. If a player intends their Ability to multi-functional, then they need to use multiple Ability slots to cover each specific effect.

**Armor and Weapons:** If a player desires a specific weapon for their character purely for color reasons, the player can declare the weapon as a simple prop, likewise

with armor. When selecting a weapon or armor as an Ability, remember that Abilities never grant a mechanical advantage. Mechanically-speaking, a weapon will never make the character a better fighter, and armor will never make the character harder to kill. Weapon and armor Abilities should preferably be associated with some sort of effect, a prime example being the bow that allows individuals to fire from a distance.

**Ammunition and Other Consumable Items:** If the character's Ability involves the use of ammunition or some other consumable good, the player can assume that the character has enough of the item to cover the adventure. In other words, the player does not need to worry about running out.

**“Healing” Abilities:** Note that there is no mechanism for healing actual Damage other than the natural tendency for a Wound to heal on its own. As such, any “healing” or medical type Abilities cannot be used to heal actual Damage. Rather, these types of Abilities are helpful in curing Conditional Wounds and in helping characters recover from incapacitation.

## Advise for Selecting Abilities

When proposing an Ability, it is helpful to focus on the **effect** that Ability will cause. What will the Ability allow the character to do that he would not normally be able to do? How does the player envision the Ability coming into play, or being used in a Conflict? Some players may find it helpful to discuss these questions publicly, as the other players can give suggestions and help the player solidify a definition of the Ability in question.



How did you let yourself get pulled into this mess? Oh yes, the money. Lots of money. You were told that there was a sum of money for the men that defeated the Witch, a sum large enough to set you up for a long time. A sum large enough to finally let you settle down and forget this endless drifting.

Funny though, the first thought that popped into your head—"If somebody doesn't make it, that's just more money for me." What was also funny was your second thought—"I'm sure everyone else is thinking the same thing."

## What It Means To Be a Ronin

The very existence of the ronin—a samurai without a master—was a contradiction. The identity of the samurai was one of servitude and loyalty to one's feudal lord. The word "samurai" itself means "one who serves." How can a servant exist without a master?

The word "ronin" literally translates as "wave man," the implication being that the individual, without the anchor of a clan or feudal lord, was adrift in life, helplessly tossed about by the tides of fate. The word has its origins in the **Nara** and **Heian** periods (710–1185), when it was used to reference serfs who had abandoned their master's land. With the rise of the bushi, however, the meaning of the word shifted to refer to samurai who had lost their feudal or clan association.

## Voluntarily Ronin

Historical instances of samurai voluntarily becoming ronin are rare. When they did, it was usually only temporary and with the unofficial support of their lord. Samurai occasionally resigned from their status to ease political tension in their clans, returning after the situation subsided. After Japan's borders were re-opened to foreign countries, there were a few examples of samurai who voluntarily became ronin in order to study Western culture among the foreigners. They, too, returned after their task was complete. Occasionally, samurai would tire of the life of a warrior and permanently resign in order to become tradesmen or monks.

Lastly, samurai would sometimes resign their position when certain "dirty work" needed to be done, such as revenge, that could potentially implicate the samurai's master. Though by official accounts these samurai voluntarily resigned, many times these samurai were pressured to take such action to protect the reputation of their masters or clan.

The reasons why samurai became ronin varied. Though on occasion individuals voluntarily resigned their position, most samurai were forced from their status, either by the disgrace of their master or by the loss of their lord's favor. A samurai was also considered a ronin if he was born to ronin parents. Even though the loss of their position as proper samurai was not always within their control, the status of a ronin was still considered shameful.

During the Edo period, the number of ronin exploded. The newly formed Tokugawan government dissolved a number

of clans and fiefs, instantly turning large numbers of samurai into ronin. In addition, the Tokugawan government instituted laws that restricted the employment of samurai. While in earlier times samurai could more or less move freely between masters, in the Edo period samurai were required to gain the consent of their former master

before they could be rehired. The effect of these laws was that any samurai that lost the favor of his master was effectively doomed to a life as a ronin.

Though literature and drama often idealize the ronin,<sup>6</sup> the life of a ronin was often one on the fringe. Without a regular means of support, many ronin faced a life of financial hardship, if not outright poverty. Some ronin became drifters, wandering from village to village. As the very existence of the ronin questioned one of basic tenets of samurai society—that a samurai's place was as a servant to his master—ronin were often viewed with suspicion and mistrust, considered unruly and thuggish.

But these attitudes were not totally without merit. Without other means of support, many ronin turned to the only skill they possessed—fighting—becoming mercenaries, bodyguards,

<sup>6</sup> The real life tale of the 47 ronin being a prime example.

or occasionally bandits. In fact, it was very common for the **yakuza** (organized crime groups) to keep one or two ronin employed as hitmen and generic muscle. Bitter toward the establishment and without the social pressure to keep them in line, many ronin did become unruly, forsaking normal social conventions and the strict rule of law. Some ronin even joined dissident political groups that sought the removal of the ruling Tokugawan government.

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But despite being ostracized by other samurai, most ronin longed to return to their former positions. Many ronin felt embittered at being denied their proper status in life by a fate beyond their control. Despite their outsider status, ronin were still samurai, by both birth and upbringing, and longed to find their place again in normal samurai society.

## QUESTIONS

As the last major step in character creation, the player must answer two questions about his character's past and motivations. The answers to these questions must be shared publicly with the other **players**. However, sharing the answers with the other members of the group does not necessarily mean that the answers are public knowledge among the **characters**. It is up to the individual player to decide whether or not to reveal the answers to the other characters.

### Why Is the Character a Ronin?

The first question the player must answer deals with how the character became a ronin. The implication of this question is that either the character's master, family, or (most likely) the character himself did something disgraceful and lost favor with his lord.

## Why Does the Character Need the Money?

The second question the player must answer deals with the character's motivation for taking on the mission to battle the Witch. The implication of this question is this assignment is the character's only option to earn the needed money, and that the more money the character makes the better.

## USING THESE QUESTIONS

How to use these questions is up to the individual player. Sometimes a character's Background will become significant to the events of play, other times not.

Sometimes players will connect the two questions. For example, suppose the player first declares that the reason their character is a ronin is because during a time of war, the character burned a town he suspected was harboring enemy soldiers, only to find out later that he burned the wrong village. The player then declared the reason the character needed the money was to rebuild the town in atonement for his sin.

Similarly, players often like to use their character's Background questions as a set-up for their character's dark Fates. For example, suppose the reason a character was a ronin was because the character's father was killed by a rival warlord who wanted to steal the father's land and position. Later in the game, it is revealed that the character's Fate, Unholy Pact, was that the Witch promised to restore the character's rightful position and land if the ronin was able present a certain item to him. Note that while players should still be honest about answering these questions, if the player is using these questions to set up their character's Fate, they should do their best not to reveal what Fate the character holds.

Even if the events of a character's past never come into play,  
at the very least these questions simply elaborate on the  
character's past, giving players a jumping off point for their  
characters' interactions with one another.

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## I. THE SETTING

### MOUNT FUJI

The highest mountain in all of Japan, Mt. Fuji stands 12,388 feet tall with a near perfectly circular base between 22–25 miles in diameter covering roughly 350 square miles. Fuji straddles the **Shizuoka** and **Yamanashi** Prefectures in the **Chubu** region of **Honshu** island, about 62 miles west of the former capital city of Edo, modern-day Tokyo. Part of the **Fuji-Hakone-Izu** National Park, Mt. Fuji is surrounded by the five lakes: **Lake Kawaguchiko**, **Yamanakako**, **Saiko**, **Motosuko** and **Shojiko**.

Most experts agree that Fuji is a dormant, but not extinct, volcano. The peak of the mountain is, in fact, a volcanic crater about 1,500 feet in diameter and 600 feet deep. Eighteen eruptions have been recorded by Japanese historians, and steam vents can still be found in Fuji's crater today. The most recent eruption occurred in 1707, when Edo—62 miles away—was covered in 4–6 inches of ash. During that eruption, a second crater and peak were formed about halfway down the mountain's side. Reports from centuries past describe cauldrons of boiling blue mud in the great crater, but today they are gone. Mt. Fuji today demonstrates very little seismic activity. Nevertheless, at the end of each summer, ritual fires are still lit along Fuji's trails and prayers are offered that the great volcano will not erupt again.

Climbing Mt. Fuji is not particularly difficult, and does not require any special equipment or training as the slope of mountain is not very steep. In fact, during the climbing season, the trails of Mt. Fuji can see up to 5,000 tourists a day. But even though the slope is easy, the climb is long. Depending on the route one takes, a trip to the peak can add up to 9–16 miles.

Also, the ease at which Fuji can be climbed should not be mistaken for safety. While climbing Fuji in summer is relatively peaceful, attempting to climb the mountain in winter can be treacherous. Freezing temperatures, strong winds, and sudden snow storms can make a winter climb deadly.

The first recorded account of someone ascending the mountain was in 663 by a monk named **En-no-Gyoja**. The monk returned from the summit with a description of the great crater which he called **naiin** or “sanctuary”. A sacred site even before En-no-Gyoja’s ascent, the monk’s trip inaugurated a practice of Fuji worship. Shrines were built on the mountain, and females were forbidden to climb it.<sup>1</sup> In 1149, a Shinto priest, **Matsudai**, dedicated a shrine at the summit. Even today, priests at the mountain’s summit shrine still scatter water, rice wine and salt into the crater as a Shinto purification ritual.

The goal of climbing Mt. Fuji is what is known as “**Goraiko**”—watching sunrise from the summit of the mountain. As Fuji in times past was considered to be a goddess, watching the sunrise from its peak was considered a spiritual act itself, a moment of enlightenment. Today, climbers usually begin their ascent sometime in the afternoon or early evening, climbing straight through the night so they may glimpse the first rays of light from the highest point in the land of the rising sun.

<sup>1</sup> The ban on women was only lifted in the late 1800’s during the **Meiji** period (1868–1912). If desired, this ban can be ignored for purposes of the game.

## A Primer on Japanese Castles

Though Japanese castles may look very different than their Western counterparts, they fulfilled the same function. When referring to a Japanese castle, it is important to realize that the term “*shiro*” (“castle”) refers not just to a single building, but rather to the entire fortified compound, including the castle grounds. The grounds of a Japanese castle are organized into a series of ascending baileys called **maru**. Traditionally, Japanese castle are constructed of three such baileys, which are typically organized in one of three patterns:

-  •Concentric—each bailey is layered on top of each other in a pyramid-like structure;
-  •Offset—the second or third bailey is built to the side of the top bailey;
-  •Step—each bailey leads up to the next in a step-like manner.

In addition, extremely large castles would sometimes be encircled by another two or three outer walls, called **kuruwa**.

At the center of a Japanese castle—both literally and figuratively—was the tower-keep, called a “*tenshu*”. Placed on the highest maru, the tower provided commanders the greatest vantage point for surveying the castle grounds and surrounding countryside. The tenshu was made of at least three stories, with sometimes as many as five or even seven stories. In addition, the keep also contained a number of basement cellars that were used to store food, weapons, and prisoners. The tenshu was primarily a military structure, serving as a final fall back point in the case of a siege and as a place for secure storage. Residential and administrative buildings, including the castle lord’s mansion, were often located separate from the tower-keep. Most often these buildings

were found in the second, middle bailey, but occasionally were placed outside the compound altogether.

The high stone “walls” that lined the edges of a castle’s baileys were not free standing structures like the walls of a Western castle. Rather the stone “walls” of a Japanese castle served as a base supporting the sides of each ascending plateau. Lining the top of these stone bases were short, free standing walls made of crushed rock and plaster that stood roughly 6-10 feet tall. These small plaster walls were pierced at regular intervals with small openings used for firing weapons—rectangular openings for arrows, triangular openings for guns. Behind these plaster walls, trees were frequently planted (usually pine) that would provide additional shielding from gunfire and arrows and could also be used for timber if needed.

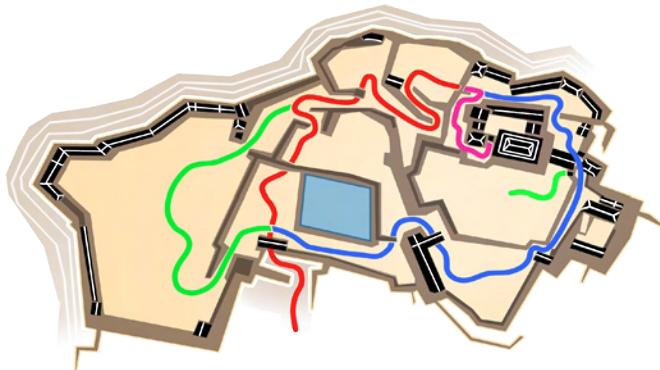
Also lining the stone bases were buildings called **yagura**. While the term “yagura” generically means “tower”, these structures came in a number of forms. Sometimes these buildings were built like a smaller version of a tenshu. Other times, they were used as gatehouses. Another common form yagura took was as a long one-story building that stretched for the length of the stone base, replacing the need for plaster walls. Yagura were used as storehouses, watchtowers, and occasionally as living quarters for servants or guards.

As the stone bases that supported each of the maru were slanted and made of rough stones to better support the underlying earthworks, they were often very easy to climb. As such, yagura often utilized a number of defenses against climbers. These included downward spikes that lined the buildings, as well as shoots that could be opened to drop heavy rocks or boiling oil on anyone that attempted to scale the walls.

Though a castle’s walls, tenshu, and other buildings were formidable structures in their own right, one of a castle’s greatest defenses was the layout and design of the grounds

themselves. The defensive layout of a castle, called “nawabari”<sup>2</sup> was the first aspect of a castle considered when designing the compound and was heavily influenced by the local typography. To begin with, each of the castle’s three baileys offered an additional line of defense that soldiers could fall back to, if needed. In addition, baileys were separated by moats, ditches, walls, and gates that formed a maze-like structure meant to confuse and disorient invading armies. Pathways were frequently designed to lead attackers in the wrong direction. Gates, stairs, and hallways were often designed as pinch points that would slow down and trap invaders.

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## The Nawabari of Himeji Castle: A Real World Example

Himeji-jo (“Himeji castle”) is arguably the grandest surviving castle in Japan today. Designated both an **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and a **Japanese Natural Cultural Treasure**, more visitors travel to Himeji-jo than any other castle in Japan. Located at the top of **Mt. Hime** in **Himeji** city in **Hyogo** Prefecture, Himeji castle is also known as **Shirasagi-jo** or **Hakuro-jo** (“White Heron” or “Snow Heron” castle, respectively) for its elegant appearance and white plaster walls.

<sup>2</sup> The term “nawabari” literally translates as “stretched rope”, for the first step in building a castle was to literally lay down rope to outline the castle’s future walls.

One of most outstanding features of the castle is that unlike so many other castles in Japan, the grounds of Himeji-jo have remained largely intact. In particular, Himeji is known for its nawabari. With its maze-like succession of gates, walls, and false pathways, as well as its excellent use of typography, the layout of the castle demonstrates the principles of nawabari to near perfection.

The layout of the castle provides visitors—be it an invading army or group of tourists—with two possible paths that spiral up to the tower keep, an eastern route and a western route. The eastern route is actually the more direct of the two, but given that the eastern path appears to be a dead end from the vantage point of the front gate, the western route is the much more obvious route to take.

**Western Route:**<sup>3</sup> Starting at the front “Hishi” gate, the western route begins by taking an invading army more or less straight through two gates. After passing the “I” and “Ro” gates, the path curves to the left and forks. The path appears to continue towards the left, but following that direction would lead the invaders back through the Western bailey and eventually loop them back at the front gate. Instead, in order to reach the next gate, the invaders must turn right and backwards through a narrow corridor.

## The Western Bailey

If an invading army were to turn left from the front gate, they would be directed through the Western Bailey. Though this route would allow the army to bypass the first two “I” and “Ro” gates, because the ramp up to the Western bailey forces the invaders to turn in the opposite direction from the keep, it is much less intuitive than simply heading straight.

Directly through this next “Ha” gate is a U-shaped courtyard, a seemingly good spot for regrouping troops after the bottlenecked corridor. But this courtyard puts invading soldiers in a very vulnerable position, for the courtyard stands directly below a set of ramparts. Any troops who gather in this spot would become easy prey for attacking defenders. In addition, this area also places the troops in more or less in plain view of the tower, giving both

<sup>3</sup> Indicated by red on the map.

defending commanders and snipers a bird's eye view of the invading forces.

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Looking right and uphill from the "Ha" gate reveals what appears to be another dead end, but in fact holds the path to the keep. After turning nearly 180 degrees around the end of a wall, the invaders are faced with another, even tighter corridor—and a suspiciously unassuming gatehouse.

In order to pass through this "Ni" gate, invading soldiers are forced to walk through a small "L"-shaped room. But inside this room, the low-ceiling has openings that allow defending troops to pour boiling oil on anyone passing through below. Should any invading troops be killed inside this room, a build-up of corpses would quickly clog the tight pathway, blocking the invading army from advancing and trapping them in the narrow corridor below.

Once through the "Ni" gate, the invaders would pass through a small courtyard before reaching the next "Ho" gate. The "Ho" gate, which is one of the few gates made of iron, is extremely low, and would force armored troops to stoop as they passed through. Directly on the other side of the gate is small set of stairs that seemingly guide the invading army forward past the backside of the tower. At this point, hurried and frantic troops would very likely continue rushing forward, eventually reaching the **Bizen** bailey or maybe even circling all the way back to the front gate. But if the invading troops took the time to look to the right after the "Ho" gate, they would notice behind a wall an unassuming gate—and the final pathway to the keep.

However short this final stretch may be, it would nonetheless be extremely perilous, as invading troops must pass through no less than 5 "Water" gates before finally entering the keep, all the while being relentlessly pummeled with arrows and gunfire from the tower windows above. The pathway after the second Water gate also unexpectedly slopes downward, in a

last ditch effort to confuse the invaders into thinking that the path leads away from the Keep. If the invaders are able to make it to the fifth and final gate, which is invisible until the final corner, they would be met with the most heavily fortified gate in the entire compound.

**Eastern Route:**<sup>4</sup> From the front gate, the path towards the right ends with a small, steep, “S”-shaped staircase that leads to “Nu” gate,<sup>5</sup> one of the more heavily fortified gates in the castle. Through the “Nu” gate is a fairly large courtyard which leads to a second “Ri” gate, which in turn leads to a long uphill corridor on the eastern side of the castle. It should be noted that this path forces the invading troops to travel along side the wall of the Bizen bailey, south of the tower keep. This wall both blocks the invaders’ view of the tower and exposes them to defending fire from the Bizen bailey above.

At the end of this long corridor, the path takes a sharp left. After this turn, directly ahead stands a large and impressive gate, known as the “Bizen” gate, for it leads to the Bizen bailey. Though the Bizen bailey is empty today, in times past the plateau held a number of residential and administrative buildings, including a great mansion for the lord of the castle. Though the Bizen bailey stands directly below the main keep, the bailey itself is a dead end; it does not actually connect to the tower above.

Instead, right before the Bizen gate, if the invading troops were to turn right they would find an extremely small, narrow, and unassuming corridor that leads to another gate. Passing through this “To” gate leads to a courtyard that stands adjacent to the eastern side of the keep. On the other side of the courtyard is a staircase that leads behind the tower and eventually to the Water gates, which of course finally leads inside the tower itself.

<sup>4</sup> Indicated by blue on the map.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the “Nu” gate is somewhat hidden behind a corner, making it difficult to spot from the “I” and “Ro” gates.

## **Yamajiro, the Mountain Fortress**

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The text assumes the **Yamajiro**, the fortress of the Mountain Witch, to be a large traditional Japanese castle that sits at the very peak of Mt. Fuji. Whether the castle is placed inside the crater itself or along its ridge, the exact appearance and structure of the Yamajiro is under the control of the GM, like other aspects of the environment.

The text also assumes the fortress to have a personality of its own. While its left to discretion of the GM whether or not to make the fortress a full-fledge sentient being, the text assumes that the fortress has the ability to shift and transform itself according to the command of its master, the Witch.



## **II. OPPOSITION**

### **CRASH COURSE IN JAPANESE SPIRITS, FOLKLORE, & SUPERSTITIONS**

In comparison to other cultures, Japanese mythology and folklore is characterized by a vast range, diversity, and oddity of ghosts, demons, and other supernatural beings. Though ghosts and spirits in the West often possess an inherent morality—either good or evil—supernatural beings in Japan are most often morally ambiguous and associated with all sorts of commonplace activities, phenomenon, and objects. Examples include the human dirt freak that punishes housewives for a dirty house, the stinking monster that haunts outhouses, the

hair-cutting spirit that “steals” a person’s hair in the middle of the night, the drinking monster that forces people to drink alcohol, and the fire-licker that steals fire among many others.

Japanese spirits seem to occupy every nook and cranny of mythical Japan, haunting all sorts of locations and objects. Though ghosts seem to haunt abandoned buildings and other isolated locations in particular, they can be found almost anywhere. Not even temples or holy sites are safe from the intrusion of spirits, though rituals can be performed to ward off or exorcise such beings.

Also noteworthy in Japanese folk art and mythological imagery is the fascination with oddities and horrific freaks. This genre of Japanese art is often referred to as “grotesqueries,” due to the grotesque nature of its subject. The grotesque and horrific nature of these beings and images is only tempered by the underlying, characteristically Japanese sense of humor found in these stories.

The near-supernatural was rarely trusted, as supernatural beings were assumed to naturally have malevolent intentions. It was said that if you ever met a ghost, run away. However, though Japanese spirits are rarely depicted as benevolent, they are not always sinister. More than anything, Japanese spirits seem to be simply unpredictable, and often only want to cause mischief. Similarly, though Japanese ghosts and monsters are almost always depicted as dangerous, they are not always depicted as bright or intelligent. Often times, humans can use quick wit to trick the spirits, and can sometimes even win the spirit’s favor through some sort of contest.

Though ghosts and spirits in the West are usually depicted as asexual, Japanese spirit are often voyeuristic. Sometimes, a spirit will even pursue living humans for sexual pleasure, even to the point of molestation or rape.

Of all spirits, female spirits were most feared. They were thought to be malicious and revengeful, with or without reason. They also seemed to have an affinity for deceiving and enchanting living men.

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Demons are common in Japanese mythology, serving in many different capacities. Demons are usually depicted as the tormentors of souls in Hades, though they can also be found on Earth acting as the servants of the gods, guardians of temples, or occasionally as servants of men. Though fearsome and powerful, a demon is always depicted as a servant of some other master.

Japanese mythology is also filled with magical animals and insects. Sometimes these magical beasts are simply giant, monstrous versions of their normal form. Other times, they are portrayed as sentient creatures, able to walk and talk like humans. These animals can sometimes disguise themselves and take human form, though usually some feature of their person betrays their true identity. For example, foxes often appear in human form, except for a fox-shaped shadow. Likewise, weasels were thought to have the ability to change into the form of a human, except for their tails, which remained unchanged. Most notably, Japanese folklore feared foxes and cats as the most sinister and powerful of magical animals.

A peculiar type of being found in Japanese folklore is the freak. Sometimes attributed supernatural abilities, but often times not, the freak is a grotesque and often horrific distortion of the natural human form. Freaks, who were often thought to be the offspring of an unholy union between a supernatural being and a normal human, literally come in all shapes, sizes, and conditions.

Still, some of the most unusual—and most powerful—Japanese spirits are those associated with natural phenomenon. One example of such a spirit concerns the great **Hideyoshi Toyotomi**

(1536–1598), whose rise to power from a common birth was said to have been caused by the favor of a thunder spirit, whom Hideyoshi had helped untangle from the branches of a nettle tree.

**Game Considerations:** For purposes of the game, it should be assumed that any supernatural being encountered in the adventure is somehow in service to the Witch.

## THE WITCH'S MINIONS

The following is a list of suggested creatures that can be included in the adventure. Please understand that this list is simply a suggestion; none of these creatures are required, and

### NPCs: Individuals or Mooks?

Should the NPCs the characters encounter be portrayed as individuals full of personality, or as simple mooks, hordes of insignificant creatures whose only purpose is to cause the PCs harm? There are advantages to both approaches, and very likely the game will be filled with both types of characters.

Creating individuals obviously adds color to the game. But creating NPCs with personalities will sometimes threaten to drift the focus of play away from the relationship between characters. Portraying monsters as personality less creatures will predictably focus play more on the interactions between characters, but equally predictably, will sometimes result in “dry” play.

Obviously, a balance will need to be struck. Different scenes will call for different types of NPCs. If the desire is to see how the characters will interact with one another, throw some generic monsters at them. But if the desire is to “liven up” play, introduce some personality-filled NPC, and see how the players react.

any of the beings can be modified or tailored to fit the needs of the adventure. More than anything, this list is meant to serve as an example of possible minions and will hopefully spark the imaginations of both the GM and players alike.

**Minion Strength:** Included in the description of individual creatures is a listing of that creature’s Strength. Many of the spirits have multiple strengths listed, and some are even listed as “any.” In these cases the Strength of the creature is variable and can be tailored to fit the significance of the creature in the adventure.

### Baku

Baku (“Dream-eater”) are usually benign spirits of Japanese



mythology known for “eating” dreams. As nightmares are believed to be caused by malevolent spirits, it is thought that a baku could be called upon to “eat” such bad dreams and turn them into good fortune. However, baku are sometimes known to eat all dreams, good or bad, tormenting the sleeper and depriving them of rest.

Like many mythological creatures, a baku is usually depicted as a composite of other creatures, often with the head of an elephant and the body of a lion. Inside a dream, however, a baku can take whatever appearance it desires.

It is suggested that for the game, baku should serve the Witch in haunting the characters’ dreams.

**Strength:** Any

## Cats

Of all magical animals, cats were feared as the most sinister. Cats were thought to be malicious and vengeful, having the

ability to remember every wrong ever done to them. Cats were also thought to have an affinity for bewitching people, sometimes even having the ability to possess another’s body.

Cats can take a number of forms. In their natural animal form, it is generally thought that cats can walk upright with the aid of their tail.<sup>6</sup> It is also believed that cats can disguise themselves in human form, though like other magical animals, some feature of their person still betrays

## Possession & Mind Control

In the event that characters are threatened with possession or mind control (or any other mental condition that dictates a certain behavior, for that matter), it is important that the character retain some measure of free will throughout the ordeal. The danger with possession and mind control is that they threaten to de-protagonize the player. As such, the player should never lose control of the character, rather the player is just expected to act out the commands of the controlling agent.

Note that the only time a character should completely fall under the control of some other influence is if the character is Taken Out. In such a situation, recovering from the total control of the particular condition would likely follow the rules for recovering from incapacitation.

6 For this reason, a rather vicious superstition dictated that a person should break the tail of an old cat, to prevent them from taking vengeance for past wrongs.

their their true identity, be it a cat-tail or cat-shaped shadow. Sometimes (again like other magical animals), they appear with the body of a human, but with the head of a normal cat.

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**Strength:** Weak or Able

## **Gaki (Ghouls) & Jikininki (Zombies)**

Both gaki and jikininki (“hungry ghost” and “man-eating ghost”, respectively) are undead spirits, individuals cursed in death for greed and selfishness in life.

The curse of the gaki is an insatiable hunger, usually for some vile or repulsive substance, like feces or blood. Gaki are often depicted as emaciated humans except for huge, swollen stomachs and inhumanly small mouths and throats.

Similar to gaki, the jikininki are cursed to seek out and eat human corpses. But unlike the typical gaki, jikininki are often depicted as remorseful. Though they lament their vile behavior, jikininki are nonetheless driven by their cravings. Jikininki are depicted as decomposing cadavers, sometimes with inhuman features like claws or glowing eyes.

**Strength:** Weak

## **The Giant**

Like in the West, the idea of giant humans is common to Japanese mythology. For purposes of the game, it is suggested that the Witch controls a single giant that sleeps in a cave on the side of the mountain. If needed, the giant will awake to serve its master.

**Strength:** Strong or Unkillable

## Kijo (Ogress)

Kijo are female ogres covered in long, white hair. They are larger and stronger than the average man, and can climb cliffs and traverse mountain paths with ease. Sometimes they are known to carry clubs.

**Strength:** Able

## The Nio

The Nio (“Two Kings”) are a pair of protective deities, traditionally depicted in statues at the entrance of Buddhist temples.

The Nio, which are sometimes thought to have guarded lord Buddha himself, are usually depicted as muscular, wrestler-like figures. One is a symbol of overt violence and death, baring his teeth and wielding a staff. The other, depicted with closed mouth and a sword, is a symbol of latent strength and birth. Sometimes, the Nio are depicted as **shishi**, or lion-dogs, instead of humans.

It is suggested that the Nio serve as the personal bodyguards of the Witch, or possibly as his top advisers.

**Strength:** Strong

## Oni

Oni are evil spirits or demons, usually depicted as large fearsome creatures with wild hair, horns, three eyes, and three clawed fingers and toes, with skin of variable color. Often, oni are attributed with the ability to fly.

Malicious and cruel, oni are characterized by devilish tempers. Though fearsome and dangerous, oni are not always depicted as too bright.

**Strength:** Able or Strong

## Kumo (Giant Spiders)

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Kumo are giant spiders. Like normal spiders, kumo are able to climb walls and shoot a web that traps prey. Sometimes they are attributed a curious ability—when curled up, they appear like a pile of dirty clothes. This allows them to lie in ambush, waiting for an unsuspecting passerby.

**Strength:** Weak or Able

## Skeletons

Like in Western legends, living skeletons are common in Japanese art and folktales. However, in Japanese superstition, a skeleton is a much stronger symbol of death than in the West. The presence of a skeleton or skull is almost always a sign of a malevolent spirit or misfortune.

**Strength:** Weak

## Tengu

A type of boogey-man figure, tengu are mischievous spirits that live in the woods or in the mountains.

Tengu are often depicted as bird-men with black, raven-like feathers and wings. Sometimes they appear as humans, but with long, beak-like noses. Regardless, they are often regarded as being fond of wearing red cloaks and small black hats, and of disguising themselves as wandering Buddhist priests. Sometimes, they are depicted as expert swordsmen.

Even in comparison to other spirits, tengu are terribly unpredictable, switching back and forth between cruelty, mischief, and humor without any apparent rhyme or reason.

**Strength:** Weak or Able

## The Witch's Other "Minions"

You do not need to limit the ronin's opposition to just living (or undead) opponents. As has been expressed throughout the book, any obstacle or danger can be utilized in a Conflict, and thus also as an opponent. In fact, it adds color to the game to approach significant obstacles as opponents in their own right that need to be Taken Out.

## **Tokutaro-san & Otoku-san**

Both Tokutaro-san and Otoku-san are enchanted dolls. From afar, they look like a 2 or 3 year old child—Tokutaro-san a boy, Otoku-san a girl. But up close, it becomes apparent that they are really made of cloth. Neither of them can talk, though they will scream or cry if hurt or angered.

It is suggested that Tokutaro-san and Otoku-san be depicted as servants to Yuki-Onna.

**Strength:** Weak

## **Wolves**

In Japanese folklore, wolves are thought to represent the spirits of the mountains themselves, though this position does not diminish their ferocity or danger.

It is suggested that wolves be depicted as either the guard dogs or personal pets of O-Yanma.

**Strength:** Weak

## **Yasha (Vampire Bats)**

Yasha are large, vampire bats, a type of demon that eats human flesh.

**Strength:** Weak

## **Yuki-Onna**

Yuki-Onna is a winter storm personified—beautiful, serene, and enchanting; but deadly, unforgiving, and ruthless to the unsuspecting. She is portrayed as tall and beautiful, with long hair and inhumanly pale skin that blends with the snow. She often appears wearing a white kimono, though some legends describe her as naked, with only her face, hair, and pubic

region standing out from the snow. She is often depicted as gliding over the snow, never leaving a footprint and dissolving into a snowy mist if threatened.

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She is often depicted with vampiric or succubus-like qualities, charming men before draining them of their warmth.

Sometimes she freezes them with her touch or kiss, other times she simply leads them off to die of exposure. Other times, she appears with a child, but when a well intentioned individual attempts to take the "child" from her, they are frozen in place.

Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Yuki-Onna was almost always uniformly described as evil. But later stories are much more ambiguous, often focusing on her ghost-like nature and ephemeral beauty. Like the snow and winter she personifies, Yuki-Onna is capable of a softer side. Some tales have her being merciful to individuals that possess some sort of inherent quality. Other stories have her falling in love with mortal men.

It is suggested that for purposes of the game, Yuki-Onna be depicted as the Witch's mistress.

**Strength:** Able or Strong

## **Yurei & Goryu (Ghosts)**

Like their Western counterparts, yurei are the souls of the dead kept from a peaceful afterlife by some harm or wrongdoing. Their personality will depend greatly on both their character in

## **You Can Not Go Wrong**

If your desire is to invent some sort of original supernatural monstrosity to include in the adventure, it is pretty difficult to go wrong. Because of the diversity of Japanese mythology and folklore, pretty much any creature will fit along side more traditional Japanese spirits.

Giant insects or animals? Works. Magical animals? Make them sentient or paste together components of living animals to form a mythical being. Spirits? As long as the creature is a sufficiently weird, grotesque distortion of some natural human condition, no one will be able to tell the difference.

Just play the creature like any other Japanese supernatural being-dark, vengeful, and wildly unpredictable with just a hint of humor.

life and the circumstances surrounding their unnatural return.

Though yurei are souls kept from the afterlife by external circumstances, goryu are vengeful ghosts, individuals who willed themselves through hate to remain in the land of the living after death.<sup>7</sup> They are malicious and malevolent, often possessing an irrational and insatiable thirst for revenge. Typically, these ghosts will haunt both locations and individuals.

Japanese ghosts are commonly depicted wearing a white kimono (the typical burial clothing of ancient Japan) and without feet or legs. Sometimes they are also accompanied by a pair of floating flames or will o' the wisps<sup>8</sup> in eerie colors such as blue, green, or purple.

**Strength:** Any



## III. THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

### O-YANMA

The most important thing to realize about the Witch is that for the most part, he is simply a McGuffin, that is, a plot device that serves to advance the story. He is not a full-fledged character in the same sense as the PCs. The Witch's place in the adventure is largely symbolic of the malice, ill will, and

<sup>7</sup> A common superstition stated that an individual whose last living thought was of hate or revenge would return as a goryu. (Thus the statement "I will haunt you" became a threatening statement made in anger to someone.)

<sup>8</sup> A will o' the wisp is a ghostly, pale light sometimes seen at night hovering and sliding around in swamps and graveyards. Will o' the wisps recede if approached, and are traditionally held to be mischievous spirits of the dead or other supernatural beings attempting to lead travelers astray.

shortcomings of the characters. The focus of the game should not be on the Witch himself, but rather on the relationships between characters. Likewise, it is assumed that the presence of the Witch, as both a symbol and as a figure in the game, should be used to push the tension between characters.

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The exact role the Witch will play will vary from game to game. The text assumes that the Witch will be an enigmatic figure. Some groups may have him appear intermittently throughout the adventure, while others may opt to only present the Witch during the final scene. Regardless, the text assumes that in the early phases of the game, the Witch's presence will be minimal, but will grow as the game progresses.

Technically speaking, like other NPCs, the Witch's exact appearance and personality is under GM control. However, in practice the creation and development of the Witch's character often turns into a group effort, as players may narrate facts about the Witch (both overtly and by implication) as part of their Fate or sometimes in association with their character's background.

The text presents the Witch as a spirit of the cold. As such, it is assumed that the Witch can control both the temperature and the weather and that a change in those elements will indicate a changing presence of the Witch. The text also assumes that the Witch will possess considerable magical abilities, though his exact abilities are left to individual preference.

**Killing the Witch:** The Witch himself is simply a Strong NPC, like any other. At first glance, since this would make him mechanically no different than any other NPC, it may seem that the confrontation with the Witch might end up being anti-climactic. But at the end of the game, the question is not whether the Witch lives or dies, but whether the characters are able to reconcile their differences. The true climax of the adventure is not the confrontation with the Witch per se, but rather it is the moment that the characters' issues come

to a head. That moment may occur come during the final confrontation, but it may just as easily come sometime earlier or even after the confrontation with the Witch.

If the characters are able to reconcile their differences and enter the final confrontation in full cooperation and trust, there is no reason why the battle with the Witch should not be an easy matter. On the other hand, if the characters have not worked out their differences, then the GM should use the Witch to bring out those issues. In that case, the “final confrontation” would not be with the Witch necessarily, but rather would be the final confrontation between characters.

**When to Bring the Witch?** How does the GM know when to bring about the final confrontation? Generally speaking, there will be a point when the characters’ issues will begin to come to a head. As the tension between characters mounts and the players begin to break, a naturally climax will begin to form. At that moment when the climax of the characters’ stories begin to surface is the time that GM should begin pushing the characters towards the Witch.

Recognizing that moment takes a bit of discretion and skill, but there are certain signs that the GM can look for. As the adventure progresses and tension mounts from characters being pulled in opposing directions, players will eventually decide that they can take no more. Every player has a threshold for how much tension they can take. When they reach that point, players usually react in one of two things:

- **Break**—players will make a decision about what course of action to take, and start moving headlong in that direction, abandoning all other options. Often such a decision comes about in a very dramatic fashion.

## **Making the Witch Tougher**

If there is a desire to make the Witch mechanically tougher to defeat, you should remember that the GM can always have the Witch summon a number of minions to help him out.

- Decide to Wait—sometimes, players react to tension by deciding to wait to make a decision until they absolutely have to (in other words, until the end of the adventure). This pattern can be recognized by the player’s refusal to react to any attempt to pull the character in different directions.

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When the GM starts seeing these shifts in players’ play patterns, then that is a sign that the GM should transition the character towards the Witch and the final confrontation.

## ENDING THE GAME

How should the game end? This is totally up to the group. Just as players can choose to battle against their fate, so can they choose to forsake their friends and join the Witch. What is stronger—goodwill, destiny, or the temptation of power? Tragedy is very common in the samurai genre; such an ending should be viewed as a perfectly valid finish to the game.

Regardless, what is important about the conclusion of the game is that the players have a chance to address and resolve their characters’ issues, as expressed by their Fate and by their Background. If by chance the company slays the Witch before resolving their personal issues, play should continue until those outstanding conflicts are brought to closure.

## Character Epilogues

After the Witch is killed, or however the adventure ends, players are each allowed to narrate a brief epilogue that describes what happens to their character after the events of the adventure. The scope and length of these epilogues are largely left to individual preference. However, as a general constraint, players should refrain from narrating epilogues that de-protagonizes another player’s efforts. Likewise, players are expected to narrate epilogues that are appropriate, both thematically and logically, to the events of the adventure.



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## I. MAKING DRAMA

### UNDERSTANDING THE BASIC FORMULA

So how does the game **work**, what makes the game **exciting**?

At its most basic level, the drama of THE MOUNTAIN WITCH feeds off of the interaction between the Trust mechanics and character Fates.

Because of the major impact of Aiding on resolution, players are given tremendous incentive to work together and build Trust. But character Fates create an opposing incentive for the player. Fates give the players reason to turn against one another, either by giving the character reason to leave the company or by giving them reason to mistrust one another. These opposing forces create a tension in play: “**We have to trust one another but we can not trust one another.**”

The GM’s job, in turn, is to exaggerate this tension. She does this in a number of ways. On the one hand, the GM should be tough on the characters. She is expected to constantly push Conflicts and severe consequences, including pushing large numbers of tough opponents on the characters. This



increases the players' need to band together and build Trust.

But at the same time, the GM is to incorporate situations into play that tests the players' trust in the other characters. Similarly, the GM is to pick up those Fate-related story

elements presented by the players and build them up. With both of these methods, the GM builds the pressure for players to turn against one another.

This tension should be continually built up by both the players and the GM alike unlike the players cannot take any more. At that point Fates and loyalties explode. Will the characters turn against one another or abandon their own goals for the well-being of the company?

## No Need to Hold Back

In *The Mountain Witch*, there is no need to for the GM to hold back on the amount or intensity of opposition she presents to the characters. Mechanically, no matter how many dice she rolls, the GM's success is limited by the fact that she can only take the highest die. Because of Aiding, the players have no such limitation. As long as the characters have the Trust to spend, they will easily overpower anything the GM presents to them.

And even if the GM does overpower the PCs, tragedy only adds to the game. Misfortune ramps up the tension between characters, pushing both characters and players closer to the breaking point and the final confrontation.

## STRUCTURING THE ADVENTURE: THE FOUR ACTS

In addition to the formal structure of Chapters, play of *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* is also informally structured into four phases called "Acts." Note that these Acts are only meant to give a general outline for the progression of the adventure; they are not meant to be rigidly enforced. The actual play of *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* should be allowed to flow freely—players should not feel that they need to restrict or modify their play in accordance with a particular Act. More than anything, the four Acts simply serve as a tool for the GM in prepping for the game.

## Act I: Introduction (1 Chapter)

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In the opening Act, the players are given the set-up for the adventure and the characters are introduced. The text assumes that the adventure will open with the characters standing on the slopes of Mt. Fuji, shortly before dawn, ready to assault the Witch's fortress. The text assumes that the primary goal for the characters in this Act is simply entering the fortress. Once the characters enter the fortress, the second Act begins.

The primary purpose of this Act is to allow the players an opportunity to establish their characters and get acquainted with the mechanics, if necessarily. As such, the GM should provide relatively simple Conflicts with light consequences.

## Act II: Building Tension (1-2 Chapters)

Once the fortress is entered, there is no turning back—both literally and figuratively. The second Act follows the characters as they explore the Yamajiro. During this Act, the more significant servants of the Witch are introduced and the feel and atmosphere of the fortress is established.

It is assumed that the Witch in this Act will remain fairly elusive. He may begin to make contact with the characters, be it through either visions or through his minions. The purpose of the Witch's appearances should be to pull the characters closer to their Fates.

Functionally, the purpose of this Act is to allow the characters to develop their relationships with one another and to build dramatic tension before the next Act. Players should begin building Trust while also beginning to foreshadow elements of their characters' Fates.

During this Act, the GM should begin to push situations that test the characters' trust in one another. As the players begin to introduce Fate-related elements into play, the GM should

start building those elements up. As the adventure progresses, the GM should push for harsher and harsher Conflicts and consequences.

## Do Not Rush It

It may be tempting for some players to want to play through the game in a single session or some other specific time period. But rushing through the game takes a toll on the emotional and thematic impact of play.

Since the drama of the adventure centers on the relationships between characters, to get the full impact of the game the players need to spend time developing those characters and relationships. Without properly developed relationships, any sacrifices, betrayals, or plot twists made by the characters will seem superficial.

## Act III: Fates Revealed (1-2 Chapters)

The third Act is mostly concerned with the explosion of the characters' Fates, as players will likely begin revealing their Fates around this time. During this Act, the characters will likely be in a low emotional state, more concerned with dealing with their individual Fates than with the Witch.

As the players begin revealing their characters' Fates, the GM should switch into full support mode. The events of this Act should all revolve around the characters' Fates.

## Act IV: Conclusion (1 Chapter)

The concluding Act follows the characters as they seek both to resolve their Fates and confront the Witch himself. As the players begin resolving their Fates, the GM should start pushing the characters toward the final confrontation.



王 山魔鬼

肉体をもつて生きること  
はすがに死しているのと  
同様とおれとすでいふの  
身は自由である



## II. RUNNING THE GAME

### PREPPING FOR THE GAME

Prepping for the game largely involves the creation of Bangs<sup>1</sup> that can be inserted into the game

#### Being a Player

In comparison to being the GM, being a player in The Mountain Witch is relatively simple. As long as the players attempt to maintain and build the tension between their characters, everything else should fall in place. The players can just go with the flow and enjoy the game!

when needed. In other words, the GM should brainstorm situations and events that demand a thematically-significant or evocative choice from the player. Examples of such situations include “one of the Witch’s servants appears to offer the character a deal” or possibly “one of the character’s missing items appears in another PC’s backpack.”

When brainstorming potential situations and events, two things should be remembered. First, these events should preferably be thematically significant. That means, these events should either push the issue of trust between characters or they should push the Fate-related story elements presented by the player. Second, there should not be any pre-decided “solution” to these situations. They should remain open so that the player can choose what course of action they would prefer to take.

As the GM—or any of the players, for that matter—does not know what direction the adventure will take prior to the start of play, it is better for her to prep a number of relatively isolated, generic situations and events that can be inserted at will. This way, as the adventure progresses, the GM can select a Bang off her list appropriate to the situation at hand (or one that can be easily tailored to fit) and insert it into the adventure. Planning situations that are connected to one another or that require a certain sequence of

<sup>1</sup> Term coined by Ron Edwards for the game Sorcerer. For a detailed discussion of what constitutes a Bang, see the article “Bang!” on Timfire Publishing’s website ([www.timfire.com/articles/bang.html](http://www.timfire.com/articles/bang.html)).

events should be avoided, because if the adventure does not take the direction that the GM was anticipating (as often happens), such prep is wasted. The GM should

also brainstorm more Bangs than she expects to use, as she never knows which ones will end up being used and which ones will not.

**Types of Scenes:** In *THE MOUNTAIN WITCH* (and in drama in general), there are essentially two types of scenes – scenes that revolve around Conflict and scenes that revolve around character development and exposition.

The GM should ideally prep for both types of scenes. However, planning for character exposition is somewhat of a lesser concern for the GM as players will often push for such opportunities naturally on their own. But nevertheless, it is still helpful for the GM from time to time to add in opportunities for character exposition. For example, the situation, “a dead loved one appears to warn the character to turn back,” might turn into a Conflict between the dead loved one and the character, but would also allow the player to elaborate on their character’s Fate or Background.

## Engaging the Players

If the game is to be enjoyable for the real-world participants, then the adventure must be set up to engage the players, not the imaginary characters. Situations should be developed so that the real-world participants feel torn over what to do.

While this does require a certain amount of familiarity between players, there are two major pointers that signal which issues are important to the player – character Fates and Backgrounds. As it is generally assumed that players will only create issues that interest them, it is a safe bet that playing up elements of a character’s Fate or Background will interest the player in question.

## GM’ING TECHNIQUES

**Break and Rejoin:** An effective technique for promoting tension is to employ a technique dubbed a “**Break and Rejoin**.” A “Break and Rejoin” begins by separating the characters. Preferably, one or more characters should find themselves individually isolated from the rest of the company. While those individuals are isolated, the GM uses the opportunity to cast doubt in the mind of the character–doubt of himself and/or the

other company members. Probably the easiest method for casting this doubt is to introduce an NPC that can converse with the character, such as the Witch, one of the Witch's minions, or some other Fate-related NPC, though the GM can use any method she thinks will be effective.

## How Many Opponents?

For a generic battle, the GM should present the PCs with a number of opponents roughly equal to the size of the company. Presenting less will make the fight easy, presenting the company with one 1 or 2 more will make the conflict tougher. Obviously, the difficulty of the battle can also be modulated by varying the Strength of the enemies presented.

While the GM is free to introduce Conflicts during these individual scenes, it should be remembered that the purposes of this technique is not inherently to harm the character, but rather to build tension.

After the GM has spent some time toying with the mind of the character, then the GM allows the company to rejoin and interact among themselves. Important to understand, the interaction between characters after the separation is what the entire technique is about. The purpose of the technique is to hopefully light a dramatic spark between characters. When separating the characters, the goal is to provide fuel for a potential future dramatic fire when the characters are rejoined.

**Flashpoint:** The major pitfall with separating characters is that if the GM sets aside one group of players so she can spotlight another for too long, the group on the side may become bored and uninterested. One technique that can be utilized that avoids this pitfall is the **Flashpoint**.<sup>2</sup>

In a Flashpoint, the spotlight rotates around separated characters until the characters all find themselves in a Conflict. The goal is to time the separate events such that all the characters reach a Conflict at the same time. If one character or group of characters reach a Conflict significantly before the others, those characters are put on hold until the

<sup>2</sup> The Flashpoint technique was developed by Ron Edwards for the game Spione.

Once everyone has reached a Conflict, then everyone rolls their dice simultaneously, similar to a group Conflict. The idea behind a Flashpoint is that the spotlight is never away from a given player for more than a few minutes, and by resolving all the Conflicts simultaneously, all the players become engaged.

**Cross:** A Cross<sup>3</sup> is another technique that can help sidestep the major pitfalls of separating characters. In a Cross, game elements and other effects from previous scenes are introduced into the current one, even though the current scene does not contain the same PCs. This technique creates an illusion of continuity between the otherwise unconnected scenes.

**ex. In one scene, Wananabe and Tsuji get into an argument with a group of tengu over a bottle of sake. The two groups scuffle, and the tengu are scared away.**

**In a later scene, Hara is walking through a small courtyard when a frantic and disheveled group of tengu come hurrying from around a corner. ‘There’s our sake!’ one of them yells...**

**Breathers:** Surprisingly, one of the most effective techniques for promoting tension between characters is to introduce short “Breather” scenes. After every major event and scene in the adventure, players should be given a few moments to simply interact in-game as characters. It is incredibly effective for the GM to literally take a step back from the players and say something along the lines of “What do you all say to each other? I’m not continuing until you work this out.” Such scenes promote the development of in-game relationships between characters.

Breathers also give players a moment of dramatic rest between periods of high drama and action, so they can digest the significant events of play.

<sup>3</sup> Term coined by Ron Edwards for the game Sex & Sorcery.

**Withhold Chapters:** As it is the GM alone who explicitly decides when a Chapter begins and ends, another major tactic the GM can use to promote tension is to withhold changing a Chapter until the players have sufficiently built up either their Fates or other general personal tension between characters.

## What is “Sufficient”?

How much build up is “sufficient” to qualify for changing a Chapter? Although that is really a question that can only be answered in actual play, generally, as long as it appears that the players are making an honest attempt, the GM should be kind and change the Chapter. This tactic should really only be used if it seems that players are purposely attempting to sidestep Fate and trust related tension.

If the players never begin building their Fates or interpersonal tension, then they will eventually run out of Trust points and succumb to the Witch’s minions. The thought behind this tactic is that players should not receive the benefit of refreshed Trust without first establishing Fate and mistrust related tension. Essentially, all this tactic does is ensure that players do what they are suppose to be doing on their own.

## Using “Extra Successes”

A player can also the extra Successes granted by a Critical or Double Success to create a similar effect as his Fate-given directorial privilege. But given that these extra Success occur only occasionally, it is much more likely that he will have to rely on this Fate-given power to accomplish his agenda.

suppose a player wants to find the dungeon, so that he may free a captured PC. The GM should not just frame a scene that sets the character at the door of the dungeon. Rather, the player should have to use his Fate-given power to find a path to the prison.

**Make Players Pursue Their Own Agenda:** If the player has some sort of agenda that they are attempting to accomplish, whether it be connected to their Fate or not, the GM should make the player work to achieve it. In other words, it is not unreasonable to demand that the player use his Fate-given directorial power to set up situations that accomplish his agenda. For example,

The thought behind this tactic is that by forcing the players to use their Fate-granted power, the GM is promoting the development of character Fates and trust-related tension.

**Let the Players Define Game Elements:** Although players can use their Fate-given directorial power to define game elements on their own, the GM always has the option of **asking** players to do this. The purpose behind this tactic is to allow players an opportunity to elaborate or highlight their character's Fate or Background. This tactic is particularly effective when the GM asks the player to define specific elements that obviously have personal significance.

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**ex. GM:** *"As you run through the Witch's mansion, you come across a hallway—a hallway lined with human heads. Suddenly you realize you recognize one of them... who's head is it?"*

**Make Side Comments:** The GM can also make side comments to the players about significant events in play, such as, "Isn't it interesting how Higa seems to get along with Ito so well, even though he can't seem to get along with anyone else?"

However, the purpose behind this tactic is not to shame or discourage—quite the opposite. The purpose behind this tactic is to **encourage** the behavior in question. So when the GM says, "Hmm, Kobayashi is acting... suspicious," she should say it with a certain "this is going to be good" smirk on her face. Or when she says, "Kawaro is lying to his best friend... that's cold," she should say it while giving an approving nod.

**Remind Players of Their Options:** Finally, one other simple tactic the GM can follow is to remind the players of their options. When the game gets going, players can sometimes get caught up in the moment. As such, it can be helpful for the GM to say something along the lines of "remember, you can always foreshadow your Fate" or "does anyone want to use Trust and Aid in this Conflict?" This tactic is particularly helpful in the early phases of the game, when players are still getting acquainted with the game.



## III. LAST WORDS

### GOT QUESTIONS?

Was there something you did not understand about the book? Not sure how to apply the rules? Or maybe you just had a really unbelievable session and want to share?

I love hearing from players. I especially enjoy hearing about groups' personalized settings and what kinds of Fates people create.

Feel free to post questions and play reports at RPG.net ([www.rpg.net](http://www.rpg.net)), The Forge ([www.indie-rpgs.com](http://www.indie-rpgs.com)), or at the Indie Press Revolution forums (<http://indiepressrevolution.com/forum/>). You can post them anywhere, really, but those are the forums I frequent the most. So if you post at one of those sites, you will very likely hear from the designer himself.

Also do not neglect to check out Timfire Publishing's website ([www.timfire.com](http://www.timfire.com)) from time to time. I will occasionally write articles concerning the game that will hopefully be helpful to players.

I am also always glad to receive emails from players, even if it is just to chat. So feel free to send me an email at [timfire@timfire.com](mailto:timfire@timfire.com).

**Enjoy! I hope to hear from you.**



# Appendices

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- 1d6 vs 1d6, roll-over w/ Degree of Success. Winner narrates outcome.
- Group Resolution:
  - Participants are divided into two 'sides'.
  - All participants roll 1d6, each 'side' takes the highest die.
  - Note, each participant may only roll 1 die per conflict.
  - Per normal rules, player with the highest die narrates.
- Dueling:
  - Each combatant secretly rolls three successions of 1d6.
  - After each roll, the parties have the choice of charging or making another roll. After the third secret roll, the characters automatically charge.
  - Whenever the characters charge, the players show their dice and add the results together. Degree of Success is then determined normally.
  - Note, no Trust may be spent for any purpose during a duel.

## TRUST

- Aid in a Conflict (1pt): Your 1d6 is added to your comrade's die.
- Buy Narration Rights (1pt): Narrate a conflict's outcome.
- Betraying Bonus [1pt per (+1) modifier]:** Only one character may betray per conflict. Any number of points may be spent on a given conflict.
- Starting Trust: [2], unless characters are Ally [3] or Enemy [0] Zodiacs.
- Changing Trust:** At the end of a chapter, Trust may be:
  - Raised by one point, kept the same, or decreased by any amount.
- Gaining Trust Points:** At the start of each chapter, a PC's Trust points refresh to the levels of Trust that the other PCs give them.
- Note, Trust points may only be spent on the PC that gave that Trust.**

## DAMAGE

- [(-1) modifier to all rolls for the duration of the wound.]
- Partial Failure: Flesh Wound (one roll)
- Regular Failure: Chapter Wound (one chapter)
- Critical Success: Permanent Wound (permanent)
- Double Success: "Taken Out" (Death or Incapacitation)

## FATE

- A character's Fate remains secret until the player wishes to reveal it.
- Players may introduce any monster, NPC, event, or scene that is related to their Fate.
- DEGREES OF SUCCESS**
- 0: Tie [GM narrates]
- 1: Partial Success
- 2: Mixed Success (Winner gains a Regular Success, loser gain a Partial)
- 3: Regular Success
- 4: Critical Success (Regular + an extra Partial Success)
- 5+: Double Success (Two Regular Successes)

# character sheet

**name**

Why is the character a Ronin?  
Why does the character need the money from this deal?

**zodiac**

animal

allies (starting trust 3)

Enemies (starting trust 0)

**abilities**

flesh wounds  
(one roll)

chapter wounds  
(one chapter)

permanent wounds  
(permanent)

**damage**

**TRUST**

your  
Trust

character

their  
Trust

points

# APPENDIX I: FURTHER READING

## FILMS

### Films by Akira Kurosawa

Arguably Japan's best known director and one of the greatest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kurosawa is best known for his *jidai-geki* films. Highlights of his career include:

- Rashomon(1951)
- Seven Samurai(1956)
- Throne of Blood(1957)
- Yojimbo(1961) and its sequel, Sanjuro(1963)
- Kagemusha(1980)
- Ran(1985)

### The Ju-On series

The Ju-On series (including the American-made film, The Grudge) is a collection of horror films that each revolve around a haunted house and the vengeful spirits that reside within it. At its core, the Ju-On series is really just a modern spin on classical Japanese superstitions.

### Kwaidan (1964)

A film adaption of the Lafcadio Hearn book of the same title, Kwaidan puts to the screen four traditional Japanese ghost stories. One of the “essential” films for understanding THE MOUNTAIN WITCH.

### Ninja Scroll (1993)

In Ninja Scroll, a wandering ronin with the help of a lone ninja girl is forced to battle the Eight Demons of Kimon. A visually

stunning animated film, Ninja Scroll exemplifies the type of brutal, hyper-realistic, and quasi-magical action typical of THE MOUNTAIN WITCH.

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## **Reservoir Dogs (1992)**

Loosely based on the 1987 Hong-Kong crime drama City on Fire, this Quentin Tarantino film revolves around a group of hitmen left alone to figure out who among them is a police informant after a seemingly perfect heist goes terribly wrong. Interestingly (and very relevant to THE MOUNTAIN WITCH), in this “heist” film, the heist itself is completely besides the point, and in fact is never even shown. An “essential” film for understanding what Trust should look like in the game.

## **Spirited Away (2002)**

In Spirited Away, a Studio Ghibli film, a young girl is forced to work in a magical bathhouse for traditional Japanese spirits. Nice for a lighthearted look at traditional Japanese folklore and superstitions.

Other Studio Ghibli films worth checking out in this regard include Princess Mononoke (1999) and My Neighbor Totoro (1988).

## **Twilight Samurai (2002)**

A modern jidai-geki, Twilight Samurai examines the life of a poor, struggling samurai, who due to a series of fateful events, is forced to accept a challenge with a rogue samurai. Subtle in its presentation, Twilight Samurai is a good film for examining the type of slow character development typical of THE MOUNTAIN WITCH.

## BOOKS

### **Book of Five Rings**

by Miyamoto Musashi

In the Book of Five Rings (also known as “Go Rin No Sho”), Musashi, a man of almost legendary reputation, outlines his grand treatise on strategy. A classic text read by martial artists and business men alike.

The Book of Five Rings can be viewed online at Timfire Publishing's website ( <http://www.timfire.com/articles/5r.html> ).

### **Hagakure**

by Yamamoto Tsunetomo

In the Hagakure (“Hidden by Leaves”), an aging Tsunetomo discusses his thoughts and reflections on the life of the samurai. Another classic text that examines the thoughts and attitudes of an Edo period samurai.

Excerpts from the Hagakure can be found online at Timfire Publishing's website ( <http://www.timfire.com/articles/hag.html> ).

### **Japanese Castles 1540-1640**

by Steven Turnbull

An excellent introduction to Japanese castles. Besides Japanese Castles, Turnbull also wrote a number of books about the samurai and ancient Japan, including *Samurai – The World of the Warrior and War in Japan 1467-1615*.

## **Japanese Grotesqueries**

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compiled by Nikolas Kiej'e

Japanese Grotesqueries explores a peculiar fascination in traditional Japanese art: the grotesque. This book, which for the most part is simply art, compiles a number of Japanese illustrations concerning the dead, spirits, demons, and other unnatural freaks. A must read for those interested in traditional Japanese ghost stories, superstitions and folklore.

## **Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things**

by Lafcadio Hearn

Like the Brothers Grimm, Lafcadio Hearn collected a number of traditional Japanese ghost, folk and fairy tales; compiling them into the book *Kwaidan* (lit. "Ghost Story"). Hearn, also known as Koizumi Yakumo, was born on the Greek island of Lefkas, but later moved to Japan and became a Japanese citizen, even marrying a Japanese woman. Besides *Kwaidan* – probably his most well-known work – Hearn wrote a number of books on Japanese folklore, culture, and spirituality.

*Kwaidan*, along with a number of Hearn's other books, can be found in the articles section of Timfire Publishing's website (<http://www.timfire.com/articles.html>).

## **Myths and Legends of Japan**

by F. Hadland Davis

*Myths and Legends of Japan* organizes and retells a number of Japanese myths, legends, and folk tales. A very accessible book, especially for a Western audience.

## **Secrets of the Samurai**

by Oscar Ratti & Adele Westbrook

Written with the martial artist in mind, *Secrets of the Samurai* provides an overview of medieval Japan and samurai culture. While not the most academically rigorous work, the book nonetheless serves as a good introduction to the world of the samurai.

## **WEBSITES**

### **Guide to Japanese Castles**

<http://www.jcastle.info/castle/index.html>

A general site on Japanese castles. Guide to Japanese Castles gives both information on Japanese castles and specific details on actual sites.

### **E-Budo**

<http://www.e-budo.com>

A discussion forum concerning primarily Japanese martial arts. An excellent site with very knowledgeable participants.

### **Enthusiasts for Visiting Japanese Castles**

<http://www.shirofan.com/english.html>

Though the site does not offer much general information, Enthusiasts for Visiting Japanese Castles nonetheless has one of the largest (and most gorgeous!) collections of photographs of actual Japanese castles on the web.

## **The Forge**

**<http://www.indie-rpgs.com>**

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A discussion forum dedicated to the independent RPG publisher. The Forge is the place to discuss RPG theory, design, and publication.

## **RPG.net**

**<http://www.rpg.net>**

One of the largest general RPG sites on the web, offering discussion forums, articles, and product reviews.



## APPENDIX II:

# JAPANESE NAMES AND TITLES

The first issue to be aware of when addressing a Japanese individual (or in the case of the game, a Japanese character) is that in Japanese, an individual's family name is presented before their given name. So for example, the author's name, Timothy (given) Kleinert (family), presented in a Japanese fashion would become Kleinert Timothy.

Also, more so than in English, in "polite" Japanese conversation an individual is referred to by their family name, rather than their given name. Referring to someone by their given name is usually reserved only for family and close friends. This was even more true for the samurai in medieval Japan, where even friends were usually referred to by family name.

A second issue of particular importance is the use of titles when addressing an individual. Typical Japanese conversation is much more formal than in America (and medieval Japanese was even more formal yet). Unlike in American culture, it is extremely rare to refer to an individual solely by name, family or given. The usual practice when addressing an individual in Japanese is to amend the individual's name by adding an appropriate title. Unlike in English, where titles are usually presented before an individual's name ("Mr Smith"), most Japanese titles appear as a suffix of the individual's name ("Saito-san").

Besides just their placement, Japanese titles have a few key distinctions from English titles. First, while many English titles are gender-specific, most Japanese titles are gender-neutral. Unlike English titles which are solely used in reference to other people, it is not inappropriate to use Japanese titles in reference to animals or even inanimate objects of particular significance (for example, Mt Fuji is frequently referred to as “Fuji-san”). Another important distinction is that while most English titles are used to denote a person’s position (such as “Dr”), Japanese titles are inherently emotional, and are used to express the relationship between individuals. Subsequently, while English titles are largely static, Japanese titles are very situational. Even between the same two people, different titles may be used according to moment - to - moment circumstances. For example, if a husband or wife were being taught to perform a particular task by their spouse, it would not be uncommon for the individual to switch back and forth between addressing their spouse as **-chan** (“sweetie”) and **sensei** (“teacher”). Japanese has many different titles for all sorts of social situations.

Another significant issue to be aware of is that in formal Japanese conversation, it is considered more polite to avoid referring to an individual by name altogether. (Again, this attitude was even more so true in medieval Japanese society than in modern Japanese.) Rather, in formal conversations individuals are commonly addressed according to their position or some other stand alone title. Another technique that is sometimes employed is to take the first syllable of an individual’s name, and use that in conjunction with an appropriate title. So for example, **Hayashi** would become “**Ha-sama**” (“Sir”). On a related note, in Japanese culture, it is common for individuals to refer to each other – even among strangers – in terms of family, such as brother, sister, father, or grandmother.

# TITLES<sup>1</sup>

## Commonly Used Titles

**-San:** The most neutral and commonly used title in modern Japanese, roughly equivalent to “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” or “Ms.” As -San acts more or less as the standard address in modern Japanese, the title would be acceptable for most situations.

**-Sama:** In modern Japanese, -sama is a polite title often used in letters and other formal situations, but too polite for casual conversation. However, in medieval Japanese, -sama was commonly used to address individuals of equal or lower social status. Often translated as “Sir” or “Ma’am.”

**-Dono:** Another formal title, commonly used in medieval Japanese to address lords, high-ranking samurai, and other individuals of higher social and political status. Roughly equivalent to “lord” in English. Dono can be used both as a suffix or as a stand alone title.

**-Kun:** -Kun is an informal title most often used by males to refer to other younger or more junior males. -Kun is used similarly to “buddy” in English. Though -kun usually denotes affection, it can also be used as a condescending insult, much like “buddy.”

Though the title is most often applied to males, in modern Japanese the title can also be applied to women. In medieval

## -San, -Sama, & -Dono

Using -san is de rigueur in modern Japanese, but historically that was not always the case. Prior to the Edo period, the two everyday titles were -sama and -dono, with -dono being the more polite of the two. But during the Edo period, -san (a contraction of -sama) appeared as an informal address. Overtime, -san emerge as the ubiquitous everyday address, while -sama evolved into a more formal title. -Dono is now rarely used in modern Japanese.

For purposes of the game, which titles to use is ultimately left to group preference. If historical accuracy is desired, then you should consider using -sama and -dono as the standard addresses. Otherwise, using -san and -sama is perfectly fine.

<sup>1</sup> This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is simply a list of common titles appropriate for the purpose of the game.

**-Chan:** Another informal title, often used for young children and very close friends, family, or loved ones. Somewhat equivalent to “cutie” or “sweetie.” -Chan is also sometimes used by women and girls as a female equivalent of -kun.

Like -kun, -chan usually denotes affection, but can also be used as an insult. In fact, -chan is often used by chauvinistic men to refer to women. Again like -kun, -chan is loosely used in modern Japanese, but in medieval Japanese the title would have almost exclusively been used in reference to a child.

**Sensei:** Though often translated as “teacher,” in modern Japanese sensei is used in reference to any individual with a higher education from whom you receive a service or instruction, such as a professor or doctor. Sensei is usually used as a stand alone title.

**Tono:** A common medieval title for one’s lord, in terms of clan or landed nobility. Usually used as a stand alone title.

## Other Titles

**-Chugu/ -Kogo:** “Queen.” The title -chugu is used when referring to the spouse of the ruler, while -kogo is used to refer to a queen that rules outright.

**Danna:** A casual though polite address, roughly equivalent to “Mi’lord,” “Mista,” or possibly “Buddy.” Danna was commonly used by merchants in reference

## Why bother with titles?

At the very least, titles simply add color and atmosphere to the game. But more than that, titles also provide players with a technique for adding subtle depth to their interactions with other players. Titles can be used to communicate both a growing or fading intimacy between characters, as well as add subtle compliments or insults to their interactions.

But are titles mandatory? By no means! It is important to realize that you do only have to use titles if you so desire. For purposes of the game, it would be perfectly acceptable to simply refer to each other by name, either family or given.

Titles also do not have to be all or nothing. You can use titles as much or as little as you want. For example, it would be perfectly acceptable for you to generally refer to fellow characters by name, but then use titles to communicate special moments of intimacy, distance or formality. Also, for purposes of the game, it would be acceptable to use the English equivalents of the Japanese terms.

to their customers, and by “casual” samurai (the scruffy, heartful type).

**-Denka:** “Highness.”

**-Gimi:** Technically, -gimi is just an earlier pronunciation of the kanji for -kun. However, unlike its modern usage, -gimi did not carry the same connotation of “junior,” and was often used to simply refer to one’s peer.

**-Gozen:** A title for women of rank.

**-Hime:** “Princess.”

**Kacho:** “Boss” or “supervisor.”

**Kohai:** A modern term for one’s junior, usually in terms of a school setting. However, it is important to note that the term kohai also implies a personal, apprentice-like relationship. A kohai’s mentor is usually referred to as “sempai.”

**Kozoh:** A Japanese term for “boy.”

**Meijin/ -Wake:** A title often used to address one’s peer, though the term is usually translated as “master” in terms of a specific art. When used in conjunction with an individual’s name, the pronunciation -wake is used as a suffix. If used as a stand alone title, the pronunciation meijin is used.

**O-:** A general term of respect, often translated as “great.” Unlike the other titles presented here, O- is used as a prefix, not a suffix. O- is sometimes used in conjunction with another title to create a stand alone address.

**Oku-sama:** An untitled, married women, often translated as “madam.”

**Ojoh-sama:** An untitled, unmarried women, often translated as “miss.”

**Sempai:** With the same root kanji as sensei, sempai is a

modern term for one's senior, usually in a terms of a school setting. Similar to the term *kohai*, *sempai* also implies a personal, mentor-like relationship. A *sempai*'s junior is usually referred to as "kohai."

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**-Shinno:** "Prince."

**Shoujo:** A Japanese term for "girl."

**Tenno-Heika:** "Emperor."

## NAMES<sup>2</sup>

Family Names	Komatsu	Royama
Fujiwara	Kondo	Saito
Fukazawa	Kudo	Sakamoto
Goto	Kuroki	Sasaki
Hamada	Kurosawa	Sato
Hara	Maeda	Segawa
Hayashi	Maruyama	Shimizu
Hidaka	Matsumoto	Shintaro
Hideyoshi	Matsushita	Sugiyama
Higa	Murakami	Suzuki
Inoue	Nakajima	Takahashi
Ito	Miyake	Tanaka
Izumi	Mochizuki	Tenshin
Jumonji	Mori	Tohei
Kai	Matsuo	Tsuji
Kato	Nakamura	Umeki
Kawaro	Narita	Wananabe
Kikuchi	Nishimura	Yamade
Kimura	Obinata	Yamamoto
Kinjo	Oichi	Yamashita
Kobayashi	Onishi	Yanagi
Koga	Ono	Yoshida
	Oshiro	
	Otake	

2 To view literally hundreds Japanese names, check out [http://business.baylor.edu/Phil\\_VanAuken/JapaneseNames.html](http://business.baylor.edu/Phil_VanAuken/JapaneseNames.html).

## Male Given Names

Akira	Naoki
Atasuke	Natsu
Bokkai	Nobuyoshi
Chojiro	Osamu
Daisuke	Ryutaro
Eisaku	Saburo
Fujimaru	Sanjiro
Goro	Shigeru
Hiroshi	Shiro
Honzo	Shouta
Ichiro	Susumu
Ieyasu	Takashi
Isamu	Takuya
Jiro	Tetsuya
Jurobei	Tohei
Kajiwara	Tokubei
Katsutoshi	Tsubasa
Kazuya	Tsuyoshi
Ken'ichi	Ukyo
Kiyoshi	Washi
Makoto	Yohachi
Manabu	Yoshi
Masao	Yutaka
Masuru	Yuta
Minoru	Zenko

## Female Given Names

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Ai	Meguni
Akemi	Misaki
Chiyo	Miyoko
Emi	Nanami
Etsuke	Natsuki
Fumiko	Noriko
Genmei	Okichi
Haruka	Raicho
Hiroko	Ryoko
Hirsako	Sachiko
Ise	Sakura
Jun	Setsuko
Kana	Shizuko
Kaori	Sumiko
Kazuko	Tamafune
Keiko	Tomoko
Kiyo	Tsukiyama
Kumiko	Umeke
Kyouko	Wazuka
Mai	Yae
Mami	Yoshiko
Mayumi	Yuko
	Yumi



# APPENDIX III: PLAYTESTING & REVIEWING CREDITS

## Playtesters

Ron Edwards & the D.R.A.G.O.N. (DePaul Resource for Adventure Gaming and Outreach Network) Gaming Club.

Nathan Cameron and Dylan Spaniel.

Sean Musgrave and Josh Kashinsky.

Julie Stauffer, Tod Olson, and Maura Byrne.

Rob McDougall (special thanks), Bryant Durrell, Jeremiah Genest, Mike Grasso, Jessica Pease, and Jeff Wikstrom

And finally my Finnish playtesters – Eetu Mäkelä (special thanks), Markus Alanen, Tea Pelkonen, Mikko Siukola, and Sanni Turunen.

## Reviewers

Maura Byrne

David Eads

Ron Edwards

Tod Olson

Julie Stauffer

Carl Van Ostrand

Ryan Yoeckel

And of course my wife, Tiffany



## ABOUT THE GAME DESIGNER

Raised on the cold streets and hot coffee of Detroit, MI, Timothy Kleinert left his mother, father, and four siblings in 1998 to move to Chicago, IL, where he currently lives with his wife of one year, Tiffany. He is currently employed part-time as a package handler for UPS while pursuing a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Northeastern Illinois University. What he will do with the degree he does not know, but his options look better than they did when he was going to school for Biblical and Theological Studies

Timothy has been role-playing off-and-on since the early '80s, when his aunt started running "kiddie" games of Dungeons and Dragons for him, his sister and cousin. Timothy began designing games in 1999, when him and his friends wrote a 108 page heartbreaker simply titled Eclectic. Though he has written numerous half-finished games, The Mountain Witch is Timothy's first commercially published RPG.

## ABOUT THE BOOK DESIGNER

Joshua Newman is an expatriate Rhode Islander traveling the wilds of Southern New England. He studied interface design at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, then went on to become a graphic designer. He lectured in the Yale School of Art for four years before remembering that he liked design and has gone back to it full-time. His company website is [joshuanewmandesign.com](http://joshuanewmandesign.com), but his publications, including games he's designed, can be found at [glyphpress.com](http://glyphpress.com).