

An illustration of a samurai and a man in a top hat fighting on a wooden structure. The samurai, on the right, is wearing a black kimono with a red sash and has long black hair. He is holding a sword and has a green energy blade extending from his hand. The man in the top hat, on the left, is wearing a black suit and a top hat. He is holding a gun. The background is a wooden structure with a red roof and some yellow and white flags. The title "HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI" is written in large, stylized letters across the middle of the image. The word "HIGH" is in red, "PLAINS" is in black, and "SAMURAI" is in black with a red outline. A gear icon is placed between "HIGH" and "PLAINS".

HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI

A CORE RULEBOOK FOR ALL PLAYERS



BROKEN RULER
GAMES

*I awoke when the spire fell. All was smoke,
ash and the metallic odour of spilled crimson
seeping into the soil. And now here I stand,
once more to finish what I started*

- The Returning Words of Chaos

HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI

We were once a beautiful world, young and fertile. Nothing but hope and opportunity lay before us. We were the chosen ones of our creators and lived a lavish lifestyle. Until the All-Being revealed his jealousy at the love his children gave to their creation and not him. His wrath nearly wiped us out. Now we are the enslaved and oppressed living in the Five Cities or risking it all in the Wastes.

But there are some who call no place home. They wander between all places and live by their own rules. Will any of them rise up to become the mysterious heroes we need?

The **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** is a tabletop story game about gunslingers, barbarians, samurai, gangsters and steampunk in a post-apocalyptic world of super powers. Everything you need to take on the mantle of Writers and Directors telling the first draft of an original story in the One Land. A story that may one day save these people from oblivion.

Play it for free with
**High Plains Samurai:
Legends**

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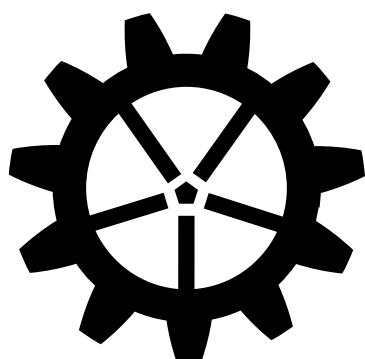
For 2-5 players.
Ages 10 & up.
To play,
you'll need dice
(d4, d6, d8, d10, d12)
and pencils.



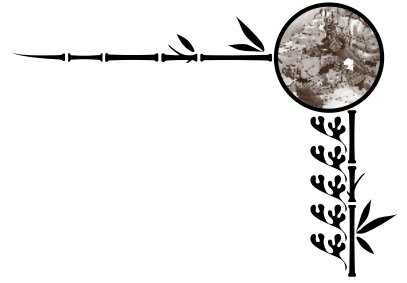
BROKEN RULER
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Learn more about the One Land at
HighPlainsSamurai.com





To the All-Father of this game,
Fraser



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI

A Tabletop Roleplaying Game of Gunslingers, Barbarians,
Samurai, Gangsters and Steampunk in a Post-Apocalyptic
World of Qi Powers

Creator/Designer/Writer/Layout: Todd Crapper

Editor: Vincent Harper

Artist: Kieron O'Gorman

Mapmaker: Jeff Brown

Development Team

Fraser Ronald, Kieron O'Gorman, Nick Dumais, Kurt Wimmer

Playtesters

Andre Brynkus, Amber Jean Carter-Page, Tyler Daley, James Dillane, Joe England,
Jesse Donovan Edmond, Bradley Grant, Chris Groff, Matlock Guse, Patrick House,
Gilbert Isla, Patrick Knowles, Taejas Kudva, Tyler Lominack, William McLeod,
Hans Messersmith, Kieron O'Gorman, Danielle O'Nanski-Huot, Bob Lai, Eric Paquette,
Maria Rivera, Fraser Ronald, Fraser Simons, Nicholas Tsoukauls, Rob Wakefield,
Kurt Wimmer, Zander

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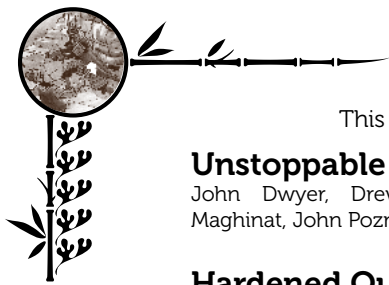
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This product is a work of fiction containing material for a roleplaying game where players use their imagination to create a place that doesn't exist with people that aren't real. Any similarities to real people, places, cultures, or events is completely unintentional.

brokenrulergames.net
highplainssamurai.com

Told with ScreenPlay

ScreenPlay



This game is made possible by these honourable qi warriors:

Unstoppable Hunters

John Dwyer, Drew E. Matlock Hargrove, Maghinat, John Pozniak, Glenn Seiler

Hardened Outsiders

Chad Andrew Bale, Matthew B. Phillip Bailey, Bryan Bailey, Brandon Barnes, Kate Bullock, Erin Congdon, Ethan Deneault, Kent Devald, Ryan Dukacz, Chris England, Robert M. Everson, Gamerstable RPG Podcast, Richard Greene, Joel Grenon, David Paul Guzmán, Michael Howard, Chris Huddleston, Konig-Wolf, Darren Johnson, Mathieu Lapiere, Antoine Lenoir, David Lewis, Liam, Kenneth Linder, Alex Lopez, Kielo Maria Maja, Ian McFarlin, Suguru Oikawa, Eric M. Paquette, Charles Pugsley, Matthew, Philip Rogers, Brendan Rowe, Chad Stevens, Tom, Donald A. Turner, johnathan turner, Max Vanderheyden, Chase Walker, Clint Williams, Christopher Wilson, Kurt Wimmer, Jacob Wood, Curtis Y.Takahashi, Adam

True Believers

Rob Abrazado, Scott Alex, Isaac Alexander, Neil Anderson, Don Arnold, Chris Bak, Peter Baldwin, Chris Bekofske, Joshua Cameron, Robert Carnel, Frank Carr, Greg Chapin, Adam Coleman, Jason Corley, greg cueto, Sheila Davis, Chuck Dee, Alberto Martin del Campo Sola, Colin Fahrion, Michael Feldhusen, Mark Fenlon, The Freelancing Roleplayer, Chris Groff, Jack Gulick, Ryan H, Roger Hall, Scott W. Hill, Horizon Point Studios, Wayne Humfleet, Ross Hunter, Jack Krause, Jaime A. Layton Jr, Kevin Lemke, Kat Lim, Christian Lindke, Dennis Malloy, System Mastery, David R. Mondello, Liam Murray, David Nebauer, Matthew O'Brien, Douglas Peacocke, Francisco Peralta, John AW Phillips, Jason Pitre, Mark Richardson, James Roberson, John "Johnkzin" Rudd, Curtis Schmidt, Fraser Simons, Keiran Sparksman, Michael Stevens, Jim Stryker, Cody Swatek, James W. Sweetland, John Taber, Neal Tanner, Nicola Urbinati, George Valenzuela, Joseph Virnig, Steven Watkins, Drew Wendorf, John Wick, Jeff Williams, Terry Yau, Mark N. Ziff, Ivona Zimonjic, Charles, Mopsothoth, M, bestshot9, ambrosecollector, Rylai, Cody

Noble Warriors

Angus Abramson/Chronicle City, Geoffrey Allen, Ludovico Alves, Svend Andersen, Jason Aschberger, Alyce Atkins, Lorenzo Bandieri, Marek Benes, Andrew Bennett, Jonathan Beverley, Biohazard Games/Nocturnal Media, Ian Borchardt, Charles Boucher, Jackson Brantley, Adam C. Craig Campbell, Scott Cawson, Michael Charlton, Thom Colgan, Jason Cordova, Christopher D. Meid, Jason D'Angelo, Isaac "Will It Work" Dansicker, Daniele Di Rubbo, James Dillane, Nitro DiOxide, DivNull Productions, Chris Eliassen, Tim Ellis, Ong Eng Yian, Allen Erb, Kevin Farnworth, Declan Feeney, Andrew Ferber, James Forest, Donald Fougere, Thomas Grandison, Christopher Grey, Tomer Gurantz, Donnie Hanby, Ian Harriman, Patrick Harris, Paul Hayes, Ryan Hennesy, Michael Hill, Gilbert Isla, Jachari J, Wright Johnson, Josh Jordan, Tad Kelson, Rajan Khanna, Andy Kitkowski, Jeff Kloepper, Patrick Knowles, Jonathan Korman, Daniel Kraemer, Taejas Kudva, Maxime Lacoste, Eloy Lasanta, Steven Lord, Dain Lybarger, Rich M., Chris Manning, Josh Mannon, Patrice Mermoud, Thomas Miller, Charles Moore, Tony Mott, Brandon Neff, Warren Nelson, Earl Scott Nicholson, Matt Nixon, Nathan Nolan, Matthew Paluch, Pete Petrusha (Imaging Games), Andrew Piseck, Ronald Pyatt, Jesse Quisenberry, Jared Rascher, Heather Rasmussen, Vance Rawson, Jesse Roberge, Adam Robichaud, Rich Rogers, Andrew Rosenheim, Dylan Ross, Ron Smay, Mark Solino, David Stephenson, Chris Stockton, QuillHound Studios, PK Sullivan, Dwayne Summerfield, Aaron Taylor, Jon Terry, Chris Tomlinson, Martin Trudeau, Paul Umbers, Stewart Walker, Benjamin Welke, Alexander Williams, Sean Wilson, adumbratus, ahabicher, alcethenecromancer, Arthreas, Ben, Boris, Damian, gigglegstick, heretic888, Jarrett, Joey, Julian, Kergonan, Kevin, M.G., Michael, Morgan, Morgan, NecroNuke9, Rani, semiomant, Tim, tinomen

Rogue Scholars

Vincent Arebalo, Jordan Bodewell, Gaming and BS, Frank Hart, James, JD McDonnell, Will Power, Jeremy Scott, Trip the Space Parasite, TheBenHatton

Raw Apprentices

Nic Clark, Martin Greening, Ku Hap, Oli Jeffery, Storybrewers Roleplaying, WI, Darren

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The River Styx

YUNG ZHI

City of Lights

Warlord: Xang
Theme: Gangsters
Dangers: Rampant crime & poverty, overpopulation, shoddy construction

The Devil's Throat

KHAR'TEP

City of Mountains

Warlord: Khar of the Hawk Clan
Theme: Barbarians
Dangers: Harsh winter climate, thin air, nomadic clans

The Great Mother

RUST

City of Industry

Warlord: The Minister
Theme: Steampunk
Dangers: Ruled by a cult, disease, underground city, qi powers forbidden

The Veil

THE WASTES

Warlord: None
Theme: Post-apocalyptic
Dangers: Unpredictable climate, manifest hindrances

Mount Ori

The Salvation

The Pale Jungle

MONSOON

City of Ruins

Warlord: Hoth Kap Sing
Theme: Samurai
Dangers: Poisonous jungle, ancient traditions, lost temples

SERENITY FALLS

City of Despair

Warlord: Grandfather
Theme: Gunslingers
Dangers: Constant sandstorm, lawlessness, slavery, Watchdogs

The Lost Ocean

HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI THE ONE LAND

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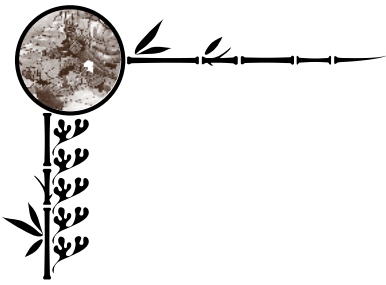
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FOR YOUR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION,

YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN.

NO DOUBT YOU HAVE OPENED THIS BOOK QUESTIONING ITS CONTENTS, AS YOU HAVE NO CLUE AS TO ITS ORIGINS. FOR THAT WE APOLOGIZE. THE CLOAK AND DAGGER USED TO GET THIS IN YOUR HANDS WAS A NECESSARY ENDEAVOUR. REST ASSURED THAT WHILE WE MUST REMAIN IN THE SHADOWS AND CONCEAL OUR IDENTITIES FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, THE WORDS YOU READ IN THIS TOME SHALL SHATTER A WORLD WITH THEIR POWER; POWER THAT MAY YET SAVE US FROM TOTAL ANNIHILATION.

PROPHECIES FORETELL DARK TIMES, AS DARK AS WHEN CHAOS RAINED DOWN FROM THE HEAVENS. EVERYTHING WE HOLD DEAR ENDS UNLESS WE ACT NOW, EVEN FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LITTLE LEFT TO LOVE. THOSE TIMES ARE SOON AND YOU MUST BE READY. WITHIN THIS BOOK ARE ANSWERS. THERE IS MORE TO COME, BUT FIRST YOU MUST PREPARE. WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, THERE WILL BE MORE.

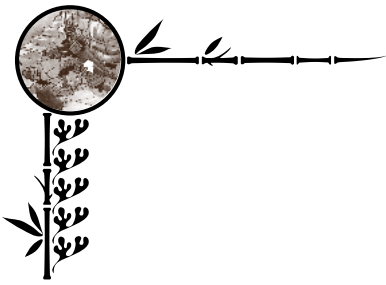
A WORLD MORE.

A FOLLOWER OF THE SIX ELEMENTAL SPIRITS WE HOLD DEAR SCRIBED EACH BOOK. PERSPECTIVES AND RECOLLECTIONS OF THE EVENTS LEADING TO THIS VERY MOMENT CONTAINED WITHIN PUSH YOU FORWARD IN WAYS YOU NEVER EXPECTED. CONSIDER WHAT IS WRITTEN WITH A CLEAR MIND, AND REMAIN FOCUSED ON YOUR QI. YOUR BODY IS BUT A VESSEL; IT IS THE MIND THAT CONTAINS YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL. YOUR MIND IS THE WEAPON TO FIGHT THIS WAR AND SAVE OUR WORLD. THIS BOOK TEACHES YOU HOW TO APPLY IT LIKE YOU'VE ALWAYS IMAGINED.

UNTIL NEXT TIME.

AN ALLY





I awoke when the spire fell.

All was smoke, ash and the metallic odour of spilled crimson seeping into the soil. That was my first experience when I woke, a prisoner in the hands of mortals! Never has a day passed when I would curse the very sinners who cast me down: my own children. And now here I stand, once more to finish what I started.

Around me is the beginning of the bloodshed. Bodies of soldiers, slaves, and monks alike buried under crashed boulders and what seemed a long wall of solid rock. Not a wall. The spire. The spire is fallen. Destroyed. The monks who dared think harmony and peace a match for my anger and immortality are dead.

Elsewhere sprawls the scattered fiery remains of their machines. Every step was over debris and ammunition - their preferred method of war. They will be useful in my campaign for revenge. These sheep are imperfect, their world shattered. They have rage. They shall be my puppets until my strength returns.

But not now. I am weakened, infected by living conditionally within the never-ending repetition and routine of those monks. We need time to shake these shackles and unleash our true power. True uncontrollable power. But first...

There is a voice in this sea of death, one who calls out to my children in fury, sadness, and doubt. I can feel her rage, her loss. Such weakness... and yet so much potential.

I will teach her how to punish these sinners.



BOOK ONE: HOPE CRACKED

"For every tyrant there are many under his boot. Those trapped beneath him are nothing more than ants until they learn to move between the treads and finally break free."

– from The Path of Innocence

Many years ago there was only the One Land. Forged by the fires swirling beneath the earth's crust and cooled by the oceans of her shores, it was a beacon to all creatures searching for a place to call home. Peace reigned for centuries as people gathered, built cities, drafted laws, paid homage, farmed crops, bore children and carved out a prosperous life for themselves in its rich jungles, towering mountains, and wide open plains. For thousands of years all was well in this paradise.

In this chapter, we will reveal what makes the High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game unique and reveal your quest to help save our world.

Until one day, Chaos looked down through the clouds and was sickened by its beauty. A world where all creatures were granted purpose to exist and multiply was an appalling sight to him. So he lashed out with all his might. Without warning, the One Land was struck with earthquakes, tornadoes and fires of such magnitude never seen since the Forging millennia before. As ash billowed into the sky and people were sucked into the earth, his children – Honour, Innocence, Balance, Strife and even Patience – came to see what had become of their creation. Shocked by their creator's homicidal anger they battled Chaos and eventually locked him within the Shard of Hope. The struggle raged in the heart of the One Land and tore it asunder, scarring it with death and destruction from which it would never recover. Amidst this scarred desert, the siblings buried the Shard within a spire of rock now known as Heaven's Peak and warded it with guardians to ensure the



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI ROLEPLAYING GAME

Shard would never break and Chaos would never again roam free. It was here the eldest spirit, Honour, charged a small monastery of humble and dedicated monks with its protection. The Monastery of Divine Hope was built atop Heaven's Peak, in the arid desert known only as the Wastes. It was here that all of the teachings of the six Spirits – including Chaos – originated. The teachings were spread across the One Land in an effort to guide, encourage and empower the survivors.

Yet such was the intensity of Chaos' Wrath that the One Land was split into man-made boundaries etched in blood on scrolled maps, each ruled by warlords killed and replaced with other warlords over and over for generations. Each rules over their city-states with fists of iron, greed or faith, their people eager to survive in the aftermath of their creator's wrath, despite the cost. Some have become touched by the radiation of the Wastes and have learned to tap into heights of power never intended for humanity's reach; some have turned to lesser traits for personal gain. And now something has happened that few have remembered to fear...

The Shard of Hope has cracked.

When you read these words, what images of this moment come to mind? How do you envision this scene? What would the rest of the world look like if you were to complete this story? Now imagine answering these questions and fleshing out a version of the story all your own; perhaps a tale of sorrow and depravity or a rousing adventure of merry misfits battling evil. What do you see happening next?

That, my friend, is what origin stories are for – to open your mind and envision possibilities. They offer only the first few paragraphs of a complete story. A tale of vengeance, bloodshed and plight in a world splintered into six equal pieces, each sporting their own unique scars; one of a landscape shattered by divine wrath that may soon become ruined by a mortal's hate.

Yet it is not all gloom and doom, for this is also a place of excitement, heroics, exotic powers, martial arts and mind-bending action; a space where almost anything can become part of the One Land and its cast of characters. It's where gunfighters face off against samurai, and a wave of machine gun-toting gangsters fight alongside mythical barbarians wielding axes; where the steam engine functions alongside traditional swords and bows as well as the rifle and the Tommy gun. Chaos' anger has created rifts so strong as to result in such a variety of possibilities, now merging together into one fantastic story.

And it is a story we would like you to tell in a manner we feel best suits our needs. The **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** is a story game about gunslingers, samurai, barbarians, and gangsters in a post-apocalyptic steampunk world where honour and the power from within your qi have been the only things keeping you alive. You shall create epic tales of anti-heroes rising from the ashes of the One Land's barren shadow to become saviours, villains, or martyrs to their cause. While these pages contain a game with rules and details on locations, major characters, goals and more, they exist only to provide a clear path for this epic story. This game involves players creating a legendary story with these notes acting as a template, a starting line from which you and your allies sprint to the very end at your own pace and on your own path. How the story is told will be a shared experience as each of you work together to create a story for a very select audience – yourselves.

Perhaps an introduction is in order, though I'm afraid doing so can be quite difficult. My order seeks purity by forsaking some of the most basic principles of society and in this case includes my birth name. Like my order, I have no name you can call me. Such liberties allow us to move silently within the mountain valleys of Khar'tep and the shadowy mines of Serenity Falls, making us privy to much there is to know about our world. Let me simply offer you an opportunity to create something powerful to help save the lives of millions.

For all my back and forth on the peaks and follies of this world, the situation is dire and about to collide with epic threats. Our future needs a set of guiding hands to help bring it back into the light. Doing so takes great power, a power all of us possess and apply with great ease when put to the challenge. We seek those who would take the plight of the Five Cities – even the Outcasts banished to the Wastes – and devise an end to the carnage.

This power carries certain responsibilities and if used for selfish purposes can lead to the One Land's fate spinning endlessly into limbo. My order has devised a means by which we can teach you how to master this power. Learning this path requires nothing more than a casual acknowledgement of your interest and there is no ill will should none of this seem to your liking. Should you choose to invoke this power and save the One Land, do not make the decision lightly. Our people and the long line of ancestors before us deserve better.

When you are ready everything you need exists within these pages. Their purpose is to teach you how to unlock this power by tapping into your qi and harnessing what it is that makes your power, and the results of that power, unique. This is done in three volumes of growing importance.

Volume 1: The Order of Things explores the vast workings of how the One Land functions, its history and how to tap into your undiscovered qi. This contains the why, where, and how of the story and is meant for all players. It defines the process by which you gather a group of friends together to create new and unexpected heroes to shape a possible future that may reveal how we can save ourselves. This is the volume you are reading now.

Volume 2: The Weight of the World offers a view of the One Land, its Five Cities and the wound that is the Wastes as the time come to shape the future of our world. It is the moments of the story as they unfold with or without your aid. This volume, targeted for the Director only, shall explain the volcanic approach to the doom which awaits the One Land and where it could all fall apart or lead to a new era of hope. In short, it is a summary of the focal plot of the story and how it can shape the tale you are about to tell.

Finally, **highplainssamurai.com** provides the resources each of you need to begin your training and tell your story. These are the weapons you take with you into battle.

Each volume consists of individual books charged with providing pieces of the larger puzzle and each of those books is taught by a different member of our order following the teachings of a single Elemental Spirit. I, for instance, am a scribe of Innocence, charged with bringing aid to our people in this time of need. As part of our role in the shadows of everything, you will find an eclectic mix of people offering their own guidance as they are best qualified to do. It is a united approach by our order to save the world without breaking the First Vow.

Take your time with this decision to unleash such power, weigh the risks and rewards of our situation. Be sure you do it for the calling of your heart, not the rationale of your mind. When you are ready, we can begin.

ONE LAND, UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

There is no single representation that locks down what **the One Land** is today. That is how torn our world has become since Chaos' rage nearly broke it. Rocky deserts, steam engine trains, and horse drawn carriages fought over by gunslingers and bandits give way to the controlled sword dancing of samurai warriors in their fortresses of wood and stone. Suddenly it shifts again into frozen peaks harboring barbarian tribes whose tradition survives through steel and bow, before morphing into the murky underground littered with scrap metal and wild inventions. The truth is that no one angle offers the whole picture. This is a world of vast differences.

This is a setting of personal honour set against the greed and depravity of a broader world. Against forces of darkness and revenge, heroes rise up and fight for their beliefs as only warriors can. Whether it is defended with lead from a bullet or the steel of a sword, a person's honour is their best currency. Those who agree with this view are the heroes and villains we need and they will change everything for good or ill.

All who survived Chaos' wrath and carried on in the ruins locked themselves within fortified communities known simply as **the Five Cities**, homelands to nine out of every ten surviving denizens of the One Land.

One of the many dangers common in the Wastes are the giant elementals that call it home.

Serenity Falls, a desert-swept city of harsh depravity and lawlessness fuelling one warlord's insatiable greed

Yung Zhi, where swaying towers loom above overwhelming poverty and overcrowded streets controlled by powerful gangsters

Monsoon, the samurai compound - located in the heart of ancient ruins - where strict order keeps back the surrounding poisonous jungle

Khar'tep, home of magnificent heights encompassed by jagged peaks and frigid blizzards controlled by the barbarian tribes

and **Rust**, a hidden city of wild inventions and rotting depths oppressed by a xenophobic cult



Each of these is a self-contained nation differentiated in size and scope. Khar'tep, for instance, is scattered across the northern mountains and exists as a collection of clans united under one banner while Yung Zhi remains locked within the middle of a massive cavern known as The Devil's Throat.

Between them all lay **the Wastes**, where Chaos' plan for demolition originated. What was once the home of a great and all but forgotten capital city and lush farmland that served as the source of all commerce and democracy in the One Land that once was is now a barren crater of radioactive abnormalities. It is also the origin of all **qi powers** centralized in one nuclear apex. Its influence is global, though weakened and controllable by those born in the enforced safety of the Five Cities. Outcasts born to roaming gangs within the Wastes or along its edges are consumed by their unexpected qi power and grow to become freaks scarred by their own power's manifestation. They scratch out livings in rudimentary clusters of homes, raiding smaller settlements outside the Five Cities or aiming for the big score robbing **the Salvation**, a massive armoured caravan crossing from one City to the next through the heart of our world's terror.

Then there are those who have no home. They wander between the Five Cities, skimming along the edges of the Wastes surviving by any means necessary. They are unshackled by the restraints of the warlords and walk with their own codes, personal values protected above all others. They are bandits, ronin, bounty hunters, and anyone else unable to coexist within the walls of the Five Cities. They are the unknown factors in many stories, the unexpected obstacles to well laid plans. They are the One Land's last hope.

Living in these conditions requires a cold heart, quick reflexes, and amazing power, the kind of power you can only unlock from your inner qi (pronounced "chi"). An unforeseen effect of the Wastes, these powers allow some to tap into abilities never thought possible: breathe fire, leap ten times higher, phase through walls, and perhaps even turn flesh to stone. These qi warriors remain spread out across the land, using their powers to survive or thrive, sometimes at the expense of others. They fill many roles, like:

the Unstoppable Hunter, fulfilling the orders of the cities' warlords

the Deadly Shadow, unseen puppet masters pulling strings behind the curtains

the Rogue Scholar, seeking truth behind the mysteries that could save the One Land

and many more!

Many of today's generation have learned to tap into their inner qi and harness the chaotic radiation to great effect. These powers are harnessed from within to create exceptional abilities, from moving with impossible speed to turning invisible to impressive strength. Influential characters can still be **untapped**, as the term goes, yet those holding the highest ranks of power are always extraordinarily tapped into their qi power.

Behind all of this and soon to become forefront to the One Land's future are the six **Elemental Spirits** worshipped for their creation of humanity and also cursed for the wretched lives created for them. The sole creator, **Chaos**, birthed offspring to share in the care of his universe – **Balance, Honour, Patience, Strife** and **Innocence** – who in turn were allowed to create, between them, a single world of their own. When Chaos grew jealous of the devotion they gave to this world, he sought to wipe it out entirely and punish them for their transgression. This wrath yielded the state of the One Land today. In defending their creation, the five siblings defeated their parent and imprisoned Chaos within the Shard of Hope. What remains is the aftermath of this epic battle and the people forced to live in the ruins.



WHAT IS HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI?

There is a world beyond our own steeped in darkness and struggling in the aftermath of a divine war; a world where its people fight not only to survive but to amass power, riches, and honour. A place of intense, high-octane wire-fu action set against the background of desert landscapes, high speed train robberies, and mutant warriors battling it out for supremacy. Nothing is as it seems in this world, and everything is possible.

The **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** (or HPS) is a storytelling game of extreme mash-ups battling it out in a post-apocalyptic fantasy world of gunslingers, gangsters, samurai, barbarians, and steampunk where the residual energies of a divine battle have bestowed super-powered abilities to a select few. Those with these incredible abilities are **qi warriors**; they are the lead characters of this setting.

Built using the ScreenPlay engine, **HPS** is a collaborative story game with all players taking an equal role in the storytelling process. You and other players tell stories about a group of ragtag anti-heroes on the run, taking command of a situation, or starting a revolution to bring back the peace. You do this by applying the rules to draft complete stories of action, suspense, horror, and survival. Through their lead characters, **Writers** actively drive the story and create epic action sequences as the central storytellers; **the Director** reacts to their descriptions while simultaneously challenging their characters along the way. For every **description** moving the story forward, another player delivers its **outcome** to push it further, react to events, and embellish details with camera angles, special effects, even a character's demise.

In a world where everything is possible, dice rolls are not used to attempt success or failure, but as **complications** against your enemies... and death is the ultimate complication. Characters roll dice based on the number of **details** built into their descriptions against an opponent's **Defence** for the right to choose their enemy's fate or perhaps allow the enemy to choose their own. Each complication becomes incorporated into the story and can also be countered or removed by spending **Vitality** until there is none left to give or the battle is over.

It is also your guide to telling stories in this world we call the One Land. A world split apart by violence and depravity, ruled by the few who dominate the many, filled with chaotic energies seeped into the soil by the anger of its divine creator. Where that very anarchy has unlocked immense power controlled by the only currency respected from one corner of this world to the next: **honour**. And it will be a tale only your players can tell.



YOUR WORLD, YOUR STORY

While this may be our history, there is nothing dictating its influence on your story. To help the people of the One Land, you and others tell a story of our salvation or damnation. Doing so requires the freedom to invoke the story everyone wishes to create without becoming weighed down by restrictions. This is your version of the One Land, yours and those who tell this story with you. What you find in these volumes are agreed-upon **initiatives** used as a starting point for your story, the machinations of the major characters involved in this story, and a collection of sights and sounds designed to aid in the immersion of players in a world they will never explore with their own senses. Piecing it all together is the experience created by telling this story.

It is also a game about creating a shared experience where everyone contributes to an exciting and engaging action-packed story full of all the martial arts, wire fu, gunfights, and chase sequences they can handle. By using the tools provided in this rulebook, everyone is able to create a unique experience in a flexible world where anything is possible.

YOUR CHARACTERS, YOUR WAY

The One Land of the past was an age of incredible advancements brought on by a diverse assortment of people who worked together to solve their problems and make a better world for the next generation. While each of the Five Cities have locked themselves away from the rest of the world since that fateful day, this diversity has only grown in the aftermath of Chaos' Wrath. There is no one character type, race, orientation, or any other qualities we use to identify us as individuals in the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game**. Even if you see one character type assigned a specific gender or way of life, never feel beholden to it. Make the characters you want to play, how you want them to look, and who they love. The goal of the game is to create a foundation for what characters can do, not who they are.

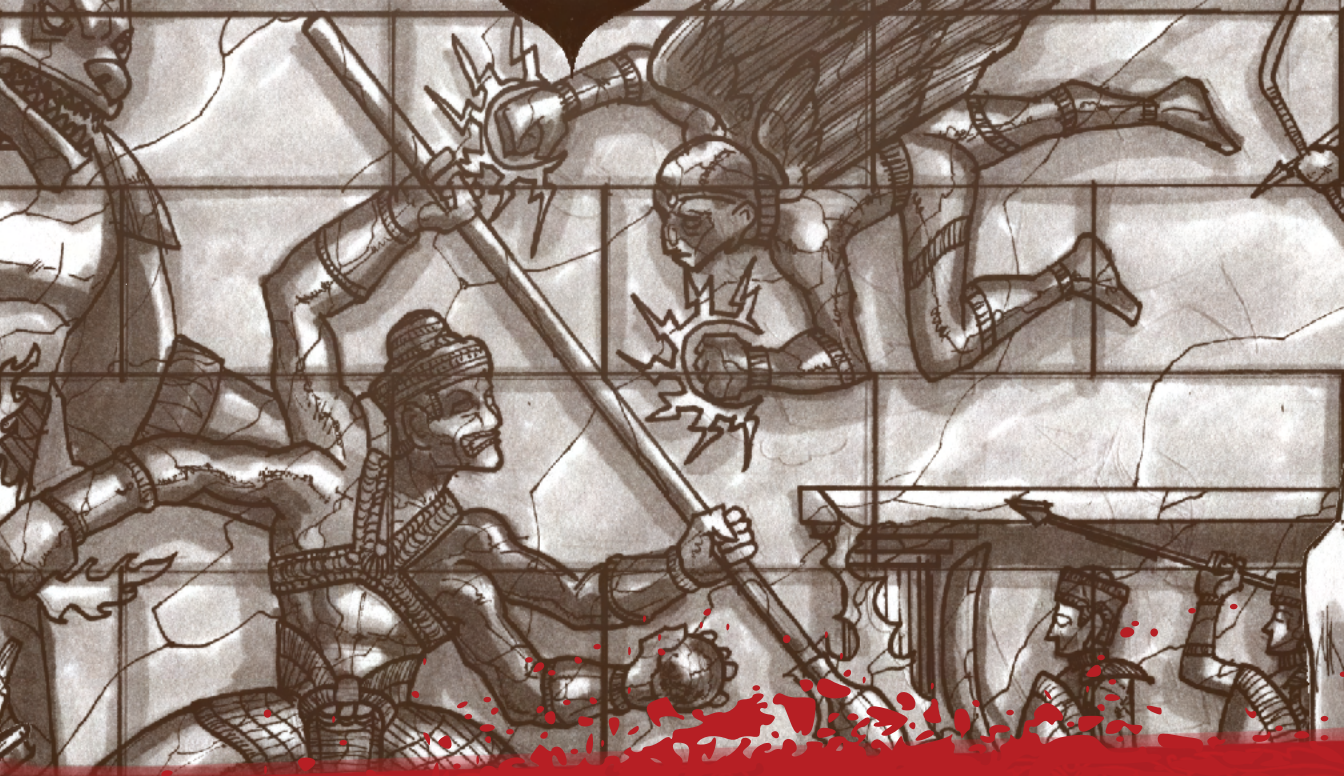
A CHOICE REMAINS

My time is close to done and I must turn to a more personal message. As a devout follower of Innocence's teachings, I would plead for the safety of those who were not the cause of Chaos' anger, and face death simply by standing in the path of a vengeance-driven harbinger. I have been assured your heart does not wish it on them either. There may be darkness in your soul but only on the surface. You have an opportunity to make something out of misery, to turn it into hope. Generations of survivors will forever be in your debt and your place in the heavens shall be guaranteed.

This is not a choice made lightly. Perhaps your time will come and it is not today. Perhaps there will not be another time. Or maybe that time is now. You are ready to be the legend you have always dreamed of. Maybe even a hero. Simply remember one message, oft forgotten: heroes make sacrifices.

If you are prepared to make that sacrifice, we shall see you in the heavens.





BOOK TWO: THE HISTORY OF IT ALL

"Time is immaterial. Each second is lost in a void of countless more, and before its passage is recognized another passes before your eyes. Stop counting and you begin to view time as eternal."

- from the Eternal Scrolls of Patience

To understand the events that unfold, you must comprehend the events that lead to this dire moment in the One Land's history. What began as the forging of a single continent dedicated to the vision of peace and unity is now a stripped down, barren wasteland of despair, strife and suffering. While Chaos was sealed within the Shard of Hope, his fingerprints remains.

In this chapter, you will discover the One Land and how the All-Father became Chaos and nearly destroyed the world.

As my brethren have done before and shall continue after, know me only as a disciple of Patience and the keeper of history enacted in my lifetime. What I am about to tell you is the known history of our world and its people as told to me by my mentor as it was presented to her by the generations preceding her. While I would tell you these are not mere legends but the facts as they have been documented in scrolls and tomes of old, to ignore the possibility of reinterpretation is to risk ignorance. Take what you will of these facts as you prepare to confront the future of this world. It is said the past is sometimes viewed at just one angle.


THE ORIGIN OF EVERYTHING

Surely we must start at the very beginning: the formation of the earth and what came to be called the One Land. There are many debates as to what was truth before rock, air, and roots merged together to create this vibrant – and now wretched – paradise, but that is not why we are here. All you need to know is the purpose of the Elemental Spirits. There is one theory I believe in and so I shall share it with you.

In the beginning, there was only Chaos, the Master of All Unknown. Alone in the swirling insanity of the universe, Chaos came to ponder the meaning of his existence and so gave birth to his children as allies in his quest to learn why all was as it was. Chaos sought to give himself purpose and reason and created Honour to teach him the benefits of vision and purpose. Next came Patience to aid him in what would become a long and arduous process; she taught him the mysterious art of meditation and how it could be used to unlock the power of qi. Seeking advice on how to handle the lesser forms in the universe, Chaos begat Innocence to be a voice for those who would come to follow the spirits and teach Chaos the errors of rash choices. Balance arose as arbitrator and advisor to the ultimate force in the universe, standing by Chaos' side to reveal the role of consequences and responsibility. For his final child, Chaos brought forth Strife to enforce his will when the time was right and provide a means to survive everything. Together the Elemental Spirits combined their domains to create habitable worlds for creatures of all shapes and sizes. Chaos was given a new name: **the All-Father**.

As gratitude for all they had taught the All-Father, the other Spirits were gifted with their choice of worlds to shape as they wished. Rather than selecting separate worlds, the children chose a single world to mould together, applying the principles of Patience, Honour, Innocence, Balance, and even Strife into one united home. This was the One Land.

Patience carved up the rock and dust to form the rolling hills and mountains; Innocence planted the seeds that became trees; Honour raised the animals that populated forests and plains; Balance established the climate and the rise and fall of the sun that would allow the One Land to thrive; and Strife mapped out the circle of life whereby everyone would have the means to eat, defend and attack when the time was right. So pleased with their work were these spirits that they chose to make it their home, cultivating their hard work and helping its creatures build lives unparalleled in the whole of the universe. In an agreement drafted by Balance, the Spirits swore an oath to never directly interfere with the life they had created but would walk among them in secret from time to time to better understand the events that continued to shape its future. This became known as the First Vow and is one we monks have taken to heart as a testament to their vision. Satisfied with their work, the sibling Spirits settled down in the One Land and watched their creation grow, leaving the All-Father alone in the universe to watch over his grand creation. This would be the undoing of it all.

—  —
Elemental
Spirits
 Chaos
 (the All-Father)
 Balance
 Honour
 Patience
 Innocence
 Strife
 —

THE RISE AND FALL OF CHAOS

Feeling abandoned by his children, the All-Father slowly crept back into his old ways of anger, confusion, and vengeance. Without the guidance of the other Spirits, the All-Father looked down upon the One Land with a jealous rage, hating what they had created in spite of all he had given them. He began to see it as a blight upon all he had created, a mark of treachery that burrowed away at his mind. Little did he know of the truth.

When this was truly One Land shared by all, it was ripe with vegetation, wildlife and people. Scattered tribes and villages opened routes for trade that all connected to one central community. Wiped from the records when it was destroyed, this golden city was the primary target for Chaos' anger and today is known only as **the Fallen City**. Worship of the Elemental Spirits was rampant as everyone dedicated their thanks and prayers to each in turn, even the All-Father, who was revered as the Creator of Existence and the Developer of Worlds. In those days, the All-Father was not seen as a vicious destroyer but as the guiding hand of the stars above whose domain was the vastness of space. He was the guardian of the dead, taking those who had departed their physical shells and guiding them to the heavens for their eternal rest. He was the master of everything unknown, and when the understanding of why things existed as they did was wanting, it was generally deemed to be the All-Father's will.

But in his returning insanity, he saw these tributes as a mockery of what he had sought to achieve all those millennia ago. It is said that death was the great affront to his vision, that he would have given mankind the right of immortality and eternally watch over the One Land as its caretaker. To consider the All-Father as the keeper of the dead was a vicious slap to his face, and so that is how he chose to strike first.

The **First Mark of Chaos** came when the dead would no longer rest. Those who would fall in the hunt or pass from old age would instead rise up as vicious cannibals ravaging the One Land. As the people scrambled to learn why they had angered the All-Father, the First Mark ended as quickly as it began. In an effort to soothe their angered parent, the Spirits approached the All-Father and pleaded for an explanation. He in turn demanded an apology for their crimes, as he called them, and proclaimed that the only fair punishment for their treason was the destruction of the One Land they so loved. They refused and swore an oath to never allow the All-Father access to their land again.

In retaliation, the **Second Mark of Chaos** came from the very sun that sustained the land. Its heat bore down on the plant-life and dried it up, inflicting a terrible drought from one coast to the next. As the Spirits fought to protect their creations from famine and wildfires they did not surrender, for the price of failure was too high for even Innocence to accept. As their love for this Land was proven stronger than their loyalty to their master, the All-Father's next action was so direct and terrible that he would no longer be called by that valiant name. Once again he was Chaos.

The **Third Mark of Chaos** came and went in a single day as fire and ash rained down from the skies, a bombardment of comets gathered and launched from the outer reaches of the universe. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost in a matter of minutes, and little was left unscarred. As the wrath of Chaos threatened to wipe out all they had created, his children made a fateful choice to call Chaos into direct combat. They knew that the only way to end this conflict was to remove Chaos for good, so they formed a plan. Honour made the challenge as Balance removed the barrier that kept Chaos from entering in physical form. Taking the bait, Chaos landed in the heart of what we now call the Wastes,

his very touch corrupting everything in sight for all eternity. Fierce was the battle as Honour and Strife duelled majestically with their creator, all while Patience waited in the shadows and Innocence rode into the surrounding homelands prompting the surviving creatures to take shelter in caves. The battle shattered the forests and shook the very foundation of the One Land terribly as Honour and Strife did their very best to ward off the assault of Chaos, buying time for their sister. Patience saw her opportunity and struck a terrifying blow to Chaos when he least suspected it. As the elder Elemental Spirit fell weak to his knees, his children forged the Shard of Hope and locked Chaos within it so that he would never again walk amongst mortals.

Weak and weary from the fight, the remaining Spirits made an oath to take up the All-Father's mantle as mentor and guardian of the universe. They each took on a role in the continuation of all he had created. They also set about to lock away the Shard of Hope within the devastation Chaos himself had created, deep in the heart of the Wastes. Patience created the spire of rock now known as Heaven's Peak; Honour established the order of monks, charging them to guard over it in their stead; Balance taught them the inner workings of the universe, training them in the art of qi; Strife taught them to how to fight, as well as how to defend their charge and their home; finally, Innocence took on the mantle of ward of the One Land so that an Elemental Spirit would always be present should the worst ever occur. With that, they returned to the vacuum of space to assume their father's place in the universe.

This is how the One Land came into being and fell into ruin.

FROM THE ASHES

It was not until hundreds of years later that the survivors of this ultimate battle crawled out from the caves and returned to their place in the world. So scarred and devoid of life was their ancient homeland, so unlike the legends they had passed down to their children as those born under the sun died beneath the rock. Their time within the ground had made many of the creatures –especially humans – aggressive and territorial. Where once there was love for the Elemental Spirits who gave them life and dreams now burned anger and dismissal. The lessons and stories of the old ways – including that of Chaos' Wrath and the formation of the Shard of Hope – faded from memory. As old cities were reclaimed, their temples were torn down and literatures burned. The teachings of their guardians were tossed aside and decades of war broke out across the One Land as democratic cities fell under the rule of warlords eager to stake out new claims on the scant remaining rivers, minerals, and populations.

What was once a populous and vibrant terrain is now a war zone. Five massive domains divided by thousands of miles of harsh landscape that kills an untrained man within hours, each of the Five Cities carved out their own lifestyles, cultures and habits. All of them revolved around survival and combat. In the heart of this new world stands Heaven's Peak, a towering spire of rock where monks thrive in peace and harmony, dedicated to the understanding of the ancient teachings of the Elemental Spirits, and wardens of the Shard of Hope.

This is the world where our story begins.

FROM SHATTERED CITIES TO WILD DESERTS

Scraped together on the backs of a scattered people, the Five Cities shine as the beacons of industry, might, and order. Where the outside lands, particularly those of the Wastes, would tear a lone man apart, the Cities are a refuge of possibility in a world that does not forgive. Survive the harshness of the wild or endure the hardship of the Cities.

The most notable shifts from our old world to this new and endangered one are the Five Cities. Pay no heed to this illusion of a united community working together for the prosperity of its people, for each may carry the name “city” but each functions as the underside of an oppressive warlord’s boot. For every one of the Five, there is a powerful warlord demonstrating their mastery with the sword and the gun or ruling through sheer guile and manipulation. Some have shown great progress in developing a solid and thriving community through roads, technology, and government. Others have not.


The Five Cities
 Khar'tep
 Monsoon
 Rust
 Serenity Falls
 Yung Zhi

Those who would wander between the Cities – few as they are – dabble in the traditions of the sword as well as the advanced and ruthless efficiency of firearms. There are some who trained for years in the ways of a single martial art, others who take what they need with gunpowder. There is as much chance to find a band of swordswomen pillaging outlying clusters of scavengers as there is opportunity for a rifleman to snipe a far off target for the sheer thrill of it.

All things are possible in what has become of the One Land, including the mastery of qi (pronounced “chi”). In the years since Chaos’ Wrath, many have unlocked their qi with little to no training, an effect believed to be the result of the Chaos’ infectious curse upon the land. No matter it’s source, there are many with great power in their hands - whether achieved from within or gained from a **legendary weapon** - who call themselves mercenaries, bounty hunters, or adventurers.

As the future pulls back the curtain to reveal what is next, you will learn more about each of the Cities. For now, as the clouds part and our plight unfolds, I will introduce you to what lies ahead for your story. This is all common knowledge within the One Land and assumed within the grasp of anyone who walks these paths. Further details come later, and each City has been assigned its own lesson for easy reference should you be ready to discover your destiny.



SERENITY FALLS

What was once a bustling City on the shores of a mighty ocean is now no more than a rusted trophy commemorating a long forgotten past. Ruled by the Tom family since before dark days fell on us all, Serenity Falls's resources were scant able to keep up with the eventual demand from a growing population seeking a promising life in the southeast border of the One Land. It now exists as a wind-blown shell embraced by thieves, murderers, and the foulest of personalities. They seek a place to rest their heads and feed their urges without the bother of settling down or leaving a mark as to their arrival and departure. Closer to the Wastes than any other City, it is now the epitome of corruption.

Today it is ruled by Asoko Tom but you may probably know him more as **Grandfather**, the greedy protector of Serenity Falls. While the depraved and wicked come to his City wanted by other warlords, Grandfather tolerates their ways until they threaten either of the pair he truly cherishes: his money or his children. Those who forget this rule face a dedicated legion of trained marksmen that have become the signature of Serenity Falls, standing on rooftops with hawks' gazes on everything that goes on in the City. Anyone not killed by his **Watchdogs** face Grandfather's judgment: take your own life or suffer a life as a slave in the mines concealed behind the empowering fortress that is his home. His people pay heavy taxes to gain this harsh protection, as they have for generations. Grandfather is a staunch believer in the old ways and his quest to bring back the past has lead his City to ruin.

Standing at his side since her tenth year is **Kiki**, his adopted daughter and bodyguard. Raised in view of tortures, beatings, and murders, this graceful girl has grown to become a crazed killer when unleashed. Armed with her legendary Crescent Whip and her terrifying efficiency in dealing death, Kiki – and her ambitions – may have reason to fear for her life as there are stirrings in Serenity Falls of uncertainty within the Tom household.

Unless you happen to live in Grandfather's house or are one of his Watchdogs, your fate lies under the warlord's boot. Life in these streets is harsh and its people live under constant threat of beatings, torture, poverty, and even slavery. Those who go on to make something of themselves do so by escaping this once prosperous community and taking their chances out in the world.

If you choose Serenity Falls as your homeland, choose from the following perks:

A Knack for Blending In: Avoiding the ever-watchful eyes of Serenity Falls's enforcers has allowed you opportunity to achieve things others have been imprisoned for. It's all about blending into your surroundings and hiding in plain sight. Whenever your character operates in a crowd of at least 10 people, you gain an additional +1 step bonus to your Defence against anyone beyond Close range.

Sharp Eyed: Serenity Falls's ever-blowing winds require residents to adapt and some have developed keen eyesight. Your character can choose to ignore the light Concealment modifier (but not heavy Concealment or any Cover) when making a complication roll.

Street Fighter: Anyone from Serenity Falls who's lived long enough to become someone important learned how to survive against some rather dirty and nefarious characters. Your character can either interrupt or retaliate once per scene without spending Vitality.



YUNG ZHI

There is much about Yung Zhi you cannot understand until you have wandered all its streets. At one moment, you may suspect this City to be the definition of impoverished as its people cram to fit within the towering walls of sandstone forming the jagged edges of the crevasse they call **the Devil's Throat**... and home. The desperate who made it inside literally dwell on top of each other as each ramshackle building flimsily stacks atop the last to create an outer rim of swaying buildings, creaking wood, and tragedies waiting to happen. And that is for those who can find room within this immediate zone, leaving the rest to camp along the windy chasm as unsettled refugees.

If you choose Yung Zhi as your homeland, choose from the following perks:

Dodging Trouble: Dodging stray bullets and finding oneself in the midst of a turf war forces anyone who calls Yung Zhi home to develop quick reflexes. Very helpful to get out of the way and avoid discovering one of those bullets in your chest. So long as they are described as moving away from any source of danger, your character gains a bonus detail.

Grace of a Cat: Getting by in the outer reaches of Yung Zhi requires dexterity outside the reach of normal people, yet these survivors have learned to leap over swaying gaps and jump down a couple of floors with ease. Your character can automatically shift a complication roll without spending Vitality so long as their description takes place at dangerous heights. You cannot cause damage using this perk.

Street Smarts: Learning who you can trust and reading people between the lines, even if they're family or friends, can be the difference between a blindfolded trip to an alleyway or hitching a ride out the other side of the Devil's Throat. Your character is immune to all inception complications involving a social trigger. It does not include anything to do with tricks of the mind, senses, or provide a resistance to qi powers.

The heart of the City is a very different story, one of greed, power, and unappreciated technology. Yung Zhi's true power lies with its warlord, **Xang**, and her dominance over the rival gangs populating the illuminated streets of neon-fueled night clubs, polished automobiles, and heavy firepower. Caught up in their own opulence, these brash youngsters seek nothing more than good times at the cost of enforcing Xang's demands until such time as another takes the old woman's place. When blood does not run into the sewers, parties carry on well into the night and long into the morning hours. In Yung Zhi's heart it is not money that commands attention, but booze.

Many a skilled mercenary has answered Xang's call to join her gang, including a varied collection of qi warriors. Filling the role of second-in-command is a particularly vicious killer: **Bolo**, once the main enforcer of the very Desert Sun Gang that brought so much grief to Xang and her fellow warlords. A silent man and efficient killer, Bolo has sworn allegiance to his new master and proven himself invaluable to her family. Those who would dare question his loyalty face the firm reply of his iron fists.

Living in Yung Zhi does not grant a long life, regardless of your social status. Either you toil in poverty and die in the slum that is the Shell or you die in a gunfight or brawl in the Pearl's voracious nightclubs. Those who show the most strength and ruthlessness make it to relative safety within the gangs' upper echelons until someone stronger and more ruthless makes a move to take you out.



MONSOON

Do not let the full name of this third City fool you. Monsoon is a place of true beauty and antiquity, one of the few to embrace the past, even if it is for nefarious purposes. Settled at an assembly of four tainted rivers running to the western coast of the One Land, Monsoon is located at the base of a waterfall where the rivers merge and flow down to give life to one of the few surviving jungles. Under the canopy of dense trees, and watched over by the singing birds and swinging monkeys that also call this place home, are ancient temples dedicated to the Elemental Spirits, libraries of vast knowledge, and a fortress from which the warlord Hoth Kap Sing, also known as **the General**, rules with absolute efficiency and determination.

Beyond its beauty and splendour lies a people under military rule. All who would call Monsoon home must serve at least three years in full arms guarding the walls and marching out into the One Land as the General sees fit. His forces are unmatched compared to the other Cities and this is what makes Monsoon so feared by the other warlords. Should the day ever come that the General feels obliged to take what is not his, the legion may be unstoppable. Yet no aspirations of power have crossed the General's mind to date. At least, not until he has learned the secret buried within the temples of Monsoon, a secret he believes will grant him the power to cleanse the impurities of the world and grant him right as supreme ruler of the One Land. Few outside of the General's inner circle are aware of the power he seeks in the ruins, but many have their own theories.

Having fathered no children in his lifetime, the General's life is dedicated to his military. Power is to pass on to his second-in-command. As of today, it is **Wind's** hands that grasp that title. Also known as the Winds of Death, Wind is a fierce swordswoman with lightning fast reflexes and the ability to summon tempest winds with a whistle. Wind's loyalty to her commanding officer is unbreakable and many who have failed to bring the General his quest for ultimate power have left this world because of the Winds of Death's twin katanas.

Buried deep within the jungle canopy exists the harmonious City of Monsoon, its people conscripted into a life of honour and glorious battle at great personal sacrifice. Avoiding the General's random accusations requires a commitment to both traditions while keeping a keen eye on those who can be sacrificed so that others can live long enough to survive the General's next mission.

If you choose Monsoon as your homeland, choose from the following perks:

Failure Is Not An Option: Combining the soldier's duty with the need to avoid the General's wild accusations, everyone in Monsoon takes their missions seriously and makes any sacrifice necessary to fulfill orders. Once per session, your character can swear an oath to complete a scene's goal and can spend 1 Vitality to roll two dice for any complication roll specifically tied to that goal. You can choose from either of the two dice.

Hardened Like Steel: When the very land around you spits poison, you develop an enhanced constitution and live long enough to find an antidote. When your character receives a complication due to poison, they can delay its effects for one round. This round can be immediately after receiving the poison or anytime between receiving the complication and removing it.

Trained To Perfection: Many soldiers of Monsoon focus on one specialty or weapon above all others to become masters. Choose a single resource, including a skill or weapon. Whenever that resource is assigned to a resource slot and applied to a description, your character gains a +1 shift bonus to any complication rolls.



KHAR'TEP

There is a reason why the Five Cities have not turned to outright war due to so many harsh words and threats exchanged between them. When it comes to Khar'tep and its current warlord, **Khar of the Hawk Clan**, there is the slight matter of scaling the rocky mountains in which this City lies. While not a City in the traditional sense, what is known as Khar'tep is in truth a nomadic gathering of barbarians relocating from one peak of the mountains to the next as conditions demand. Out here, change is a constant. Even the name of the City is altered when a new warlord is proclaimed – its former name was Roth'tep in favour of its previous warlord, Roth of the Goat Clan.

If you choose Khar'tep as your homeland, choose from the following perks:

Ignore the Pain: Overcoming the shakes or the sharp pain of an axe wound is an everyday part of living in Khar'tep. Learning to master pain, fear, and other signs of weakness is considered mandatory for anyone carrying a blade to battle. Your character can ignore a single complication for one round. This can only be done once per scene.

Kills For A Living: Efficiency with weapons is something on which the barbarians of Khar'tep pride themselves, passing down lessons learned from previous wars and trials by combat to the next generation. Choose between one- or two-handed weapons, melee or ranged. When your character uses one of these weapons in a complication roll, they gain an additional +1 damage bonus.

Steady As A Goat: The barbarians of Khar'tep cannot possibly live to adulthood without mastering mountain climbing skills. Your character gains a +1 step bonus to any challenge-based complication roll while climbing.

Life is firm and unrelenting in the heights of the northeastern mountains. While each clan tends to their own, they all form groups of hunters, gatherers, parents, gardeners, and warriors working apart but for the same purpose: the survival of the clan. Only their clan elders engage with the other clans and ensure little to no violence breaks out between them. Such peace between the clans is only maintained because of Khar's wishes as he prepares for the days of total war with the other Cities.

Home to a gathering of numerous clans, Khar'tep maintains order through might alone. These people have been raised to live a warrior's code: what is desired is taken and fought for. While not as organized and dutiful as the soldiers in Monsoon, they are indeed a force to be reckoned with. All manner of harsh crimes are permitted when raiding parties are sent out, and few that oppose them are left alive. Ruling them all is their unchallenged warlord. Never defeated in battle, it is told, this hulking warrior has slain ten people for every year of his life. The youngest of all the warlords, his quick temper and swift reactions make him the most feared of them all.

Precariously balanced on the top of the world, the barbarians of Khar'tep have enough troubles without Chaos' aftermath tainting their way of life. This rugged mountainscape is not meant for the weak-willed and that is why these barbarians feel they have been chosen to live here. Every day is a battle, whether it is against the frigid temperature, limited air, or one's neighbors. Never assume peace between the tribes spells an end to the bloodshed.



RUST

Tall spires of scrap metal pierce the horizon in this pocket of the One Land ripe with strong electrical currents as bolts of lightning bounce from one tower to the next. These towers are a monument to a world of bizarre creations and marvels that cannot be found until you begin to look underground. Buried beneath the barren soil, everything that is this final City is concealed beneath the earth. That is perhaps its greatest defense. Blending salvage engineering with religious devotion, Rust is a beacon of hope, for those who can both physically and morally endure, in an otherwise dreary hellhole. Yet most would rather take their chances in the Wastes.

Every street, building, and construct in Rust was built from the wreckage of the world before Chaos' Wrath, and its people have completed wondrous feats with these remains. Despite the brown-flecked appearance of the metal applied in these inventions, its citizens have manufactured some of the most advanced forms of technology available today (some even more than what was possible before it was all destroyed). They even have the ability to harness the electricity flowing through the air around them (a lesser side effect of the storm-riddled northern landscape above) to provide heat and illumination. It is this ingenuity that makes Rust a powerhouse among the Five Cities as it sits on a powder keg of weaponry. While all the other warlords would unleash an army to seize this city for their own, none would dare face down a barrage of contraptions built for the sole purpose of tearing a man in half.

Ingenuity in the face of devastation is the signature conceit of this City overseen by **the Council of Iron** and its messiah, **the Minister**. The people of Rust have built impressive technologies and architecture using the leftovers of the world before Chaos' judgement and have dedicated themselves to the worship of the Minister as their guide to the afterlife away from all of this toil and death. Total subjugation is the price for living in a city of metal and advancement, with the Council of Iron acting as the Minister's voice. While they may seem to have it all compared to the remaining Cities, everything a family owns can be stripped at a moment's notice at the Council's whims. Those who have managed to flee with their lives intact speak of the Council's madness and the rampant disease from a life surrounded in rusted metals and an unkempt populace.

If you choose Rust as your homeland, choose from the following perks:

Anything Could Be A Resource:

Raised with an advanced education where engineering is a hobby, many are able to assemble and utilize a new resource even though the experience is straining. By spending 1 Vitality, your character is able to create a temporary resource without filling an existing resource slot. The same resource can remain in effect for an additional 1 Vitality for 2 rounds of continued use throughout the scene.

Keen Sense of Danger:

The continued threats from both government and environment leave many of Rust's citizens with sharp observations capable of saving them from getting crushed, lost, or locked up. Your character can set a trigger to avoid a physical danger. This trigger can only function once per scene and does not need to be maintained.

Smarter Than Most: Say what you will about the Council of Iron, they understand the value of an educated population. When your character assigns a knowledge- or background-based resource, they gain +2 steps for a single complication roll in a scene. This knowledge or background resource cannot be changed and remains the same once chosen.



THE WASTES

If you choose the Wastes as your homeland, choose from the following perks:

Predicting Chaos: Spending years in the swirling insanity of the Wastes teaches you a thing or two about predicting what's to come, even if you only have a few minutes to prepare. Your character can spend 1 Vitality while in the Wastes to rewrite one of another player's detail or part of an outcome and provide a revised threat created by the landscape itself. For example, if the Director describes a leviathan approaching, you can change it to a sandstorm.

Wild Potential: Some Outcasts have absorbed more chaotic energy than others and access the ability to tweak their potentials to varying effects. Your character can permanently increase one aspect of a single potential, either the dice value, Defence, or maximum details, at the cost of decreasing another. For example, the dice value of a potential can increase by one step while the Defence goes down by one step. If you choose to decrease the maximum details of a potential, they are decreased by two steps (reducing a d8 potential to 1 detail). This perk can only be applied during character creation and remains fixed for as long as the character lives.

Out Of Control: Outcasts are capable of qi powers beyond those of others, yet this enhanced power is not always in their control. Your character can spend 1 Vitality once per scene to double their qi power's step or damage bonus but no additional Vitality can be spent to shift a complication roll with that qi power until the end of the next round. Additionally, if the player is able to set a complication, it is instead randomly determined by another player. Roll a die as close to the number of players in the session and assign each player a number in sequence. For example, if there are 4 players, roll 1d4 with each player assigned a number from 1 to 4 (starting with yourself as 1 and counting upwards to your left). If there is an odd number of players, use the next highest die with the remaining number assigned to the Director. For example, if you have 5 players in your game and roll a d6, the Director would be also be assigned the 6, regardless of table order. Whoever is rolled determines the complication instead.

Life in the One Land revolves around the Wastes; not only as the heart of the continent but as a blight on the whole land. Sand storms created by its slicing winds hurdle past its borders without warning, earthquakes from shifting mountains rumble in all directions, and an unseen ooze of corruption leaks out into the dried up riverbeds winding across the land. There is not a day that goes by without the Wastes, without reason, extending its reach and bringing misery to thousands.

Tainted by the anger of Chaos, this place is in a state of constant change. Even the land does not remain the same for long, creating a maze for those who do not wish to be found. Perhaps this is why it appeals to those who seek refuge from the anger of warlords or freedom from their oppression, even if the chances of death increase exponentially. While the whispers of city dwellers believe only the crazed and maniacal would call this place home, there can be more honour found here than most other places today.

Those who call it home have adapted to the harshness of it all. And what hardships they must endure. An eternal blasting sun that scorches the skin within minutes, stirring up the air to create a curtain of heat that blinds a weary traveller, or perhaps a sudden storm with waves of rain and hail pelting down on anyone without shelter. Another day could bring on massive earthquakes as the rock itself rises and falls to build new monuments of stone, sometimes wiping out entire settlements in minutes.



- Despite it all, those they call **Outcasts** call this home. Nomads, devout believers in their way of life, and incredible hunters, these few lead meagre lives because they are either unwelcome or wanted for dead by one of the five warlords. Part of the Outcasts' code is to aid all survivors and give them an opportunity to live a free life away from the oppression of the Cities.

Stories tell of mutilated nomads not only surviving in the wild desserts of the Wastes, but thriving as a people. While thriving may not be the proper term, those called Outcasts have found a way to make ends meet using any means necessary. Their direct exposure to Chaos' energies have granted many, if not all, incredible qi powers scarring them for life. No one said living out here was easy.

The Salvation

For hundreds of years after Chaos touched the land, there were only two ways to cross the deserts: by foot or by steed. Neither was a guarantee of arrival and many skeletons lie buried under the sands as proof of this difficulty. One person sought to change this.

Over two-hundred years ago **Deckland Burr** fled Rust with nothing but the clothes on his back and the tools in his pouch. The third-born of a powerful and respected family in the City, with close ties to the Council of Iron and many sons and daughters serving its elite clergy, Deckland challenged the Council's "abuse of power." He loudly decried their failure to use the technology they had unlocked to better all societies, not just those sworn to the Minister. For his heresy, he was jailed. Not only were his words dangerous, but the inventor was known to have the ambition and morale code to follow through on the ideas he spouted in his speeches. His greatest concept was for a massive armoured locomotive, driven by a perpetual engine, carving a trail through the Wastes to connect the Five Cities for trade and travel alike. After his daring escape, Deckland made for Yung Zhi and twenty years later fulfilled his dream. Dubbed **the Salvation**, the people today simply know it as the Train.

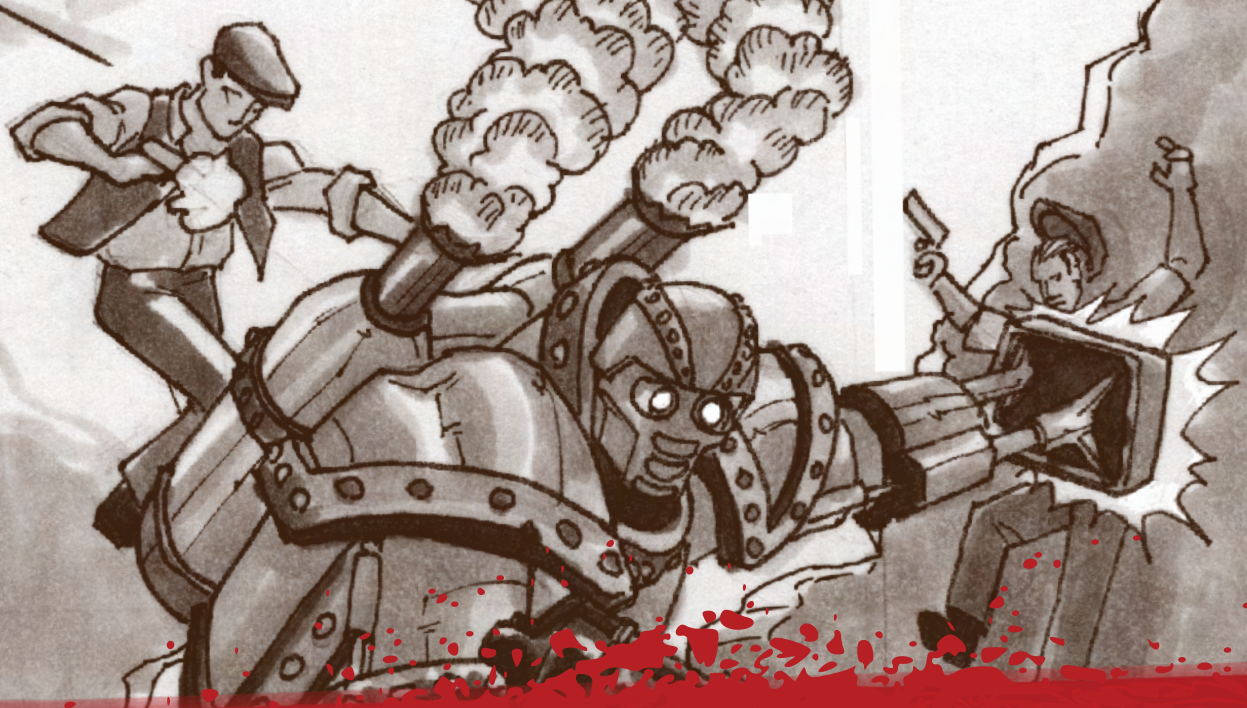
Thousands of coins and hundreds of lives later, the Salvation operates across large reaches of desert connecting all Five Cities. Equipped with iron reinforcements, powerful weaponry and an interchanging crew of dedicated guardians of Deckland's own design, the Salvation itself is but the means by which others can pass through the Wastes. Unable to take any passengers itself, other vehicles capable of high speeds in rugged terrain join up with this behemoth, breaking formation as each connects to way stations for passengers to disembark or climb aboard when the Salvation makes its next approach. At any one time, as many as twenty privately run connections, colourfully known as **wagons**, follow the Salvation through the dangers of our world's deadliest terrain. Many wagons have been lost to Outcast raiding parties, leviathans and raging storms, but the Salvation continues to this day.

ENTERING A LARGER WORLD

There is no irony lost on a scholar of Patience's teachings offering words of calm when it comes to the discovery of our One Land but it goes without saying that your time to learn more of these events, people, and locales will come soon. There is far more I could bestow on you before taking that first crucial step and great deliberation was made as to whether or not such knowledge should be imparted so early. Suffice it to say, a simpler introduction was wisely chosen. This is but a window into what we call home; entering it requires you to find the door.

It is with sincere hope and blessings that I leave you with what has been taught. May it provide you with the first steps in your quest to bring peace and a future to the One Land. A single footprint can be removed by blowing sands or forever etched as it slowly hardens into stone. Patience teaches us that all fall subject to the whims of time and only time reveals the fruit of our labour as viewed in the heavens when our bodies are dust. Perhaps one day we shall see the impact your footprint has on all our fates.





BOOK THREE: ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

"A single blade of grass is eaten by a cow. The cow is eaten by a cougar. The cougar is hunted by man. Man is killed by time. Time converts the man into earth. The earth sprouts another blade of grass."

- from the Passages of All Sides

It is not sheer coincidence these words reached you. Great pains and debates were undertaken to ensure the best possible approach to not only place these pages before you but in a format that would entice you to put these words to action. In short, you were chosen because of your adventurous spirit and your ability to imagine, two traits sorely needed in the times ahead.

Allow me, a simple scholar of Balance's teachings, to be blunt. You are a lover of games, a shaper of worlds, a player of heroes both noble and foul. It is for this reason that strict and freeform rules have been crafted, and the duty of teaching you their ways has fallen to me. These rules shall assign each of you a role to play both in your world and in ours, each with a structure to follow and bend as you see fit. I have taken pains to harness features you have come to know and respect while making it something we require for our own ends. All with the goal of bringing you one step closer to aiding us in our great time of need.

In this chapter, you will learn how to play the High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game as a Writer and as the Director. You will also learn how to create new characters of all types.



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI ROLEPLAYING GAME

This guide (along with the assistance of your Director) takes you through a game we call the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game**, introducing you to the basic mechanics of play and working with you to create a truly unique character who sees the One Land through perhaps the most tumultuous period since Chaos attempted to wipe it from existence. Only through your creations and the story you help move forward can you save the people of the Five Cities (and yes, even the Wastes) from itself. Let us begin.

WRITERS AND DIRECTORS

Anyone participating in the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** are players and the responsibilities of these players are divided into two parts. The majority are **Writers**, those charged with bringing lead characters into the story as guiding lights in the tumultuous scenes ahead. At least one player is **the Director**, tasked with ensuring the story stays focused, the One Land is represented to the characters, the goals and motivations of major characters are brought into the plot, and challenging the Writers as both co-creator and opponent.

Writers all play one lead character and can add any number of supporting characters to their cast. Directors also play supporting characters as well as extras to help flesh out the setting and create trouble for the lead characters.

Writers:

Players charged with using their lead characters to tell a story.

The Director:

A player tasked with ensuring the story stays focused & challenging.

Gathered around a long table set within the orange light of the fading sun are five friends. As it is Brendan who called the others here to play High Plains Samurai, he shall be their Director. This allows Chelsea, Nick, Kate, and Fraser to be the story's Writers.

PLAYERS AND CHARACTERS

There is a strict distinction between players and characters, and with good cause. **Players** are those in your world gathering together to save our people; **characters** are those in ours who experience its dangers. Some of the text here clearly marks out one versus the other should a single player be able to utilize a rule for all their characters or if it is restricted to a single character instead. For example, an individual turn consists of a character's moment in the story while a round is complete when all players have been able to tell their characters' moments.

Players:

People in your world playing this game.

Characters:

People portrayed in the story by the players.

As a Writer, you have access to the following characters:

Lead Characters: Each Writer creates one **lead character** that influences the story. These characters are your primary source of storytelling. You use your lead character to provide descriptions and deal with the outcomes provided by the Director to help move the story forward, engage in exciting combat, and so much more.

Supporting Characters: Should you so desire, you can also create additional **supporting characters**. These work the same as lead characters in many ways, yet do not have the same influence or significance as your leads. But they can add that extra little bit of fun and roleplaying uncharacteristic of your lead. Some supporting characters may be created by the Director and provided to Writers, others are strictly for use by Directors.

FORMATS

The Director also has access to their own characters, including major characters, supporting characters, and extras (nameless stand-ins offering minor challenges and obstacles to your leads). Only Directors can play extras.

Major Characters: Some of the Director-controlled characters detailed within these books play a significant role in many renditions of this story and must offer a significant challenge when the lead characters face them in combat of any kind. In short, they are the vital characters to the main plot of your story, the reason why you are here. These are known as **major characters** and they are referenced throughout this book with additional benefits beyond your standard characters.

Supporting Characters: Identical in almost every way as those played by Writers, a Director-controlled supporting character is capable of entering the story with more potentials and longevity. In every other way, they are the same. Supporting characters provided in the full account of the One Land can be played by either Writers or Directors unless specifically stated otherwise.

Extras: Generally considered those nameless goons looking to hinder the lead characters in some manner, **extras** can only be applied to the story by the Director. Unlike other characters, extras can enter the story in groups with no mechanical differences (save for their Vitality), all using the same potential to attempt complications.

It does not take long for the Writers to devise ideas and early concepts for their characters. By the time they are ready for their first scene, there are four lead characters. Mauser (played by Fraser) is an untapped bounty hunter who escaped from Serenity Falls's mines as a child; Darius (played by Chelsea) is a cat burglar from Yung Zhi gifted with invisibility; Lotus (played by Nick) is a telekinetic assassin from Monsoon; and Xai (played by Kate) is a dishonoured barbarian scout from Khar'tep who can create and shape ice.

FORMATS

As it is with any creative team, setting down boundaries and guidelines for your story requires placing some tracks well before the train has a chance to derail. How long will your story be? How does that translate into the number of sessions you play? How violent, graphic, or sexual will the story be? Will it be anime, a comic book, series of novels, or a stand-alone film? All these are **formats**, each one fundamental in establishing overall story goals and ensuring individual scenes do not stray too far from the path or wander on too long.

Before sitting down to do anything with the story, discuss the following formats as a group. Together, they help shape the tone, style, and approach all players can use in their descriptions and outcomes.

Genre: All stories fit into a genre. From wushu action to heartbreaking drama, there are a wide range of genres to choose from and the possibilities multiply when you explore genre combinations. Locking down the genre of your story goes a long way toward determining the other formats as well as the story everyone tells over the coming sessions. For example, your players could decide on telling the story as a Shakespearean drama combined with Saturday morning cartoons or tell it as a 1980s "buddy cop" film.



**Character
Types:**
Lead
Major
Supporting
Extras



Formats:
Genre
Medium
Combat
Technology
Rating
Key Initiatives
Duration

Medium: There are many ways to tell a story and share it with the world. Do your storytellers want to share the magic of a good novel or express their rendition as explosive anime? Choosing a medium helps players building descriptions, imagery, and messages during play. Your choice of medium determines the cues and presentation for your story, such as relying only on visual descriptions for a movie or the inner dialogue and introspection of an engrossing novel.

Combat: There are many methods of hand-to-hand combat, from street fighting to martial arts renowned the world over. But this format extends to more than just establishing a common level of ability or generally known fighting styles. What exceptions to the common laws of physics exist in your story? Can everyone defy gravity or just a qi warrior? Establishing a baseline for how combat looks and feels in your story allows room for qi powers to go above and beyond.

Technology: Our world is a shadow of its former self, built atop the ruins of an ancient empire and the technology afforded the day before Chaos brought down his fury. What is the most common technology available in your story? The most common vehicles, weaponry and forms of communication? Knowing the baseline for the average citizen of the One Land helps guide descriptions and outcomes, as well as provide exciting additions to the setting and high-paced action scenes.

Rating: How violent will your story be? Will it be gratuitous or tame? How will adults relate? Will there be cursing? Film ratings have become common vernacular in your culture to help establish how hardcore or family-friendly a story is. Even if you choose a different style other than movies, using a rating system still allows everyone to work off of a consensus on how far to push the boundaries of decency. If you are not aware of your country's rating system, you can also determine an age recommendation for your story. Is it suitable for kids or adults only?

Key Initiatives: Before deciding who the lead characters are in this story, you need to know what the basic premise of the story is. What is going to happen? What has to be stopped or started and what are the consequences if you fail? Who is involved and what is known about them at the start? These become the story's **key initiatives**, a series of main plot points, story beats, locations, and other central figures to the story about to unfold.

While all players are free to create as many key initiatives as they wish, it is recommended to have at least one for every player. Unlike other initiatives, they are not beholden to any particular player and are used as guidelines to help all players keep their story on track.

Duration: Will this be a short story, a regular feature film, or an epic novel? Better yet, is everyone looking to create the first instalment of an ongoing series? Establishing the duration of your story keeps Writers focused on their motivations as well as from drifting too far from the main plot. Story length is best measured in the number of sessions you intend to play. Here are some key points to keep in mind based on the average story of the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game**.

- Expect to complete an average of 3 to 4 scenes in a single 4 hour session.
- Three sessions can be the equivalent of a single 1-hour episode for one of your television series (or 42 minutes, factoring in commercial breaks) or a short story of approximately 15,000 words. Three sessions should equal 10 to 12 scenes.
- Ten sessions (or 30 scenes) can be the equivalent of a two-hour movie or a novella of approximately 50,000 words.

DESCRIPTIONS, DETAILS, AND OUTCOMES

At its heart, the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** is about telling a story of unexpected anti-heroes stepping forth to save the One Land from grand plots or twists of fate or devout followers of Chaos eager to fulfill their master's prophecies. Creating the storytelling experience requires an early understanding of the game's core tools: descriptions, details, and outcomes.

Your story develops using **descriptions**, complete renditions told from a particular character's point of view. They are the "turns" of this game because a description encompasses a moment in the tale told to suit the formats chosen from the very beginning. Think of a description as a single paragraph in a novel or one shot in a movie. Each description can be broken down into **details** consisting of individual sentences providing a specific effort put forth by the character to create a complete description. Each character can apply a maximum number of details to their description until their description is complete and an outcome is created to suit the description.

The **outcome** is the resulting observation, consequence, complication, and/or events brought on by a description. If a description explains how a lead character slides across the floor to knock over three extras, the outcome provides a possible reaction, such as one of the extras flying through a window while the other land on their backs just as the lead character flips herself back onto her feet. Outcomes are not structured in the same fashion as descriptions and do not have details – they can consist of as much or as little information as deemed necessary by the player.

All turns consist of this back-and-forth exchange of descriptions and outcomes. For technical purposes, characters provide descriptions and players give outcomes. These are explained in greater detail later in this book.

Details

Whenever a character provides a description in the story, they are restricted to a maximum number of possible actions based on the potential chosen at the beginning of the turn. These actions are known as **details**.

A detail is much like a sentence within the full paragraph. Based on the strength of their potential, a character can offer more details on how they move the story forward, conquer their enemies, and live to fight another day with as much flourish and information as desired before they run out of details and can make a complication roll. This is explained further in **Complications** on page 39.



On their turn, a player will provide a **description** for one of their characters.

Each description will have a maximum number of **details**.

After each description, another player will provide an **outcome**.



Details:

The individual actions of a character's description.

To count as a detail, it must meet any of these conditions. If not, it is simply part of the Writer's presentation and narrative approach.

1. IT REQUIRES CONCENTRATED AND DELIBERATE EFFORT FROM THE CHARACTER.
2. IT REQUIRES A RESPONSE FROM ANOTHER CHARACTER, EITHER THROUGH DIALOGUE OR PHYSICAL REACTION.
3. IT MAY TRIGGER A COMPLICATION ROLL.
4. IT MAY REQUIRE ANOTHER CHARACTER TO USE A DETAIL TO OVERCOME OR AVOID WHAT HAS BEEN PROVIDED (WHEN A COMPLICATION APPLIES).

Key Details: One of these details is considered the **key detail** and is the primary action performed in the description. If a complication roll is triggered, it is to determine this detail, leaving all others to work as additional moments and actions related to or assisting in building up to the key detail. The last detail in a description is normally the key detail, but this is not a requirement and remains at the describing character's discretion.

REQUIRED DETAILS

REQUIRED DETAILS	DETAILS
Equipping a prop	1
Gain a cover/concealment modifier	1
Maintaining an advantage, complication, or trigger	1 per detail used to activate
Move forward by one range category	1 detail to the next range; full description for 2 range categories

Required Details: Certain actions require the use of a detail; these are listed below for your convenience. Many of these are explained in greater depth throughout this book.

Maintaining Details: Not everything ends when a description is complete; some details require repeated effort over the course of multiple descriptions. This is known as **maintaining details** and requires the same number of details used to introduce the element into the story to extend its use in every additional description the same character provides until it is no longer needed. If you needed a detail to activate a psychic shield against a barrage of bullets, you must continue using one detail each turn to maintain the shield until you no longer need it.

Descriptions

All of these pieces fall into place to provide descriptions. A **description** is an active account of how a character interacts with a scene and drives the story forward using their details as a series of individual sentences to create a complete entry in the story. Whenever a character's account is provided on their turn, this is giving a description.



Description:

A collection of details revealing how a character moves the story or action forward.

Outcomes

For every description, an **outcome** provides its conclusion. The outcome is the result of a description or conflict revealing the effectiveness of a description or simply an observation achieved by completing the description, such as what a character sees when they are described opening the door to a new room. An outcome means that the character's turn is now complete and play moves to someone else in the round.

Unlike descriptions, outcomes are not limited and provide a lot of flexibility in how they are presented. It may actually be easier to list what they cannot do rather than what they can.



Outcome:

The reaction or results of a description as provided by another player.

Outcomes cannot provide actions or responses that would technically count as descriptions. They can only react to the events established in the description and any possible complications introduced. This means characters involved in an outcome cannot perform anything that counts as an action, only as a reaction.

The Rule of Initiatives applies in all outcomes. If an initiating player disagrees with a character's involvement in an outcome, she can ask for a rewrite (all explained in the section on the Rule of Initiatives).

While there are no technical limits to an outcome's length, it should never run longer than a minute. This is simply for common courtesy to the other players and to help keep the game moving at an acceptable pace. This is more of a recommendation than a guideline and some outcomes work best when a player runs a little long. Consider this the average.

Kate thinks for a moment before leaning forward with a sly grin on her face. She has 3 details to apply in her character, Xai's, next description. As she speaks, her fingertips mimic the actions of her character. "Xai leans forward and places her fingertips gently on the table. The camera pulls back between the assorted mugs, chips and playing cards to reveal the mug of beer with Samuel's hand over the handle. We then see several trails of ice sliding across the table from Xai's fingers right towards Samuel's mug before wrapping around the mug. As Samuel picks up his drink, the camera raises up with the mug and we see his beer is frozen solid. He stares at his mug, dumbfounded. And he never sees the dagger come flying across the table and land directly in his right eye."

The first detail is Xai using her icy qi power to freeze Samuel's mug. The second detail distracts Samuel from Kate's third detail that cuts straight to the point by attacking Samuel. Waiting for this to trigger a complication roll, she is surprised when Brendan rolls with the punches and brings in his own surprise.

"The dagger stops a mere inch away from his open eye, hovering in midair and vibrating slightly. As the camera shifts its focus, we can see the young woman sitting next to Samuel has her hand out to the dagger. She blows softly and the dagger disintegrates into dust."

THE RULE OF INITIATIVES

Our ways are not for the solitary mind; they were made for the co-operative experience. This means everyone works together and follows a practice of building upon the works of other players and accepting these elements as they are introduced to the story. Ensuring this practice remains reality involves the application of our most cardinal rule: **the Rule of Initiatives**.

Whoever introduces a character, element, setting, or any aspect of the story has final say on how it is used in the story. This includes any written material provided by the Director. If another player offers a description that does not agree with the initiating player, the description must be revised with assistance from the initiating player. This is known as a rewrite.

Rewrites

Should a character's description or a player's outcome dispute something already introduced into the story, be it intentional or not, the Director can determine a **rewrite** is in order due to the Rule of Initiatives. It typically defaults to revising a single detail in the description or a portion of the outcome. Whichever player has initiative over the matter has final say on how much needs to be rewritten to comply.

Once an outcome has been provided, a rewrite is no longer possible for a description. If the next description has already begun, a rewrite is not possible for an outcome.

Brendan speaks up at the end of Fraser's description. "Don't forget we've already established the medallion inside the chest was once in Grandfather's possession. Nick, that was you who brought that up, right?"

Nick nods. "Yeah, before the robbery. The chest was marked with Serenity Falls's crest."

"Ah, right," Fraser replies. "So instead how about we get this guy to tell us he was driving the stagecoach when it was robbed?" Everyone thinks for a moment and agrees with this rewrite and Fraser revises this last detail.



The Rule of Initiatives:

Whoever introduces a character, element, setting, or any aspect of the story has final say on how it is used in the story.



Rewrite:

A change to a detail or description when it does not break the Rule of Initiatives.

COMPLICATIONS

Not everything is going to go a character's way and when it doesn't, that is a complication doing its job. A **complication** is a forced limitation, viewpoint, penalty, or damage placed on a character as the result of a complication roll. Depending on the nature of the complication applied and whether or not the Director redeems a challenge to extend it further into the story (or even make it permanent), they can be removed by using descriptions depicting how the character confronts the complication.

Whoever created the complication assigns it a name based on how it functions within the scene. Complications are designed for creativity on the fly and to suit the situation at hand. Think of a complication as an effect placed upon a character as the result of bad luck or the concentrated effort of another character in the scene. If a character effectively grapples an opponent as the result of a complication roll, that character is complicating the other's desire to walk away or accomplish something else requiring the full use of his body. Once applied in a scene, the complication must be removed or incorporated into the scene, which typically makes things harder for the affected character.

Once a complication has been introduced to the scene and affects a character, it lasts until the end of the scene or until it has been actively removed by the affected character. The Director can determine a complication can have a longer effect by spending challenges (see page 72). Long term effects of a complication can continue to come up in a story, such as the scars from many wounds or the character walking with a limb until they are able to remove the bullet. Removing any complication (other than damage) requires the character to use a full description detailing how they counter it, cope with it, or whatever method seems best at the moment. Each of the four types of complications provided offers a description guideline for removing them. Vitality can also be spent to reduce the description down to a single detail, leaving the character free to perform other feats on their next turn. There is more on Vitality in a later section of this book.



Face the samurai's blade or the poisonous jungle of Monsoon.



Complication:

A forced limitation, viewpoint, penalty, or damage placed on a character as the result of a complication roll

COMPLICATION ROLLS

RESULT	VS. OPPONENT	VS. CHALLENGE
Effective with an Even Number	The target gains a complication chosen by the roller.	Avoid the challenge and gain +1 Vitality.
Effective with an Odd Number	The target gains a complication of its choice.	Avoid the challenge.
Ineffective with an Even Number	The roller gains a complication chosen by the roller.	
Ineffective with an Odd Number	The roller gains a complication chosen by the target.	The roller gains a complication chosen by the Director.

There are four types of complications. All are available through any complication roll and can be adapted to suit the scene.

Penalty: The affected character suffers a -1 step penalty to a single potential, but only after the character creating the penalty spends 1 Vitality. Multiple penalties can compound this penalty until the character is reduced to the base step. Removing this complication requires the character to describe how they have countered or removed the penalty altogether.

Restriction: This complication removes a character's access to a single prop, set piece, or other aspect already introduced to the scene until the complication is removed. It prevents a character from being able to use a weapon, consider a previous statement, notice an object in the corner, or many other possibilities from their descriptions. Removing this complication requires the character to describe how they are able to remove the restriction.

Inception: The affected character is lead to believe something that is not true or re-interpret information from a different viewpoint. Until this complication is removed, the character may believe they heard a noise upstairs, become convinced a guilty person is harmless, or run the wrong way in a chase. Removing this complication requires the character to describe how they have come to believe the truth without using the falsehood as evidence.

Damage: Physical, mental, or emotional harm is inflicted on the affected character and they lose a number of Vitality equal to the difference between the complication roll's result and the Defence. Regardless of how **damage** is inflicted multiple times in a scene, it all compounds as the character's resilience is worn down, meaning it is plausible for a single character to suffer physical damage as well as endure emotional abuse and feel their sanity slipping away. When the character is reduced to 0 Vitality, they are removed from the scene in a manner chosen by the character inflicting the damage. Unlike other complications, damage can only be removed by gaining additional Vitality through healing or reaching scene goals and motivations, as described later in this book.


Complication
Types
 Restriction
 Inception
 Penalty
 Damage

Removing One Complication With Another

Characters can apply a complication on another character for the purpose of removing one from a third character. For example, if one character has pinned another to the ground, a third character can place a complication called Stunned on the first character to prevent her from concentrating on applying the Pinned complication. Doing so requires a restriction complication where the restriction is on the ability to apply the specific complication applied to another character. Meaning the Stunned complication can only affect the previous Pinned complication and nothing else.

COMPLICATIONS

Complication Rolls

If it is simply a matter of a description's overall success or failure, the character should always succeed. **Complication rolls** are only intended to determine if a complication occurs. When it comes down to someone trying to increase the difficulty of accomplishing a current or future description, that's when complication rolls comes into play. If one character is described as locking her arms around an opponent to hold them at bay, the success of grappling an opponent is not what the complication roll is deciphering; it's how **effective** that grapple is. If the complication roll is **ineffective**, discretion is left to the players on how to provide the outcome and it may include "missing the target" entirely for the sheer sake of believability. That grapple could still occur, but it can be so easily shrugged off by the grappled target that it's barely worth any effort on their next description. In other words, it does not require a detail to remove. Whatever the result of a complication roll may be, it becomes part of the outcome and it used to move the story forward, even if that movement is slowed or halted by the complication.

The Director is the final arbiter on whether a complication roll is triggered by a description. There may be times when the Director decides to spend challenges (see page 72) and force a character to make a complication roll. These are known as **challenge-based complication rolls** and function as the Director attempting to complicate the scene by applying location-based obstacles, such as a slick floor caused by recent rainfall.

Determining whether or not a complication occurs and which player creates it is based on whether the result of the complication roll was even- or odd-numbered. Consult the list on page 40 to determine the results and use them to craft an outcome to the description. "Roller" refers to the character rolling dice and "target" refers to the character setting the Defence. In short, even-numbered rolls favour the roller and odd-numbered rolls favour the target.

III



Complication Rolls:

Dice rolls used to determine if a complication is effective/ineffective and which player chooses the complication to affect a character, be it the character who rolls the dice or the intended target of the dice roll.



Effective:

The complication roll meets or exceeds the target's Defence and will affect the target character.

Ineffective:

The complication roll is lower than the target's Defence and will affect the rolling character.

INEFFECTIVE DAMAGE

There is nothing wrong with a character taking damage from an ineffective complication roll. As written, the mechanics behind damage are intended to result in a negative number on an ineffective roll but this is not explicitly stated because some players have made use of ineffective damage to inflict harm on their own characters for dramatic effect. So long as the player is not attempting to place a damage complication on a character not their own, the Director is encouraged to allow it.

When Mauser landed on top of the vampire's back and began to jam two wooden stakes into its chest, a complication roll was triggered. With a d10 for his potential plus a bonus for the wooden stakes resources, he rolls a 6 against a Defence of 5. Effective and Darius gets to choose the complication. As the difference is not enough to kill the vampire, Darius goes with a restriction complication. "Since I'm strapped to his back using these stakes in its chest, it can't bite Darius for as long as he's there," Fraser announces.

Lotus' deadly fan attack has hit its mark after rolling an absolute on a d8! With her opponents' Defence a mere score of 3, she goes for a damage complication and is able to slice 5 Vitality from the group of extras surrounding her.

With a small army of ninjas in the temple's main hall on alert, Darius needs to complicate their efforts to keep him from getting to their master. Rolling a d10 against a Defence of 7, the result is a 3 – ineffective and the ninjas get to choose Darius' complication. Brendan's eye light up and it becomes clear he has a devious idea. "As soon as Darius lets go of the rope, he can suddenly see a series of razor sharp wires lining the temple floor. Let's call the complication.... Watch Your Step."

CREATING CHARACTERS

Without characters, there are no stories in the One Land. Otherwise, it would simply be a vacant graveyard of silence. Those who call this place home are the ones who drive the story forward as both passive witnesses and active participants of one degree or another. Building the right characters to stand a fighting chance in this world is where this section comes into play. Consult the Character Creation Checklist for each character type in the Appendix.

Stage 1: Who Do You Want To Play?

The goal of this game is to create truly epic characters capable of amazing feats. It's a world where genres are blended together like kneaded dough baked into a delicious desert. For this next step, imagine what you want to play and consider the following highlights of the setting.

High Plains Samurai's key tropes can be compared to many of your movie classics such as westerns, gangsters, and other genres mixed with stylish martial arts films. In other words, your characters will find themselves encountering gunslingers capable of shooting the pinkie off a man from 100 yards away, martial swordswomen who defy gravity as their blades slice through enemies like paper, and gangsters vying for power and money no matter who gets in their way.

All action is based on "wire-fu" cinema where your average combatant is capable of gravity-defying feats. Many of the restrictions of your world do not exist on ours. While there are still some restrictions your characters must abide by during play, if you describe your character leaping from a rooftop onto a galloping horse or racing along the side of a wall, it is completely possible so long as it fits the character and formats you've created.

Many lead and supporting characters have learned to unlock magnificent and unique qi powers from within. Everyone's qi is found only within that individual and these powers represent their soul, be it destructive or generous. As we will cover shortly, a character's qi helps reveal much about them and allows them to bypass restrictions and limitations even extraordinary characters must follow. For example, a blind woman who uses her qi to observe the world without sight is never burdened by matters such as total darkness and can feel the heartbeat of her enemies as they hide around the corner. Not everyone has learned to access their qi (known as the untapped) but those who have become famous – or infamous – across the One Land.

For this stage, take some time to consider what concept you want to play based on these three aspects. For lead characters especially, consider the following stages and work with your Director to build the foundation for an exceptional individual who may one day save the One Land from doom.

Perks

At various stages along the way, there are ways to translate a character's history into mechanical benefits known as **perks**. They are learned tricks, reactions, and enhanced abilities to help define a character's time exposed to the environment and the strength of their role. Depending on the character type (lead, supporting, or extra), each character has a number of selected perks to enhance their efforts beyond an average character.



Perks:

Mechanical benefits applied by characters to represent their backgrounds.

Lead characters receive 2 perks – one for their homeland (explained in Stage 2), and one for their role (detailed in Stage 3). If they do not have a qi power, they are treated as untapped and can choose a bonus perk from their homeland.

Major characters receive at least two perks, one from their homeland and another of the Director's invention. If they are untapped, they can choose a bonus perk from their homeland. They can also receive a perk that grants bonus challenges to create powerful consequences and complications in the scene without the burden of dice rolls. More information on bonus challenges are provided later in this book.

Supporting characters (regardless of player) receive 1 perk for their homeland.

Extras can receive 1 perk from their homeland or of the Director's creation but many have none. These perks are almost always unique to the extra.

Stage 2: Where Are They From?

The One Land is populated by six key locations you explore during the course of this story: the Five Cities and the Wastes. Everyone has to come from somewhere and the place you call home (even if you may be banished) helps defines how your character begins this story.

For this story, your characters originate from one of the Five Cities. Choose a homeland from **Book Two: The History Of It All**, select a perk, and use it to help shape your character with some assistance from your Director.

Our Writers now turn to filling out the specifics for their characters. For his bounty hunter, Fraser selects the Sharp Eyed perk from Serenity Falls plus a bonus perk of Street Fighter for being untapped. Chelsea appropriately assigns Grace of a Cat for her burglar born on the streets of Yung Zhi. Nick applies the Trained to Perfection perk for Lotus' bladed fans, perfect for an assassin from Monsoon. Finally, Kate appreciates a survivor from the heights of Khar'tep and chooses Ignore the Pain for her character.



The quartet of bounty hunters who apprehended Dollface at the Showdown In Yung Zhi. From left to right: Xai of Khar'tep, Darius of Yung Zhi, Lotus of Monsoon, Mauser of Serenity Falls.

Stage 3: What Are Their Roles?

Prophecies have spoken of a select few who will rise from the huddled masses to stand and fight this great evil, mysterious figures from eight walks of life. Each of them plays a role in the story you tell, though they may not know this as first. For the purposes of telling your story, they are exactly that: **roles**, loose definitions of those prophesied to save our people from the dark days ahead.

Each of the lead characters can be chosen from the roles detailed here and there is nothing restricting multiple lead characters from sharing the same role. Each role sports its own **code of honour**, a means of viewing the terrifying world around them and how they will survive, no matter the costs. How you choose to play to that code remains entirely up to you. With each role comes a single perk based on a lead character's honour (such as "to gain honour" or "regain your honour") related to their personal code. Whenever a perk references their honour, it refers to how they view and fulfill their role's code of honour.



Roles:

Loose definitions for lead characters to showcase those prophesied to save our people from the dark days ahead.

Not all lead characters need be from these roles as even prophecies can be wrong from time to time. Some people do not fit into existing tropes and walk their own path. Supporting characters can be created from these roles, but it is not common or recommended for they have their own parts to play. This is no place for extras.

THE UNSTOPPABLE HUNTER

The closest there is to law and order in the One Land is the whim of its warlords. Each City – and even the Wastes – have their codes, forbidden practises, and crimes. Matters with harsh punishments from which many accused are desperate to flee deep into the barren outlands and never be seen again. When they leave the jurisdiction of their accusers, the Unstoppable Hunter is called to bring them back for justice or to enforce it without the burden of transportation; dead or alive.

Feared for their determination, an Unstoppable Hunter can fulfill their contract in any other warlord's territory so long as they present the contract to a City's warlord. Not to say all contracts are honoured but failure to aid in the capture of a wanted fugitive eventually backfires when the warlord needs their own contract enforced. This near freedom places many Unstoppable Hunters as legendary figures in One Land modern myths, which also makes them a target for anyone looking to prove their worth in that next big contract.

Code of Honour: There is no room for failing to complete a contract in this line of work. An Unstoppable Hunter's word is her bond and whatever she promises to deliver shall be done. They are rarely held to minor aspects of a contract, such as due dates, for the circumstances of any contract can be as chaotic as the Wastes themselves but your character never allows themselves to return empty-handed. They protect their honour when they directly move one step closer to completing their contract.

Refuse to Fail: Your character can roll 2 dice on a single complication roll rolled in a direct attempt to gain honour. Choose your preference of the two rolls. This can only occur once per scene.

THE RAW APPRENTICE

Some begin the story as nothing more than a talented youngster not yet trained to unlock their full qi, once locked in a monastery, library, or what have you with no understanding of the world they call home. Whatever the case may be, the Raw Apprentice is a diamond in the rough that, with time and experience, is capable of proving their worth.

A Raw Apprentice does not have the benefit of the doubt or the reputation preceding their arrival. They are seen as nuisances and obstacles to the true heroes everyone turns to and it is only by proving themselves in direct confrontation, a demonstration of knowledge, or another trial by effort that they cause people to pause and give them the credit they are due. It is a long road ahead and even one screw up can bring them right back to the beginning.

Code of Honour: A Raw Apprentice's honour comes from their pride, that emotional barrier telling you everyone else is wrong. Showing themselves as capable figures in the story means successfully completing what others loudly state cannot be done by one such as them. Only by proving others wrong can a Raw Apprentice gain honour and respect.

Eager To Learn: Still discovering their place in the One Land, a Raw Apprentice keeps an open mind and always seeks to study new techniques and approaches to victory and discovering their true purpose in life. By spending 1 Vitality after being affected by an opponent's perk, you can mimic that perk in your next description. Every additional use of this perk costs +1 Vitality.



THE HARDENED OUTSIDER

There are some no one would consider a friend, ally, casual acquaintance, even a family member. They are the disregarded orphans who view only strength and power as a means of gaining respect and acceptance. They follow their own rules and damned be the consequences. They have lived this long without help and know only the hardened path of solitude, a path on which they would gladly die.

Perhaps some of the most stubborn people wandering the One Land, even the hardest of Hardened Outsiders quickly learns to find a place with someone and purpose with some cause. Yet they always remain best going it alone and proving to everyone – and themselves – they should never have been left aside in the first place.

Code of Honour: Everyone understands strength, whether they fear it or respect it. Personal fortitude, aggression, tenacity, and accomplishment are all measures of strength and they are not always physical. Whenever a Hardened Outsider is able to prove themselves better than someone else (including a group), their honour is upheld or regained until challenged once more.

Shake It Off: Your character can ignore a single -1 step penalty for one round whenever their honour is threatened or they seek to prove their honour. Only one step penalty can be ignored per scene.

THE NOBLE WARRIOR

One's lineage is more than a recount of a person's history; it is a token of those who forged the values, skills, and beliefs of those standing today. Everyone becomes someone else's ancestor. Embracing a life of tradition and duty is seen as the path to salvation for the Noble Warrior, regardless of what that might be and how they came to walk it.

As the One Land's soil is drenched in blood, many who master the sword or the gun or both fall into this role. It is not just that you believe violence is an answer, it is how you choose to enact that violence that defines you and brings honour to your ancestors whose weapon you might carry or seek to replicate. Failure is not an option in violent times because it can only result in your death.

Code of Honour: Be they every ancestor or one in particular, the Noble Warrior looks to honour them and bring a smile to their faces in the heavens. Proving themselves worthy in the eyes of their ancestors is what allows them to gain honour in return.

Raised In Tribute: Your character must choose a single resource at the beginning of the story, be it a weapon, armour, skill, or anything else connected to your ancestors. It is now your honoured resource. This resource must always be assigned to a resource slot in every scene. Whenever your character seeks to gain or defend their honour using the honoured resource, they can perform one of these three options once per scene.

- Target an additional opponent in a single complication roll without the standard step penalty
- Ignore a single +1 step bonus to any opponent's Defence
- Follow up an absolute with a second complication roll against the same opponent or another opponent within Melee distance of the first

THE DEADLY SHADOW

Every day is broken by dawn and dusk. Dawn brings the sunlight and exposes all the flaws and issues to be solved; dusk brings darkness and the means to solve them. So believes the Deadly Shadow, whose methods go unseen by those too ignorant to see them coming. Whether they are thieves taking what they think should be theirs or assassins silently doing away with anyone who gets in their way, their greatest weapon is fear.

Deception and avoidance guide their actions and their actions are swift and efficient, but it is also as important to flee when the situation is out of their hands or threatens to bring reinforcements. These skills are not just physical, for even incredible guile and a wicked tongue can achieve the same results. Some of the greatest Deadly Shadows cause witnesses to believe there are multiple instigators when it is simply the one manipulating the situation in their favour, as it always should be.

Code of Honour: Truth is in the eye of the beholder and when no one can see what actually goes on out of sight, the only truth they need know is the conclusion they make for themselves. This is the Deadly Shadow's code for it is only when the lie becomes the truth have they proven themselves worthy against foes deemed stronger by brute force. They gain honour through causing others to believe their deception.

Master of Inception: Any inception complication placed on a character within Close range cannot be removed by spending Vitality. They must always use their full description to remove this complication. This can only occur once per scene.

THE ROGUE SCHOLAR

Knowledge is the pursuit of eternity. There are many believers in the eternity of information carried down in scrolls, sculptures, architecture and any number of creations since the formation of the One Land. The study of any knowledge (as few are able to endure lives long enough to learn **everything**) is seen as both noble and elitist; it is only for those who can afford countless hours at study. Their passions eventually become dangerous possessions. Everyone wants what they have and will take it from them using any means necessary.

Regardless of their reasons for seeking out knowledge, including answers to a horrible crime or absolution for past sins, a Rogue Scholar is not helpless. Their journeys have taken them to dangerous places before and the reasons for their survival have been the reactions of others and their own sheer determination. Combine that with the dedication to train and perfect the necessary skills and you face a dangerous enemy on a mission.

Code of Honour: Rogue Scholars demand great sacrifices of themselves against the traditions of their family, sometimes leaving them banished from communities for their heresy. Answers are the lifeblood they seek, the honour to prove to everyone, including themselves, that their quest was not for a fool but for the very brave and calculating. Deciphering clues for the right answer before anyone else, or as one step on a long path to their quest's solution, brings them honour because they are expected to fail.

Armed With Facts: Your character can create a knowledge-based resource without having it link to any potentials and so long as it uses a fact from a previous scene in the story in which the character gained honour. This can only occur once per scene. At the beginning of the story, a Rogue Scholar begins with a single fact created by their Writer to explain how they came to reach the point in the first scene. Once a new fact is assigned to a resource slot, any previous facts cannot be used again.

THE INNOCENT PAWN

There are innocent lives caught between all sides of any conflict, no matter how far away the battlefield lies. Violence unleashes death and death acts indiscriminately in times of war. Yet sometimes innocence lost rallies one event, one rising hero, capable of inciting great change for any side. Sometimes they become the beacon for peace or the rallying cry for one final victory. The unfortunate and ordinary life that once was can lead to great stories.

The Innocent Pawn was a nobody before a great event took them on a new path, one leading them away from the ordinary lives threatening them every day. Something about the open road and the dangers of adventure speaks to them, even if it is desperation for themselves or another. Their determination drives them forward every day as they struggle to make a difference.

Code of Honour: Growing up disregarded as an individual or as a member of an unconsidered community weighs on the Innocent Pawn and they refuse to let social norms hold them down. Their honour comes from showing their value despite any formal training or experience through flexibility and ingenuity. If they can do what someone else more qualified did, their point is made.

Against All Odds: Luck favours the innocent and their persistence despite the mounting odds. Whenever you roll an absolute, you gain a +1 shift bonus that can be applied to any complication roll of your choice until the end of the scene.

THE VENGEFUL SPIRIT

Some crimes never offend the honour of a warlord or a gang leader with an army of loyal killers at their side. Lives are taken, properties burned, honour stripped by powerful figures every day and some refuse to lie down and let them go unanswered. Someone must answer for these crimes and only blood washes away blood.

The role of the Vengeful Spirit runs parallel to the Unstoppable Hunter except their quarry was chosen by destiny rather than compensation. All manner of sacrifices are made and numerous promises and bones are broken to find retribution. They temporarily unite in a common cause with others against the same foe, a tolerated alliance so long as no one gets in their way.

Code of Honour: Memories of victims drive the Vengeful Spirit every day. However their wishes can be honoured and their deaths avenged, honour is gained whenever those victims' souls get closer and closer to their final rest where they can sleep eternal knowing the cause of their pain or demise has been punished.

Never Fall: If a Vengeful Spirit's goal in a scene brings them honour and is suddenly at risk of failing to reach that goal, they are able to press on when others would fold. Your character can gain an additional use of their signature. This can only be done once per scene.

THE TRUE BELIEVER

Faith is a powerful ally and a harsh mistress. There is so little of it in the One Land that it is often mocked as foolish schoolyard riddles, and the Spirits who created them are spoken in name only without any understanding of their teachings. The True Believer views the world, no matter its state of affairs, as evidence, not a myth. Whether they are part of a following or the lone black sheep with their eye to the heavens, there is no shaking them from their faith.

With so few devotees available to spread gospel, teaching the lost in a large world, all True Believers undergo a quest with limited guidance other than a few scant passages, a vision, even a hunch to head north and see where their calling takes them. Signs translate indecisive moments and there are many clues if one simply knows how to interpret them. There is no right or wrong, there is only belief.

Code of Honour: Everything is about the message of their belief and such beliefs come in many forms. Defending an insult to a belief, proving its existence or its plausibility, and finding links between the obscure and the obvious are all ways a True Believer can gain honour in such a dishonourable world.

A Mission of Great Importance: Whenever your character's honour is threatened, you can choose a complication placed on you (other than damage) and automatically use a detail to remove it without spending Vitality. This can only occur once per scene.

As a bounty hunter, Mauser is perfectly suited to play the role of the Unstoppable Hunter and gains the Refuse to Fail perk. Equally built to fit a cat burglar is the Deadly Shadow role, which

Chelsea selects for her character, granting Darius the Master of Inception perk. Nick was considering the same role but starts to find himself drawn to Lotus as a Noble Warrior in her own right and make her bladed fans an honoured resource through the Raised in Tribute perk – there is no equal to Lotus and her deadly fans in all the One Land!

Finally, Kate has begun to reconsider her original idea for Xai after looking over the roles.

Something about the True Believer speaks to her and playing a devout character who was tossed from her homeland because of those beliefs may have contradicted the edicts of her warlord make this character far more interesting to play. This choice grants Xai a perk called

A Mission of Great Importance.

Stage 4: Have They Tapped Into Their Qi?

Certain characters in the One Land have tapped into their inner **qi** and unlocked extraordinary talents and abilities. It is said all those created by the Elemental Spirits possess an untapped qi waiting to be discovered. Perhaps your character can create fire, become invisible, have incredible speed, or exhibit the agility of a cat. Tapping into one's qi grants characters access to a **qi power** to do those very things once thought impossible. While your character's qi can be anything imaginable, there are limitations to its power you must consider.

Qi grants a character a single enhancement or supernatural ability.

While there's no limit to how you can apply it during the game, it must always work within the confines of the qi's core. For example, if your character's qi allows her to create fire and you want to light a candle, that fits within your qi's core. However, should you wish to drain the heat from a person, that would not work as your qi creates fire; it does not control temperature nor does it remove something.

All qi comes from within. This means whatever your character's qi does effortlessly, it must originate and extend outwards from your character. All qi powers have a default maximum range of Melee and this can be increased by permanently spending Vitality. More information on range and improving characters appears later in this book.

Using qi allows you to frame your descriptions and avoid typical

details required by all other characters. All qi powers continuously unlock possibilities otherwise unavailable to other characters. For example, a character that can mimic the appearance of others can simply change their face to look like someone's superior and gain entry without question, whereas anyone else would have to find a way to deceive the guards using make-up, voice mimicry, and other tactics.

You can assign your qi power to a resource slot to gain a step or damage bonus. Even if you do not assign it to a resource slot, your qi power remains applicable to any description.

A qi power cannot prevent a complication roll. It can, however, block certain complications from coming into play. For example, a character with skin as hard as stone can still be shot at by an opponent but they cannot be damaged in such a way. This can be overruled by other qi powers and there are always other ways to overcome a qi power. If a qi power could allow a character to be immune to damage, specify what kind of damage. Qi warriors able to resist a barrage of gunfire are still vulnerable to psychic attacks.



Qi:

(pronounced "chi")
A creature's inner spirit augmented by the radiation from the Wastes. It is the source of all qi powers.

Untapped Characters

Not all have accessed their true qi and you may be one of them. If you wish to create a lead character without a qi power, you may choose an additional perk from your homeland.

Qi Powers In A World Of Wire-fu

It is important to remember a qi power is not required to run up the side of a wall or balance on the branch of a fig tree. Those actions equated to the cinematic trappings of wushu/martial arts films mimicked in the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** are not gained from qi powers; they are possible to all characters, including extras should you wish it. Use your qi power to do something uniquely magnificent, deadly, or beautiful.

Narrative First

While there is opportunity to have your qi powers provide mechanical benefits during the story, their primary purpose is to provide a narrative tool in how you present your descriptions, visualize your character, and tackle problems. If a qi warrior can fly, she need no longer concern herself with scaling the side of a building or falling from great heights just as another who can harden their skin to iron should be concerned about getting shot in the chest. Qi powers are a way to bring your character to life and force opponents to find ways around the benefits of these incredible abilities.

While the leads' qi powers were determined at the very beginning of the creation process, three of the Writers have now defined them further (save for Fraser, who has chosen to portray an untapped character). Darius' power of invisibility meets all criteria for a qi power but Chelsea likes the idea of her character appearing like a wisp of fog when applied. Lotus' fighting ability hinges on using her telekinesis on those deadly bladed fans so that she barely need move in combat. And Xai's power to create ice is used to summon an endless supply of weapons but Kate also envisions her character sliding around on ice chutes like a certain mutant character from her favourite comic book series.

Stage 5: What Are Their Potentials?

In the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game**, there is no failure. There is no success. There are only complications, efforts made by other characters (or the Director) to make future descriptions harder, restricted, or bring a character's impact in the story to an end. All characters face conflicts over the course of the story where complications are a real possibility. Even attempting to place a complication on an opponent leaves a person vulnerable to one of their own. When a complication roll is triggered, Writers must roll dice to determine possible complications and use potentials to determine what dice to roll, how to resist complications attempted against them, and how many actions are available to describe these complications.

Potentials

A **potential** is a wide-ranging, yet also specific, aspect of a character that defines them above all else. The exact name of a potential is entirely up to its creator; it can be a brief description, a single adjective, or a personal mantra. The choice is up to you and what you feel best describes your character. Recommendations for establishing new potentials are provided later in this section.

Each potential provides three facets to define characters and how they complete their role in the story as well as complicate their enemies: a dice value, a Defence, and a maximum number of details. For example, a potential of d10 also has a Defence of 7 and a maximum of 4 details unless they are modified by step bonuses or penalties. Potentials are commonly referenced only by their dice value unless otherwise specific.

All potentials are measured in **steps** and range from a 4-sided die (d4) up to a 12-sided die (d12). There are two kinds of **step modifiers** adjusting this based on the exact moment in a story:



Potential:

A wide-ranging, yet also specific, aspect of a character that defines them above all else. Each potential provide a character their **dice values** for complication rolls, their **Defence**, and the maximum number of **details** they can provide in a description.



Step Modifier:

Increase/decrease the dice value to the next level, or gain +/-2 to Defence, or apply one more/less details.

a **step bonus** allows you to treat a potential as if it were a number of steps higher based on the number associated with the bonus; a **step penalty** forces you to treat it as if it were a number of steps lower. They can also go above or beyond, so if you drop one step below a d4, you have to roll d4-1, if you rise one step above a d12, you roll d12+1, and so forth.

POTENTIALS & STEPS

POTENTIAL	DEFENCE	DETAILS
d4 or less	1	1
d6	3	2
d8	5	3
d10	7	4
d12 or higher	9	5

A **shift bonus** simply allows you the **option** to increase the result of a dice roll by that amount; they have no effect on Defence or details. For example, a +1 shift bonus allows you to add to the total value rolled. If you rolled a 5 and added this bonus, you would end up with a result of 6. Shift bonuses are optional in any complication roll; you are not required to use them with every roll. Shift bonuses can be combined when applicable.



Shift Bonus:

An optional shift granted by certain potentials or perks.

Lead characters start with 2 potentials: one at d8 and one at d6. As the story progresses, you have the opportunity to increase these through roleplaying, participation, and utilizing complications during play.

Major characters have either 3 potentials (one at d8 and two at d6) or 2 potentials (one at d10 and one at d6). These potentials can increase and gain shift bonuses based on their total Vitality, which is explained later in this book.

Supporting characters have only 2 potentials, both listed at d6. As the story progresses, you have the opportunity to increase these for Writer-controlled supporting characters, as you can with lead characters. These potentials can increase and gain shift bonuses based on their total Vitality, which is explained later in this book.

Extras have only a single potential listed at a d6.



Base Step:

If a character does not have an appropriate potential to apply to their description, they default to a d4.

Base Step

Whenever all of a character's potentials are not applicable, you default to using the **base step** of d4. A potential cannot be reduced to its base step without suffering from a step penalty.

OPTIONAL IDEA: HEROIC & GRITTY

Should your group wish to play a far more heroic game or one with a greater emphasis on qi powers and wire-fu, allow lead characters to start with three potentials: one at d8 and the other two at d6.

For a grittier, harsher game emphasizing the post-apocalyptic aspects of the One Land, allow lead characters to start with both potentials at only d6s.

COMMON STEP MODIFIERS

MODIFIER	STEP MODIFIER	SPECIAL NOTES
Aid Another Character *	+1 steps	Requires a full description from the aiding character
Attacking Multiple Targets	-1 steps for every additional target beyond the 1st	Does not apply to extras if they act as a group but does apply when targeting more than one group
Cover/ Concealment	+1 steps for light concealment/partial cover, +2 steps for heavy concealment/full cover	A character must use a detail to access this step modifier
Concentrating/ Preparing	+1 steps per description to a maximum of +3 steps	The character must announce what they are preparing to roll for; all descriptions must be consecutive; using a detail for anything else breaks concentration & the character loses this bonus
Long Range	-1 steps for every additional range category beyond a resource's maximum range	For more information on Range, see page 71.

Common Step Modifiers

Certain events or situations allow characters to raise their die's step or force it to drop. The above chart provides the most common step modifiers available. Certain modifiers require a full description to apply and are marked with an asterisk (*).

Details and Step Modifiers: A step modifier can only be used to increase the maximum number of details in a scene if a qi power is applied. For example, a character with incredible speed can use a step modifier to increase their d10 potential to 5 details.

Defences

You will not be the only one rolling dice, as the Director's characters attempt to achieve their own ends and thwart your efforts during the course of the story. When this happens, Defences are used to determine what result a potential must roll against to be considered effective.

Defences are always listed as odd numbers and range from 1 (automatic) to 11 (next to impossible). Whenever the Director rolls dice against your character, choose an appropriate potential's Defence. If you do not have one that applies, then the Defence defaults to the base step of 1 and any die roll is simply attempting to discern which character sets the complication.



Defence always change by increments of 2 in order to have all ties result in odd numbers, thereby allowing the target to narrowly avoid an unwanted complication.

Creating Potentials

Each potential is customized by the player to help provide a visual identity, personality traits, and other possible considerations for the character. There are no predetermined potentials; each player is free to create their own potentials to suit their desired character and style. When determining potentials for a character, regardless of type, think of them as descriptors highlighting what makes this character unique, how they express themselves, interact with the world, judge their moral compass, even their professional occupations. There is no limit to what a potential can be, and players are encouraged to ensure their choice of potentials is useful in many situations, be they physical, mental, or social situations.

Below are five questions for players to consider when creating potentials for their characters. For each potential available, answer one of these questions. Choose whichever questions best represent the concept you have for the character. You may also use these for new potentials unlocked as the story progresses.

WHAT IS THEIR REPUTATION?
WHAT IS A LINE THEY WILL NOT CROSS?
WHAT IS THEIR FIGHTING STYLE/CORE BELIEF?
HOW HAVE THEY SURVIVED IN THE ONE LAND?
HOW DO THEY SOLVE PROBLEMS?

Brendan starts by asking each Writer to create their first potential and assign it a d8. "Think of this as the most unique part of your character, how others you've encountered view your characters. What is your reputation and your approach to getting things done?"

Fraser writes down *No One Gets In My Way* for Mauser's no-nonsense first potential. Chelsea puts *Neither Seen Nor Heard* for her stealthy character as Kate ponders for a moment and writes *You Wouldn't Like Me When I'm Angry* as her first potential for the rebellious Xai. Nick looks at what everyone else wrote and chooses *Deadly* for his telekinetic assassin.

"Now," Brendan continues, "what is a potential that would describe how you survive in the One Land? When the going gets tough and there's a line drawn in the sand, what guides your character's morales? Assign that one a d6."

Fraser reflects on his bounty hunter and decides he wants Mauser to be a true lawman at heart, even though he deals with warlords and other scum on a daily basis. He writes down *Justice For All*. Chelsea likes the idea of a thief who revels in discovering people's dirty laundry and seeks to use that information to make things right. She goes with *There Are No Secrets* for her second potential. Nick wants to play an assassin who is loyal to those she trusts (when she trusts people) and writes down *Never Forget My Friends*. Kate likes this idea of seeking her own form of justice and uses this potential as a means to demonstrate her belief in the teachings of Balance, so she writes down *There Must Be Balance*.

CREATING CHARACTERS

III

Building Potentials

Simply choosing a potential as the source of a description is not enough to provide maximum effort in a complication roll. Characters must apply their maximum number of details in order to gain their maximum dice value (not including step modifiers); if they are unable to, they can only use the step value of the number of details they did apply. This is referred to as **building a potential**. Once they reach their key detail, they must roll the dice built with their description. For instance, if a character with a d8 potential is only able to contribute 2 details to a description before reaching their key detail, the maximum dice they can roll is a d6. If they can reach their full potential of d8 (meaning 3 details), then they can roll a d8.



To roll your full dice value, you must apply the maximum number of details to your description.

This does not apply to Defence.

Characters with an ongoing step penalty applied to a potential are not limited to how far they can build their potential unless that step penalty specifically limits their maximum details and nothing else.

A helpful reference to keep tracking of how details are currently built into a descriptions, players can use poker chips or tokens to note the number of details applied to a description.

Optional Rule: Splitting Potentials

Characters can make multiple complication rolls on a turn by using an optional technique known as **splitting potentials**. Doing so requires building up a potential during the course of a description, as normal, until the character wishes to roll dice, even if they have not reached their maximum details. Any remaining details after the roll can then be played out immediately until the character's chosen potential has reached its maximum details. This can include multiple complication rolls in a single description.

Splitting your potential allows characters to make complex descriptions but with a greater risk of becoming ineffective. Players must announce they are splitting their potential at the start of their turn. Complications applied during the middle of a description must continue to factor into the remaining details of the description. Only dice values can be split; this technique cannot be applied to Defence and details.

When using this optional rule, ignore the standard step penalty for attacking multiple opponents.

Darius needs to get past the stone guardians blocking the clearest path to her true nemesis in the fight, so she decides to split her Neither Seen Nor Heard d8 potential. Using the first two details to approach the first guardians and lash out at it, she can roll a d6 against it. Immediately afterwards, Darius uses the last detail to become invisible with her qi power.



Fleshing Out Your Fight Scenes With Potentials

It is easy to forget the strength of your enemy when you are only concentrating on yourself. Your opponents block, parry, dodge, and rebuke up until a point but your actions are never completely effective. Every offensive strike faces a defensive move, an important lesson many warriors forget until they lay on the ground about to take in their last breath.

When building your potentials, use your details to showcase how your character is working up to the key detail. This includes having opponents block your strikes, dodge bullets, even take a few hits without any serious burden or harm. Only when you reach your key detail are dice rolled but that does not mean the rest of your description need be mundane. Keep the whole description exciting and dynamic as you build your potential.

Lotus uses her Deadly d8 potential (with 3 details) for the next description in a fight with a warmech outside the gates of Rust. "Leaping up in the air, Lotus lands on top of the warmech's head. Holding her hands outwards, she uses her telekinesis to grab hold of the machine by both hands before she leaps in front of the thing. Her body spins like a top and this causes the warmech to also spin around wildly as Lotus heaves the rotating automaton over her head and slams it down on the ground in front of her. Then when it lies on its back and

struggles to get back up, she cries out with this ferocity to unleash the full power of her qi. An explosion of telekinetic energy is unleashed against the warmech, slamming against its metal shell to crack it open and break the damn thing apart."

The key detail in this description is the telekinetic explosion designed to damage the warmech, which triggers a complication roll. The previous two details were flourishes leading up to the key detail to help Lotus look as deadly as Nick always intended.



Warmechs are one of the most prized artefacts coming out of Rust, even if the Council of Iron tries to clean them all to themselves.

Stage 6: What Are Their Motivations, Connections, Hindrances, and Signatures?

Everyone is driven by motivations pushing them forward against the slicing winds of the Wastes and the oppressive regimes of the warlords, but the harsh reality of life in the One Land creates hindrances. Those few on the open road with the luxury of camaraderie establish connections with their fellow qi warriors, even if they risk more hindrances. Some also have the option to create signatures, infamous aspects, reactions, or fighting stances repeatedly used throughout the course of their story.

All characters have at least one motivation or connection and one hindrance. They can expand themselves with further motivations and connections so long as they balance them out by learning to cope with more hindrances. Writer-controlled supporting characters are not required to have motivations or connections, yet doing so increases their impact in the story by gaining bonus Vitality at the end of every scene. The maximum number of motivations and connections allowed is based on the number of additional lead characters in the group, aside from the player's.

Director-controlled supporting characters and extra can have motivations, connections, hindrances, and signatures in their characters, but never gain any mechanical benefits or rewards for doing so. These are purely narrative.

Playing with Major Characters: Unlike extras and supporting characters, there is one other character type eligible to begin the story with motivations, hindrances, connections and signatures: major characters. As they are intended to play across entire stories and multiple scenes, they can grow as the plot thickens just like any lead character. The sections on Vitality and challenges contain specific information on how they are applied during the story. Signatures work exactly the same for major characters as they do with lead characters.

Motivations

A **motivation** is a personal, actionable goal for a character to achieve before the end of the story. It also drives them to complete scenes. Motivations may be directly related to the main plot or they can create subplots that Directors help weave into the central storyline. They can be major accomplishments of great strength or inner struggle as the character seeks to understand the events of the past and where they will go in the future.

Each lead and major character (and Writer-controlled supporting characters, if you choose) starts the story with at least one motivation. The more motivations you have, the greater change of gaining Vitality while showing a wider breadth of character.



Motivation:

A personal, actionable goal for a character to achieve before the end of the story. Characters gain bonus Vitality (see page 60) when they apply their motivation to a scene's goal.

Closing A Motivation: The entire purpose of a motivation is for the character to achieve closure and move forward with the lessons learned from struggling to reach their long term goals. This is known as closing a motivation and it can happen at any point and time in the story when the character's Writer and the Director agree that the motivation reached its natural conclusion. At the end of the session, the Writer is awarded Vitality.

Major Characters and Motivations: Unlike other characters, a major character gains a number of Vitality equal to the number of lead characters in the story. They are less likely to occur but are incredibly effective when they do. This reward encourages the Director to highlight a major character's motivations throughout the story to help that character gain power and impact.

Connections

A **connection** is a history between two or more characters that can play a serious impact on how those characters complete a scene's goals. Connections establish an emotional or historical bond between the characters, be they healthy or dangerous. This can include family, childhood friends, love, hatred, members of the same gang, former soldiers in a long forgotten war, even two survivors of a catastrophic disaster. Characters cannot have more than one connection with each other.

Similar to motivations, each connection must have a hindrance revealing a dark side to their bond. For example, a brother and sister could be haunted by the death of their mother by another sibling's hands. New connections can be created at any point and time at the end of a scene.

Ending A Connection: If one of the characters wishes to end a connection and no longer apply it to their character, the connection is severed and cannot be used by either character until it is restored the same way a new connection is established. This can only happen once per connection per story. Restoring a connection provides the same award as closing a motivation.

Hindrances

Hindrances are physical, mental, or emotional obstacles that threaten a character's progress and increase the effort required at various moments in the story. An old injury, a violent temper, memory loss, and a fear of heights are all examples of hindrances. Any character with a motivation or connection must also take a hindrance. For every additional motivation and connection beyond the first, a character must take on an additional hindrance. They work like motivations (a single sentence on your character notes) but can be manipulated by the Director spending challenges to create problems for your character.

A hindrance is removed when a motivation or connection is closed. Characters may continue to carry the burdens that haunt them forever, though they may creep up less often than before and never in a way that affects their efforts in the story. Someone haunted by the victims of a house fire may continue to live with such horrors even after their deaths have been avenged.



Connection:

A history between two or more characters that can play a serious impact on how those characters complete a scene's goals. Characters gain bonus Vitality (see page 60) when they apply their connection to a scene's goal.



Hindrance:

A physical, mental, or emotional obstacles that threaten a character's progress and increase the effort required at various moments in the story.

Directors can spend **challenges** (see page 72) to invoke a character's hindrance in a scene.

Kate wants to spend time addressing Xai's past and how her expulsion from Khar'tep, by the warlord himself, eats at her and is an issue she uses to make her strong enough to challenge Khar upon her return. She writes down Conquer My Fears as Xai's motivation. For a hindrance, Xai will be revealed to be Reckless, a woman driven by her barbarian temper.

Fraser decides to have Mauser on a contract when the story begins and hopes to use that towards these next few sessions. Finish The Job is the bounty hunter's motivation and involves bringing a wanted fugitive called Longshanks back to Yung Zhi. A hindrance called Obsessive balances out Mauser's motivation as this lead has been known to miss out on important facts when he is hot on the trail.

Lotus gains the **Avenge My Master** motivation. As a young apprentice to a lieutenant of Monsoon, her master was slain by a coward with a rifle named Longshanks. Since then, she has never been able to complete her training as a samurai and instead fell into an assassin's life. What she wouldn't give to get Longshanks' throat in her hand. For a hindrance, Nick chooses **Haunted By That Night** to represent how deep the terrible memories have burrowed into her heart.

Chelsea is not sure on a motivation for Darius just yet, but she likes the idea of having a connection with another lead character. So she and Fraser create one: **You Scratch My Back** establishes a convenient arrangement between the bounty hunter and the thief. Darius has helped out Mauser with information and access to private areas in the past while Mauser has used his influence and credibility to get the thief out of trouble here and there. Unfortunately, their hindrance is an **Opposite View Of The Law**. They often stand on the wrong side of the same issue and this will one day threaten to break this arrangement.

Major Characters and Hindrances: Because they are the main adversaries of the lead characters, a major character's hindrance creates a different effect. All major character hindrances are designed to provide some form of penalty, complication, or other effect to weaken their power in the scene or force them to respond in a particular way. Doing so allows the lead characters to tap into their hindrances and exploit them to gain an edge. Each hindrance is unique to the major characters, as it is with leads, and so is their effect.

Signatures

An esteemed martial artist enters an animal stance as she prepares to battle a mortal enemy; an enraged samurai enters a state of absolute anger when confronted with the memory of his murdered wife and child; doves flap into view around our hero as they prepare to enter a dangerous scene. These are all examples of **signatures** in action, key moments that define and embolden a character in the story.

Lead and and major characters have the option of providing a signature. If they do, the signature can be whatever they desire so long as it can either be triggered by themselves, an outcome, or by the actions of another character. No more than once per session, a triggered signature allows a character to temporarily unlock greater power in the current scene. A signature is a tool to portray a character from a particular angle and can be presented as a means of the character visually or emotionally expressing themselves at key moments in the story.

Whenever a character's signature is triggered, they gain Vitality to help them cope with their wounds or rise up and become a stronger character in the story. See the section on Vitality for more details.

Only two Writers have an idea for their signatures; the other two want to see how their lead characters play out before settling on anything and Brendan abides. Mauser's signature kicks in when everything goes slow motion and he steps out from hiding or into a room and draws his guns right in the line of fire. Darius's signature takes effect once per scene when it looks like the thief has been killed or defeated and has instead tricked everyone to suddenly strike back against his opponent.



Signature:

A repeatable moment in a character's story where they can rise up and get back into the fight. Once per session, a character can use their signature to gain Vitality (see next page).

Stage 7: What Is Their Vitality?

Every character who calls our world home has limitations of physical and mental endurance, as it is with yours. Traversing across the rugged hell scape that is the Wastes, riddled with gunshot wounds, pounded mercilessly from a barrage of powerful punches and kicks to the chest, pushing their abilities to the max, all of it eventually catches up with everyone.

Vitality is used to track these limits until a character either completes a scene or falls in defeat. It is used to track how long your character can endure and how often they can push the boundaries of their qi powers and adapt to intense moments of conflict in the game. When a character reaches 0 Vitality, they are removed from the scene or the story in an appropriate manner decided on by the character that put them there; this includes a character's unconsciousness or death.

Vitality is more than a character's lifeforce, energy level, or endurance. It is a measurement of their impact on the story and how engaging they are as a character. New characters in any story enter with their role firmly in hand, but only through the course of the story is their worth proven. Dull characters fade into the background or are killed off; engaging characters hold a place in the audience's heart and become people of greater purpose and interest to an audience. That is what Vitality brings to the story.



Vitality:

A measurement of a character's endurance in the story & how important they are to the One Land. When a character or group reaches 0 Vitality, they are written out of the scene or story by the character who put them there.

For Writers, how much Vitality you start with depends on the type of character you create:

Lead characters base their starting Vitality on the number of lead characters in the story. Writers can distribute these as group totals or break them out as described below.

- If there is only one lead character, they start with 20 Vitality.
- For 2-3 lead characters, they start with 16 Vitality each.
- For 4 lead characters, they start with 12 Vitality each.
- For 5 or more lead characters, they start with 10 Vitality each.

Major characters begin with a predetermined amount of Vitality, at least 15, based on their proposed impact on the story. Higher Vitality grants these characters stronger potentials, qi powers, and more, as explained later in **Powerful Characters** on page 75.

Supporting characters begin with 7 Vitality when created and controlled by a Writer, while those from Directors can have far more to suit the needs of the story. Higher Vitality grants these characters stronger potentials, qi powers, and more, as explained later in this section.

Extras begin with 3 Vitality. In a group, they have a single Vitality score equal to 3x the number of individuals in the group. For example, a group of 3 extras begins or enters a scene with 9 Vitality.

When damage is dished out, it reduces the affected character's Vitality by that amount. Vitality can also be used to alter various outcomes during play by sacrificing additional Vitality. Only 1 Vitality can be spent at a time for any single option but there is no limit to how much Vitality can be spent over the course of a round. **Extras cannot spend Vitality to gain these benefits.**

Complicating Groups: Placing a complication on a group of extras requires spending 1 Vitality. Individual extras can be affected as normal without spending Vitality.

Complication Re-Roll: By exerting extra energy, characters can attempt to adjust their efforts at the last moment for a better (or possibly worse) result. By spending 1 Vitality, a character can re-roll a complication roll and must accept the new result. Additional re-rolls cost an additional +1 Vitality per use in a scene.


Interrupt: A character who has yet to act in the current round can spend 1 Vitality to cut in line. The player can choose whether they want to **interrupt** before another player is chosen or after a character's description or outcome is provided. Once they have interrupted, their turn is over for the round.

Penalize: Placing a penalty complication on another character requires spending 1 Vitality.

Retaliate: Immediately following a complication roll, regardless of its success or failure, a character can spend 1 Vitality to make a complication roll against the opposing character that just completed a complication roll against them. This is known as **retaliating**. Characters reduced to 1 Vitality cannot retaliate.

Remove a Complication: A character can spend 1 Vitality to remove a complication with one detail instead of a full description.

Shift: Characters can spend 1 Vitality to increase or decrease the result of a die roll (either one they rolled or one rolled against them) by 1. This is called a **shift**. If a character rolls an 8 on their complication roll, their opponent can spend 1 Vitality to reduce it to a 7 and choose their own complication. In turn, the other character involved in the complication roll can also shift the result back to an 8, but both characters can only shift the result once. Rolling an absolute prevents another character from shifting the result.

—  —
You can spend Vitality for the following benefits:
 Complicate groups
 Re-roll dice
 Interrupt
 Penalize
 Retaliate
 Remove a complication with 1 detail
 Shift

Mauser fires off a volley of shots from both six-shooters against a Monsoon commander and rolls a 6 on his complication roll – it's effective. But the general decides it best if she chooses the complication and spend 1 of her Vitality to shift it down to a 5. Even though he is already down to 7 Vitality in this fight, Mauser risks it and spends one of his own to bring the complication roll back up to a 6.

With his legs tied up from the ninja's whip, Darius needs to remove this complication and get back into the fight. By spending 1 Vitality, he can use a single detail to remove the whip by shooting the whip with his pistol and the remainder of his description is used to leap back onto his feet and deliver a barrel roll double punch into the ninja's chest.

Surrounded by a group of 4 extras simply frothing at the mouth to see her cooking on their fires tonight, Xai wants to create a sheet of ice underneath their feet and trip them all up. Because they are a group of extras, she must spend 1 Vitality to affect all of them with a single complication roll.

Regaining Vitality

When you complete a scene, all surviving characters receive Vitality based on their performance in the previous scene. This only applies to Writer-controlled characters; the Director applies a different technique for advancing major supporting characters during the course of the story.

Scene Goals: All characters receive +1 Vitality for every scene goal completed. If a character had a personal scene goal not related to the other lead characters in the scene, they receive another +1 Vitality. Failing to complete individual scene goals does not affect Vitality gain for completing scene goals as a group.

Motivations & Connections: All characters gain +1 Vitality if at least one motivation or connection were applied to at least one of the scene's goals. This refers to any character's motivations and connections offering something of value, direction, and purpose to accomplish at least one of the scene's goals. They must have been actively described in the scene or based on how the story has progressed to date. A connection does not need apply to both characters. If the history behind a motivation or connection has not been introduced to the story, the character cannot gain Vitality.

Closing Motivations: If a character closes a motivation or restores a connection during the course of the story, they gain +3 Vitality. The character can now replace it with a new motivation, do so at a later time, or leave it blank for the remainder of the story.

Chapter Goals: For those stories running over multiple sessions, the Director works with the Writers to create chapter goals. For every successfully completed chapter goal, all characters receive +1 Vitality at the end of the session. Information on setting chapter goals can be found in **Bringing It All Together** on page 65.

Signatures: Any character who triggered their signature in a session immediately gains Vitality equal to half of their starting Vitality. This can only be gained once per session, though characters are always encouraged to incorporate their signatures into descriptions throughout the story.

Bonus Vitality: At the end of every scene, the Writers assign a number of bonus Vitality equal to the total number of challenges remaining at the end of the scene. These can be awarded to each of the Writers' characters as they see fit. Challenges are explained on page 72.

If a scene did not directly put the lead characters in significant harm's way or they just completed a dialogue scene, these bonus Vitality are not available. This indicates enough danger that damage was caused directly to the lead characters during the scene, such as in a fight scene.



**Gain
Vitality at
the end of
a scene:**

Meet scene
goals

Use
motivations &
connections

Close
motivations

Chapter goals

Bonus Vitality

THE PASSAGE OF TIME

There will be times where a significant period of time passes between scenes and some or all of the lead characters will have low Vitality. At the Director's discretion and no more than once per session, any lead characters with less than 10 Vitality can gain enough back to make them equal to the next lowest number of Vitality (so long as that amount is over 10) minus the number of lead characters in the story. This means if two out of four leads have less than 10 Vitality while the others have at least 15, those first two can have their Vitality increased to 11 (15-4=11).

Major Characters and Vitality

There are two variants when it comes to handling major characters's Vitality in a story: motivations/connections and signatures. Whenever a major character hits their motivation or connection in a scene, they gain an amount of Vitality equal to the number of lead characters currently in the story. A major character's signature provides them with 1/4 of their original Vitality at the start of the story.

First Aid

Sometimes a Writer describes their character pulling themselves aside during a wicked skirmish to bandage a horrible wound and cope with a life threatening injury. Other descriptions may see a medically trained character offering first aid to a comrade. In either case, whenever a character's description is used to either regain Vitality or deal with a complication, use one of the following effects.

Healing Vitality: A character can use their description to actively treat any injuries or replenish their energy or that of another character. If a character does so on herself, she regains 3 Vitality. If a character does so for another character, that character gains 4 Vitality. Healing any character requires a full description and can only be done once per character per scene. This cannot be used to increase a character's Vitality higher than it was at the start of the scene.


Starting A New Scene From 0 Vitality: Any character allowed to continue participating in a story after she's reduced to 0 Vitality begins the next scene with 3 Vitality.

Using Vitality To Improve Characters

It is a mistake to believe the power you possess at this point is fixed. There is more within you, buried deep underneath doubt and inexperience. Your time within the One Land and the choices you make guide you on a path to learn the true meaning of your purpose, your motivations, even your shortcomings. As your impact within the story increases, so too does your power.

During the progression of your story, you may spend Vitality to gain permanent increases to your potentials and harness your qi power. Balancing the need to keep your characters alive and thriving within a scene while also preparing them for the dangerous road ahead by improving on their abilities, qi powers, and potentials will decide exactly how these characters impact the story. Too much Vitality and your character is able to survive their struggles yet remain unable to change them; too many improvements and characters are at risk of suddenly finding themselves dead at their opponent's feet.

The following improvements can be gained by spending Vitality between scenes. If a Writer wishes to spend additional Vitality before the start of a character's first scene, they may do so using the same costs provided.

—  —

You can spend Vitality to improve your character:

- Increase potentials
- Gain a shift bonus
- Gain a perk
- Gain a potential
- Additional resources
- Increase your qi power

Step Up Potentials: By spending 5 Vitality, a single potential is permanently increased by +1 step. This can only be done once per session.

Bonus Potentials: By spending 2 Vitality, gain a +1 shift bonus on a single potential of your choice. Only one potential can have a shift bonus per character. The character can choose to apply the shift bonus to a complication roll or ignore it. This shift bonus can still apply if the potential is reduced to base dice.

New Perk: By spending 3 Vitality, create a new perk for your character. It costs +2 Vitality for every additional perk afterwards.

New Potential: Gain a new potential starting at d6/3/2 by spending 3 Vitality. It costs +3 Vitality for every additional potential afterwards. For example, a second potential would cost 6 Vitality, a third would cost 9 Vitality, and so on. This can only be done once per session.

Additional Resources: Gain an additional resource slot by spending 2 Vitality.

Harness Your Qi Power: By spending 5 Vitality, gain a permanent alteration to your qi power. This can only be done once per session.

- **Stronger:** Gain an additional +1 step bonus when using the qi power in a resource slot, but this step bonus can only be applied to either complication rolls, Defence, or bonus details when used in an ongoing description.
- **Further:** You can increase the maximum range of their qi power to the next category, such as Melee to Close. Qi powers can never reach the Impossible range.
- **Harder:** Double your damage bonus.
- **Wider:** Target one additional character using your qi power without any step penalties.

Preferring to have a greater chance of controlling complications, Mauser and Lotus both spend 2 Vitality to gain a +1 shift bonus to their strongest potentials. Darius wants to rely on a lot of skill and weaponry should the going get tough and spend 2 Vitality to start the story off with an additional resource slot. Xai does not spend any to improve her character.

As the story begins, Mauser, Darius, and Lotus have 10 Vitality each while Xai has 12.

Spotlights

With several individual motivations, hindrances, and connections involved in a single story, each lead character could benefit from having a scene dedicated solely to addressing their past, as well as personal side quests intended to help close a motivation or restore a connection. These scenes are known as **spotlights** and the lead character for a spotlight can receive additional Vitality equal to the number of additional lead characters in the story. At the end of the scene, the lead character must remove Vitality equal to the amount gained unless they met the spotlight's primary scene goal. If the Director determines the spotlight's scene goals do not place the lead character in harm's way, this Vitality bonus can be waived.

To qualify for this Vitality bonus, the lead character must be the only lead character involved in the scene.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now we come down to the crux of the game: how to play. This step covers the rules of play and how you can help the Director tell your story in the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game**. As you read this section, review what you've created for your character thus far and make any adaptations you feel necessary to make your character work using the mechanics presented here.

Chapter Goals

At the beginning of each session (or at the end of the previous session), all players should discuss and agree on a list of story goals to achieve. These goals are targets to help the characters move the story forward as required by the current phase. These are known as **chapter goals**. They can be assigned to achieve every session or players can decide to divide these chapter goals into multiple sessions to suit their own style of play. Each chapter goal completed during the story earns each Writer-controlled character +1 Vitality at the end of the session.

Think of chapter goals as the checklist for reaching the end of the story's current phase. These are the key moments all players feel are needed to move from the beginning phase to the middle phase to the conclusion phase, though reaching all chapter goals are not required to move onto the next phase. If the players feel as if they have enough to move forward, do so. Reaching chapter goals allows the players to reward their characters for following a plan of action and learning from their efforts.

During play, the story may head off in a new direction for numerous reasons. The enemy's tactics may reveal an interesting new twist to explore, exploring a new City may become more appealing to the players, or the current session may have to be cut short for personal reasons. Players are encouraged to switch out chapter goals between scenes as the story unfolds.


Scenes

All stories are broken down into scenes. A **scene** is a particular moment in the story (not necessarily told in chronological order) played out by Writers and the Director. A scene can last any length of time and ends when the goal of the scene is completed or the goal is now firmly out of reach. There are three key questions to ask when creating a scene.

What is the goal of the scene? What are the characters trying to accomplish? When does the scene end? Different characters may have individual scenes goals. Setting these goals determines when characters can gain Vitality at the end of a scene.

Which characters are involved in the scene? Knowing who's involved in the scene helps shape the scene's goals, setting, and more.

Where does the scene take place? A scene's duration is not limited to a single location and it's also recommended to start a scene at an interesting point in the plot, as not every scene needs to focus on the characters travelling to a location.


Chapter Goals:
Plot points/story beats intended to be introduced to the story by the end of the current session. You gain additional Vitality by hitting these chapter goals.

Dialogue Scenes: Not all scenes requires the strict use of details, particularly when action is not one of the scene's goals. A **dialogue scene** is one where complication rolls are not rolled and players can simply talk back-and-forth on what happens between the characters in the scene. These are useful scenes to help new players adjust to the game or scenes where players are looking to emphasize roleplaying over dice rolling. If the Director determines a complication roll was triggered in a dialogue scene, all players revert back to applying descriptions, details, and outcomes as normal.



Dialogue Scenes:

Scenes that do not require players to apply details; the events of the scene are simply played out as a conversation at the table and no complication rolls are attempted.



The Opening Shot:

A moment at the beginning of a scene in which the Director "paints a picture" of the story as the Writers get ready to start providing descriptions.

The Opening Shot

Once these aspects have been determined by the players, the Director provides **the opening shot**, detailing the events leading up to the start of the scene and/or visuals of what characters witness as they begin the scene. More than simply a cue to start the scene, it is through the opening shot Directors can immediately incorporate key initiatives for a scene.

Brendan hits play on the soundtrack to his favourite movie and waves his hands outwards, as if to reveal his grand opening shot. "We cut from black, the roaring thunder of a far-off storm echoing well into the first long shot of a hot, dry desert. From high above the tallest plateaus, we see a trio of tornados spinning destruction to the far left and rising plumes of steam to the right. Through it all, we hear the sound of a train whistle as the camera tilts down to reveal the tiny puffs of black smoke rising up from a caravan passing through the middle of the Wastes.

"So," he continues with a smile on his face. "Who wants to go first?"

Sessions, Rounds, and Turns

Every time players gather to tell their story, this is known as a **session** and typically ranges anywhere from two to six hours at a time. When the story shall be continued another time, the session is over. Some aspects and perks, such as signatures, can only be used once per session.

When the scene begins, all Writers and the Director have moments describing what all their characters offer to the story. Once all characters have had a chance to offer a description, a **round** is completed. Certain aspects of your characters cannot be repeated until the start of a new round.

The Director starts a round by choosing a Writer to complete a turn. Players can have multiple turns in a round based on the number of characters in play; a **turn** only consists of a description for a single character at their disposal. No two characters can provide descriptions in a single turn. Once the description has been completed, the Writer chooses the next player, be they another Writer or the Director. If that person does not have any characters available in the current round, they must choose someone else instead.

Turns work best in the following order.

1. THE CHARACTER IS CHOSEN TO TAKE THEIR TURN BY THEIR PLAYER.
2. THE CHARACTER ANNOUNCES THE SELECTED POTENTIAL AND DETERMINES HOW MANY DETAILS ARE ALLOWED IN THEIR DESCRIPTION.
3. THE CHARACTER PROVIDES A DESCRIPTION AND BUILDS THEIR POTENTIAL.
4. THE DIRECTOR DETERMINES IF THERE ARE ANY STEP MODIFIERS AND TRIGGERS, INCLUDING A COMPLICATION ROLL. IF SO, IT IS PLAYED OUT ACCORDINGLY AND USED TO DETERMINE AN OUTCOME.
5. IF THE CURRENT PLAYER IS A WRITER, THE DIRECTOR PROVIDES AN OUTCOME. IF THE CURRENT PLAYER IS THE DIRECTOR, ANOTHER WRITER IS CHOSEN BY THE DIRECTOR TO PROVIDE THE OUTCOME.
6. THE PLAYER CHOOSES ANOTHER PLAYER TO TAKE THEIR TURN. IF THERE ARE NO OTHER TURNS AVAILABLE, A NEW ROUND BEGINS AND THE PLAYER CAN CHOOSE ANY OTHER PLAYER, INCLUDING THEMSELVES.

Players can select a particular character for the next turn so long as that character has not yet had a turn in the current round.

Cutaways

Certain moments in the story may be so intense that the Director decides to focus on one or more characters for a brief moment. When this happens, the chosen characters break off and form their own rounds (up to 3 or 4 rounds maximum). Once these cutaway rounds are completed, those characters cannot become involved with any remaining characters until the same number of rounds have been completed in regular play.

For example, if the Director plays out a cutaway of four rounds with one lead character as they fight off a group of ninja extras, the other lead characters in the scene must be allowed to play out four rounds before the original character from the cutaway can provide a description again.

Any other characters associated with the cutaway, including outcomes or complication rolls, become part of the cutaway. All characters involved in a cutaway are part of the cutaway's turn sequence.

Resources

Unless you plan on walking into the first town in this story naked, your character needs clothes, supplies, weapons, and more. Some provide a dramatic benefit to your character. Others may be part of your identity, something that helps others know your name and why they should fear you.

A **resource** is an item, a point of interest from a character's background, a skill, or knowledge of any type that aids your character's performance during a description. Each one can be as unique as a grain of sand or as common as the cold. What makes them stand out during the game is how they can boost your chances and possibly increase the damage you can cause with your descriptions. While you may come across any number of items during the course of the story, you only have so many resources.

All characters have a set number of **resource slots**. Within each slot, you can assign a particular item, skill, qi power, or other applicable resource at the start of a new scene. You can have multiple versions of the same resource, such as a collection of throwing knives, but you must stipulate exactly how many you have. You cannot split these resources into separate resource slots. You have unlimited access to anything appropriate to your character as it pertains to the story and its availability at any given moment but only those assigned to a resource slot count as a resource. Any of the possibilities offered in this section can be assigned to a resource slot so long as they have been introduced to the story in the previous round or earlier. No details are required to assign a resource to a slot and they can be assigned at any point in the scene, though you may be required to use a detail to apply it to your next complication roll.

At the start of a new scene, any resource slots from the previous scene can be retained or cleared. This decision must be made at the start of the scene.

Each resource provides either a step bonus or a damage bonus.

Step Bonus: The resource provides a +1 step bonus to a complication roll's dice value or Defence when applied in the description.

Damage Bonus: The resource provides a **damage bonus** based on the criteria below;

- If the resource can be used one-handed, it grants a +1 damage bonus. Only if the resource can be safely and securely used with one hand does this apply, otherwise it must be two-handed. Anyone using two one-handed resources simultaneously is granted a +2 damage bonus.
- If the resource must be used two-handed to utilize properly or encompass their entire body, it grants a +2 damage bonus.
- If the resource is a firearm or qi power, it grants an additional +1 damage bonus.
- If the resource creates an explosion, it grants an additional +1d4 damage bonus per use.
- Any knowledge, background or skill-based resource can provide a +1 damage bonus per potential connected to it.



Resource:

An item, a point of interest from a character's background, a skill, or knowledge of any type that aids your character's performance during a description.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

III

You can only apply one resource at a time. The number of resource slots available depends on the character type.

Lead characters and **major characters** start with 3 resource slots.

Supporting characters have a maximum of 2 resource slots.

Extras can only have 1 resource slot, as individuals or as a group.

Props (AKA Items, Weapons, Armor)

Characters must use a detail to introduce a physical resource, known as a **prop**, into a scene if it must be actively manipulated, but not to discard it or return it to its original space. For example, you must use a detail to draw a pistol or a sword, but not to re-holster or sheathe it.

Skills & Backgrounds

Characters have the option of creating a skill or background experience as a resource instead of an item. For example, a character from Rust could have advanced training in engineering and apply it as a resource during appropriate moments. If you wish to go this route, create a skill as one of your starting resources; it grants you a +1 step bonus when applied to your description or a damage bonus equal to the number of potentials you can connect to that skill or background fact. A skill cannot be applied as a resource unless it can be connected to a character's potential or homeland.

Teachings

While many have forsaken the lessons taught by the Elemental Spirits, others have taken these teachings to heart. This allows a character to use the long forgotten (or disregarded) **teachings** of a particular Elemental Spirit (Balance, Honour, Innocence, Patience, Strife, and even Chaos) to serve as a resource. The Writer should explain an overall viewpoint based on the basic principles implied by their chosen Spirit (such as the belief that all people have rights as taught by Balance or fighting for those who cannot defend themselves as taught by Innocence) before the scene begins.

Legendary Weapons

Scattered across the One Land are weapons that have participated in epic battles and tragic events. Due to the residual energies of Chaos' taint, these **legendary weapons** are infused with their own qi and are capable of great feats of power, though they are incredibly selective of those who can unlock these powers. Writers cannot create a legendary weapon, but the Director can and may introduce them during the course of the story. Each character can only use one legendary weapon in their lifetime – they tend to get jealous.

Each legendary weapon has a motivation based on an epic moment in the One Land's history, even if the repercussions of that moment are yet to be revealed. Their power cannot be unlocked unless the legendary weapon is wielded by someone with a similar motivation. The wording of the two motivations need not match flawlessly but they must coalesce in some way to make them compatible. A person may choose to gain a new motivation as a vow to the legendary weapon so long as they choose an corresponding hindrance. Many legendary weapons find this to be an acceptable proposition, but this route requires the hopeful wielder to research the origin of the weapon's power. Some legendary weapons are known to speak telepathically or by other means, such as appearing before someone in a dream or planting emotions into the minds of those they feel are worthy of carrying them into battle.

Once a character and legendary weapon join forces, the character can spend some of their Vitality into **qi points** for the legendary weapon. The weapon's starting qi points becomes its maximum value. At the end of every scene, a legendary weapon regains half of its current qi points but cannot exceed its maximum value.

Major characters with legendary weapons default to a number of qi points equal to their starting Vitality divided by 5, rounded down.

For more information on legendary weapons, consult the writings in **Book Five: The Path Discovered** on page 117.

To help Mauser complete the scene's goal of breaking into the Wildlings' cavern and escape with Longshanks (alive), he assigns the following three resource slots. First, he records his Peacemaker 6-shooters and gives them a damage bonus of +2/+3 (the first bonus if he only uses one and the other should he start blasting with both) – this is based on +1 for the number of hands used and another +1 for being firearms. Next, he relies on his experience in tight situations to assign a resource called Close Quarter Combat and gives that a +1 step bonus. Finally, he wants to make sure there's no room for error in these caverns and writes down Straight Shooter with a +1 step bonus... just in case he has to blow out someone's head without killing Longshanks.

Triggers

Events that occur in the story warranting an predetermined reaction, such as when a Deadly Shadow waits for the guards to round the corner before making a dash for the basement window, are known as **triggers**. During the course of the story, descriptions can involve triggers for a variety of reasons. The most common trigger is the complication roll and is set to go off whenever the Director determines there is a complication implied in the key detail.

Triggers can be set well in advance or decided at the spur of the moment so long as the trigger is directly related to something in the description. Triggers can be avoided, sometimes without the Writers even knowing they existed, but only by applying specific details capable of overcoming or avoiding the trigger.



Triggers:

An event or reaction waiting to happen when a certain description or outcome is provided in the story.

Complications rolls are a form of detail trigger.

There are three types of triggers available.

Damage Triggers: Major characters can have special triggers known as **damage triggers**, set to go off whenever they receive damage. Each damage trigger is different, but the most common one allows major characters to make a complication roll limited to a d8 against the triggering character. This allows them opportunity to put up a fight when they're outnumbered by the likes of your lead characters. Other such characters may have additional unique triggers designed by the Director, so keep your eyes peeled and stay frosty – you never know what your opponents are capable of. Damage triggers function as a bonus detail; they are available to the major character even if they have already completed their turn this round.

Detail Triggers: Triggers can be set to go off in response to a particular detail in any character's description. For example, waiting until someone walks through a door is a **detail trigger**. Any character can set a detail trigger on their turn by declaring it with a single detail. A character can use a detail to set a trigger, creating a moment in which that character holds the remainder of their description until a particular event of their pre-determination has occurred. When this event takes place, it is known as **setting off the trigger**. The trigger must be maintained and if that character does anything to jeopardize their readiness to react to their trigger, it's automatically cancelled.

Event Triggers: Some perks do not come into play until they are triggered by specific events or complications and are therefore known as **event triggers**. These triggers occur whenever a particular effect or complication is attempted, regardless of how it occurred. For example, a giant warmech from Rust has been reinforced with steel plates that reduce any damage by 4 when someone places a damage complication on it. Some event triggers can be avoided by manipulating certain limitations, such as warmechs missing this reinforced plating on their backs. Event triggers do not need to be set; they are always available to the character. Whenever a perk provides a trigger, it is almost always an event trigger.

Absolutes

Whenever anyone rolls the highest value on their die roll, it's called an **absolute**. While the roller can shift it up (or down), another player cannot spend Vitality to affect that value. In other words, if you roll an 8 on a d8, it remains an 8. Using a shift bonus to reach a die's maximum value does not count as an absolute.

Kate rolls a 10 on a d10 – an absolute! Because she's had little success beating Kiki's Defense of 7 all night, she decides to take advantage of her opponent being unable to block this attack and inflicts 3 damage on Grandfather's bodyguard.



Absolute:

The highest possible result on a complication roll, without modifiers or shifting.

Range

Distance plays a crucial role when it comes to matters such as combat, stealth, perception, and any number of additional situations players concoct. Rather than work with actual measurements, everything is kept in broad range categories relative to the character providing the description.

To move from one **range** to another, a character must use one detail. Additional details in the same description make no difference, but a character can use her full description to move across two ranges, such as being Far from an opponent and using a full description to run up to Melee for the next round. The only exception is the Impossible range.

Melee: Anything and anyone standing within 10' of the character is considered in Melee range. Characters must be in this range to use melee weapons, grapple, punch, kick, or any similar complication against a target. Qi powers default to this range.

Close: Further away than Melee yet still close enough to shoot, volley, or blast, a character must use at least one detail to provide movement towards the target object or character and treat it as Melee range. Thrown weapons, such as knives, and one-handed firearms and two-handed ranged weapons can be used without penalty.

Far: Too far away for simultaneous movement and attacks, a character must be able to attempt the complication roll from a distance, such as using ranged weapons or spotting an enemy's approach from far away. Two-handed firearms can be used without penalty.

Impossible: Reaching anything in this range cannot be done reliably, including with ranged weapons. The Director determines how many descriptions are required to move from Impossible to Far range, if applicable.

Maximum Range

All resources have a maximum range limiting them to their best range. Applying these resources to a target further than its maximum range requires an additional step penalty per additional range category applied to a complication roll. Use the following factors to determine a resource's maximum range.

- Unless otherwise specified when assigned to a resource slot, all resources default to the Melee range.
- If a resource is intended or designed to be thrown or is a one-handed ranged weapon, its maximum range is Close.
- If a resource is designed exclusively as a two-handed ranged weapon, its maximum range is Far.

Advantages

Dramatic moments come and go in the blink of an eye and there are many things characters accomplish in that time. Others can endure for a brief period of time, and sometimes there's something that has a strong impact on other characters in the story. That is where advantages come into play.

An **advantage** is a benefit one character provides to another individual or a group of characters and always works in the form of either a step or damage bonus, similar to a resource. Providing an advantage simply requires spending 1 Vitality to activate and maintaining at least 1 detail until the start of the character's next turn in the following round. Maintaining an advantage over additional rounds requires the same character use the same number of details applied in activating the advantage so that it continues to provide its benefits until the start of the character's next turn and so forth until the advantage is no longer maintained.



Advantage:

A benefit one character provides to another individual or a group of characters and always works in the form of either a step or damage bonus.

Pinned down under heavy gunfire, Xai stands up and constructs a solid wall of ice to block the shots. Spending 1 Vitality to activate, the wall provides a +1 step bonus to her allies' Defense so long as she uses 1 detail to maintain it every turn.

Challenges

Along with assisting the Writers in developing their story, the Director's secondary role is to excite and surprise them. Not to say the Writers cannot create their own exhilarating tales, but it can become far too easy for Writers to always write in their favour. That's where challenges come into play.

In the same way that characters earn Vitality for moving the story forward, Directors gain **challenges** as the lead characters delve deeper into their exploits and engage in incredible adventures. The short and sure-fire way to explain challenges is that Directors gain challenges to ensure the Writers are... well, challenged.



Challenges:

Points collected by the Director to influence the story in subtle, yet important ways.

Whenever any of the following events take place during a scene, the Director gains challenges. Challenges carry over for the duration of the story until spent.

At the start of every new story, Directors begin with 1 challenge per Writer. Whether stockpiled for later or used right away, it's always good to have some ammo under the belt.

A Writer rolls an absolute. Whenever a Writer naturally rolls the best possible result on her complication roll (without shifting), the Director gains 1 challenge.

All lead characters achieve the scene's goals. When all Writers receive Vitality for achieving the scene's goals, the Director also gains 1 challenge. The Director can gain no more than 1 challenge, regardless of how many Vitality are awarded to individual Writers.

A single challenge can be redeemed in the same way a milestone can, except these allow the Director to make alterations to the scene for the purpose of pitting the characters against a stronger threat. At any point during a scene during a Writer's turn, the Director can spend 1 challenge (or more) to accomplish one of the following.

Place a complication on a character. This complication does not occur until after a complication roll (regardless of the result) or after the Writer has completed a description for that character. Directors cannot inflict damage on a character using a challenge and must use 2 challenges to inflict a penalty. If a challenge is used to place a complication on a character after a failed complication roll, the complication must be different from the rolled attempt. For example, if a Director attempted to trip a character and failed, she cannot spend a challenge to trip the character anyways.


Increase the duration of a complication. Directors can extend the duration of a complication the moment it is placed on a character by spending a certain number of challenges. This means characters afflicted with these complications cannot use descriptions or Vitality to remove them and must instead endure its effects for as long as the Director chooses. Damage cannot be extended using challenges.

- For 1 challenge, the complication remains until the end of the current scene.
- For 2 challenges, the complication remains until the end of the current session.
- For 3 challenges, the complication becomes a hindrance for the remainder of the story.

Force a challenged-based complication roll. The Director can spend a certain number of challenges and force a Writer to make a complication roll against a **Defence level**.

- With 1 challenge, the roll is attempted against a Tricky Defence of 5.
- With 2 challenges, the roll is attempted against a Damn Hard Defence of 7.
- With 3 challenges, the roll is attempted against a Foolhardy Defence of 9.

Alter a set piece to create an additional danger requiring a full description to counter or bypass. This danger can come in the form of changing the setting or introducing opposing characters to start a fight scene. For example, characters racing to escape from a burning building suddenly discover the staircase leading to the main floor has collapsed. These alterations can interrupt the middle of a character's description and it must be plausible for characters to use descriptions to eliminate, overcome, or avoid these dangers.

 You can spend challenges for the following:

Place complications

Increase duration

Force a complication roll

Alter the scene

Act first

Create a trigger

Invoke a hindrance

Choose a supporting character, including a major character, to start a scene after the opening shot. This allows the Director to get a leg up on events in a scene, including triggering a complication roll.

Create a spontaneous trigger. By spending 1 challenge, the Director creates a detail or event trigger based on the information provided by the Writers at the start of a scene, in response to a character's description or a single detail, or when the characters enter a location.

Use a character's hindrance to create a complication. Drafting an applicable reason why the hindrance would complicate matters for the character, the Director can spend 1 challenge to create a restriction or inception complication with the hindrance and 2 challenges to create a penalty complication. This cannot be removed easily by spending Vitality.

As the blood of Lotus' enemy sprays across her face, Brendan sees an opportunity to make this fight a bit more interesting. The Director spends a challenge to turn Lotus' Haunted hindrance into a complication as the blood suddenly sends us back into a momentary flashback of a young girl witnessing the death of her master. A moment duplicated by the presence as a few drops of blood splatter onto her cheek. Lotus is now Haunted by this moment and cannot return to the fight until she removes the complication.

Mauser decides to place a complication called My Gun's Jammed on his rifle... and then Brendan spend a challenge. "That complication now lasts until the end of the scene as the situation's too chaotic for you to address this problem." Fraser curses out loud. That was his favourite rifle.

Leaping off the side of the swaying tower above the streets of Yung Zhi, Darius goes to catch the swinging rope. That is when Brendan spends a challenge to trigger a complication roll. "Let's see if you can actually catch it, Darius. Tricky Defence of 5." As Darius was already using his Neither Seen Nor Heard d8 potential (as the guards on the roof above did not know Darius has tied the rope there earlier), he rolls... a 3! This is not going to end well.

Major Characters and Bonus Challenges

To provide an appropriate level of difficulty in combat for our lead characters, major characters gain a number of **bonus challenges** available only to that character. These bonus challenges are separate from the standard challenges awarded to the Director during the course of the story but can be redeemed to create similar issues. In some cases, major characters have special features usable only by spending their bonus challenges, not the Director's challenges.



Powerful Characters

While your power may increase, do not underestimate your enemies. They have never surrendered and have trained themselves to survive at all costs and battle multiple enemies at once. Any major and supporting characters who begin the story with more Vitality than recommended gain additional benefits, making them stronger with greater potential as they become a more fearsome opponent.

POWERFUL CHARACTERS

STARTING VITALITY	BENEFITS
20	Gain a permanent +1 shift bonus to a single potential
25	Gain one permanent qi power alteration
30	Increase one potential by +1 steps OR gain a new potential at d6
35	Gain an additional perk.
40	Gain one permanent qi power alteration
50*	Increase one potential by +1 steps AND gain a new potential at d8

* Only the Salvation has 50 Vitality... for now.

SAMPLE PLAY: SHOWDOWN IN YUNG ZHI

For this sample play, we will focus on the first round between Xai and Mauser (from **High Plains Samurai: Legends**) taking on Dollface in their final confrontation. All characters are at full Vitality and stand in the middle of an open street in the middle of Yung Zhi at night. No one has any weapons drawn as they stand almost 20 feet apart, with Mauser and Xai at one end and Dollface on the other. The Director decides to leave the table open to either lead character going first and Mauser decides to make the first strike.

Using his No One Gets In My Way potential of d8, Mauser has 3 details to provide in this description. He uses his first detail to draw his six-shooter and assigns this weapon to a resource slot with +1 steps (allowing him to roll a d10 with this potential). The second detail demonstrates just how good the gunslinger is when he shoots the revolver from Dollface's hand just as it teleports into her palm. He follows this up with another shot in the third detail and triggers a complication roll. Dollface uses her Dangerously Unexpected potential to gain a Defence of 7; Mauser rolls a 5. The complication is ineffective and that means Mauser has to take one of Dollface's choice. The Director chooses No Bullets and provides an outcome where Mauser fires all six shots only to have Dollface suddenly teleport a large metal shield in her hands to block the shots.

Mauser passes his turn to Xai and she decides to use her You Wouldn't Like Me When I'm Angry potential of d8. First, she uses her frozen qi power to create a sheet of solid ice under Dollface's feet and knock her down to the ground. Next, she uses her second detail to rush forward and form a large spear of solid ice in her hands. The third detail is the deadly strike as Xai leaps up in the air and gives out a fierce battlecry in her attempt

to jam the spear into her enemy's back. Without any resources assigned, Xai can only roll a d8 and Dollface's Defence of 7 still applies. Xai rolls the dice... and gets an 8! Going for damage, Dollface loses 1 Vitality as she is barely able to move aside and suffers a bloody gash to her hip.

But Dollface has a damage trigger, meaning she gets a free detail with a d6 to make a complication roll against whoever harmed her... and that means Xai. The villain swings her shield into the back of Xai's legs and triggers a complication roll against Xai's Defence of 5 (from the same potential as her last turn). Dollface only rolls a 4 and the Director decides to spend 1 Vitality to shift it to a 5. Xai shifts it back down to a 4 by spending one of her own Vitality and places the complication, Exposed Back, on her enemy.

Now it's Dollface's turn and she uses her Dangerously Unexpected potential of d10 and 4 details. Before anything else, the Director spends 1 Vitality to apply her Fast and Accurate perk to gain an extra +2 damage bonus on any teleported weapon, which becomes a sawed off shotgun with Dollface's first detail. The shotgun is added to a resource slot with a +1 step bonus. She then spends 1 Vitality to remove the Exposed Back complication with her second detail and uses the third to spin kick her legs so quickly that her body is brought back into a standing position and turn Xai face-forward. (Because bringing her to the ground was not brought on by a complication, she does not need to use details to stand back up.)

On her final detail, Dollface aims the shotgun at Xai's back and pulls the trigger. With her d12 complication roll (including the +1 step bonus from the resource slot), she rolls an 8 against Xai's Defence of 5. It is effective and Dollface gets to choose the complication, going with damage that costs the barbarian 5 Vitality (including the +2 damage bonus from her perk).

At the end of the first round, Mauser is untouched, Dollface has lost 3 Vitality, and Xai has lost 6 Vitality.

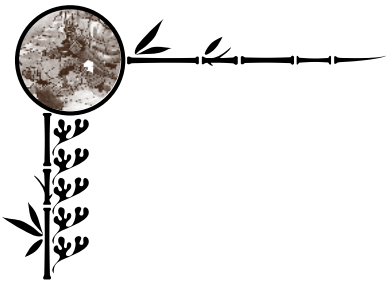
YOUR DESTINY AWAITS

Your patience and determination has brought you this far and it is with faith in my duty as translator and hope to come that you have come to understand the basics of what lies ahead. Every effort has been made to ensure all matters on both sides are presented fair and accurate. Should you seek to continue your journey, the time has come for self-discovery and reflection. The wide open world of the One Land is largely undiscovered and filled with threats. Before you save our world, you must first help us create it.

May your light cut a path through darkness.







The world was not leveled by my wrath. A pity.

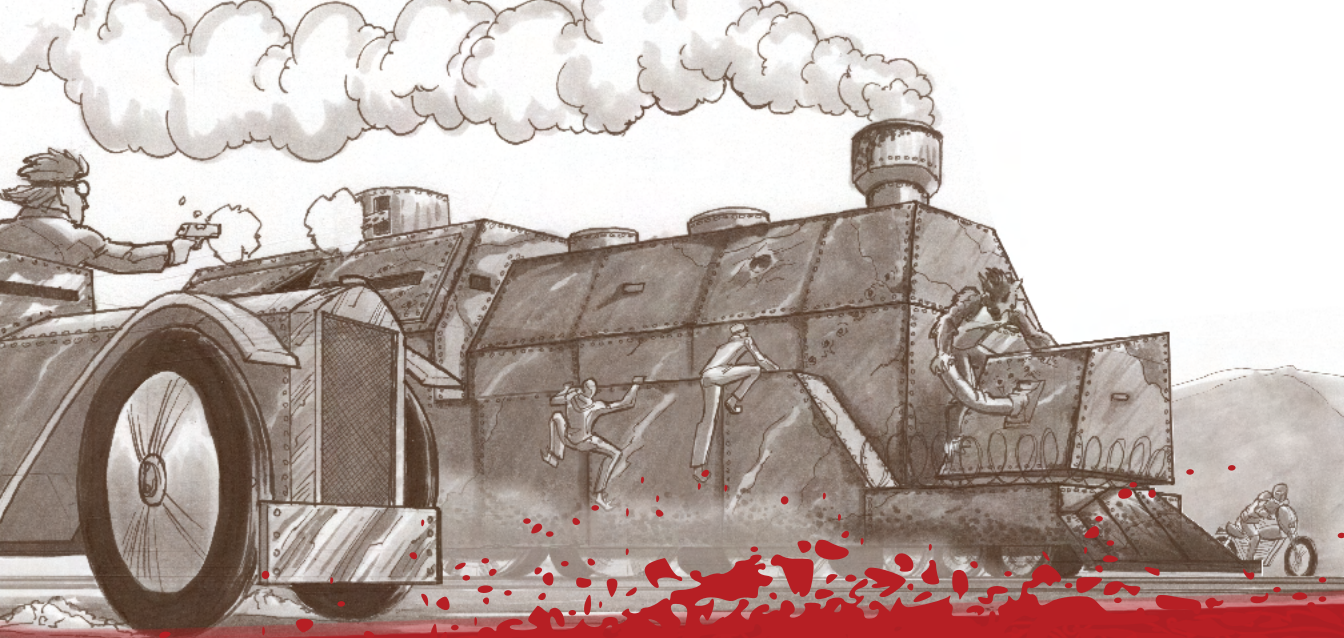
Instead, these survivors have built something upon the ashes. What they have created is a mockery of the values they once held dear before we crushed their precious paradise. Times of peace and democracy have been replaced with the iron will of these warlords. Death is dispensed for no more than access to one's water, and there is little of that remaining to make it more precious than the fuels they use to power their vehicles. Everywhere we look, there is smoke.

We are pleased. But our work is not yet done.

Our energy is diminished still. It will be some time before our full strength returns and the machinations already in position bear fruit and rage fire across the ruins. From what can be seen of these remains, these are a people with little hope and time remaining. Will they make the best of it before our return?

Before the purge returns and all is restored to what we desire.

It is doubtful. There are no heroes left in the world. Only Chaos.



BOOK FOUR: A LAND PAVED IN BLOOD

"When you see what has happened to the rest of the world, any doubts about the General's command instantly disappear. It tears my heart to see what has become of the One Land. To bring it back to what it once was, I will spill much blood."

- Lord Shinzei, Watchtower Commander of the Serpent Guard

The time to mourn is past. The world has been ripped apart and is a shadow of its former self. There's no escaping that, and standing around reflecting on the tragedy of it all does nothing. This is the present. This is what the One Land is like now and we must fight to shape its future.

These words may be harsher than those of the other books in this volume, save for those written by our resident student of Chaos, but it is for good reason. As a follower of Strife's teachings, I am not one of your typical monks adorned in flowing robes and deep in meditation. We are the order's striking fist, the launching blow cutting off our enemy's maneuver before it ever has a chance to connect. Strife does not concern himself with history but with the present and the future.

Your participation in this game is a test of your ability to bend reality and survive against the exploits of what is our home. When it comes to presenting your group's vision of the One Land, you are past the point of no return. This is where your story comes alive as the lead characters run through the streets of Yung Zhi, climb the frigid peaks of Khar'tep, dodge bullets in a rundown tavern of Serenity Falls, and ride the Salvation through the devastation of the Wastes. Once you complete that opening shot, there is no going back.

In this chapter, you will learn everything you need to know about the One Land, its warlords, and the dark secrets used to create your own version of the game.



The One Land as it exists at the beginning of your story. You can discover more about our world at the Atlas of the One Land on highplainssamurai.com

This book is for the Directors of this story. Those who have accepted the challenge to represent our people in a manner that invokes a possible solution to our plight. What we, as students of Strife, feel about the viability of this plan does not matter. What matters – and why it was us who chose to draft this book – is that the spirit of our home be given the respect it deserves. The One Land, though small in size, is wide in scale. There is much to explore and experience in the massive fortresses that are the Five Cities and more to discover in the expanse of the Wastes. What you create in your rendition of our world will not be the same as others, much as would be the case if you were ever physically here. What remains constant is the initial and lasting impressions available for the six major location covered here.

What follows is a series of sights, sounds, backgrounds, and more for the Five Cities and the Wastes. These core foundations shape this setting while remaining loose and open to allow all players room to make it unique and be an active part of the story. Together, these segments provide you with the basics you need to flesh out your version of our homelands and create new ones not yet considered.

SERENITY FALLS

It is said no City has suffered from the effects of Chaos' Wrath more than Serenity Falls. Say what you will about Rust, at least they have found a way to make something under the ruins. This rundown shell of its former self mirrors the vacant ocean that once crashed against its shores: vacant, barren, offering few to no resources to encourage life. Though cursing the never-ending sandstorm blanketing them day by day, those who call Serenity Falls home are thankful this haze of grit keeps them from seeing what has become of the City.

Those wandering to the southeast eventually make their way to a seemingly endless deep gorge. Following the edge of this gorge brings them to Serenity Falls, ruled by the Tom family for generations and currently overseen by the ruthless warlord known only as Grandfather. Those who have gleaned past the billowing sandstorms that blanket Serenity Falls discover one of the many tragedies of this once thriving port city. Before Chaos' Wrath, this was a bustling oceanside harbour built on a foundation of commerce, hospitality, and knowledge. It is why newcomers to Serenity Falls discover numerous nautical signs, imagery, and themes on every street. What exists now are dusty shops run by brittle prisoners serving criminals and bandits hiding out in a town where the greed of a feeble old man is law.

Serenity Falls sits to the southeast on the edge of a cliff overlooking a barren ocean that evaporated during Chaos' Wrath.

It is ruled by the warlord known simply as Grandfather, a descendant of the Tom family that governed this port city long before it was ruined.

It is constantly battered by a never-ending sandstorm.

All healthy and able residents of Serenity Falls are indentured to work in the Pits; all others, including the elderly, operate the various businesses. Grandfather raises all children of the city within his elaborate estate until they are old enough to work in the Pits or are chosen to become Watchdogs or personal servants.

Grandfather's orders are enforced by the Watchdogs, a group of highly trained qi warriors and untapped marksmen.

Sights & Sounds

Think of Serenity Falls as a town from the Wild West dime novels of your world. Expand its size to house tens of thousands more people (with only a fraction of that living there) and magnify the stench of urine tenfold. This City attracts many bandits, Outcasts, and gunslingers thriving off the loose ethics and morality found nowhere else in the One Land. Here, disagreements are settled with bullets.

Life is harsh in Serenity Falls and there is little to be thankful for save the roof over your head and the protection Grandfather grants those on the run. These are just the guests who stay indefinitely until they are discovered or killed. The true residents of Serenity Falls are twofold: those who are granted access to work on the surface and those slaving away in the mines beneath Grandfather's sprawling estate. Anyone deemed capable of working in the Pits, accessed from natural caves formed at the base of the parched cliff on which Serenity Falls perches, never sees the light of day until they are no longer able to work. Or they are dead. Once their usefulness in the Pits is gone, they are charged with the maintenance of Serenity Falls' various taverns, inns, brothels, and shops catering to those who make do here for as long as they can. It is not uncommon to encounter only those above the age of 50, regardless of their profession.

Constant Sandstorm: Raging in from the Wastes, this eternal barrage of sand and wind pelts Serenity Falls every minute of every day. On a regular basis, anyone out on the streets gains the benefit of the Light Concealment step modifier (+1 steps). By spending 1 challenge, the Director can increase this to a powerful typhoon of sand and treat all complication rolls beyond Melee range to be in the Impossible range unless an absolute is rolled.

Always Watching (Trigger): The constant presence of the Watchdogs patrolling every street and rooftop of the City ensures nothing happens here without their knowing about it. Whenever a character does something that Grandfather would not approve of and rolls a natural 1 on a complication roll while under the Watchdogs' possible view (meaning the Watchdogs have been introduced into the scene prior to this event trigger), the Director can spend 1 challenge and cause 1d4 damage to the character.

Warlord's Rule

Overlooking the vacant ocean floor, Grandfather's home is a sprawling walled estate where the warlord oversees his domain as he has for the past forty years. Should anyone find themselves invited into his home, they will be surprised to find it full of joy and laughter as the warlord has charged himself with the care and upbringing of every child in Serenity Falls. Their parents slave away in the Pits and many grow up knowing only Grandfather and his servants as their guardians. Most eventually work in the mines, while others are groomed to hold a place of importance in his court. Such was the case with Kiki, his personal bodyguard and resident homicidal maniac.

Grandfather rules Serenity Falls with an iron fist thanks to his keen-eyed enforcers, the Watchdogs. Recognized by their black dusters, the Watchdogs patrol Serenity Falls' streets to make sure any violence does not get out of hand. They are not there to prevent it or protect its citizens, simply to keep the bloodshed from interfering with Grandfather's steep taxes. Shooting up a business is tolerated; blowing it up is not. Anyone caught committing a crime in Serenity Falls can serve their time as a Watchdog for a set period or until Grandfather deems otherwise. There is no record of any Watchdog's service reaching a happy conclusion.

Despite tense treaties with the other warlords of the One Land, Grandfather is more than willing to barter refuge in Serenity Falls for favours and information. In some cases, he simply relishes taking in a wanted felon from another City just to annoy that warlord. Yet when a bounty hunter comes to collect, Grandfather does not interfere. Many say he embraces the anarchy that thrives in Serenity Falls while others believe this tension between the warlords is why the City remains cut off from the rest of the world.

Dark Secrets

Based on Grandfather's lavish lifestyle, the common assumption is that the Pits are in dire search of gems, minerals, and other traditional sources of wealth; that is very far from the truth. What Serenity Falls – and many other Cities – lack is clean water. As the Pits were naturally formed by ocean currents long before Chaos evaporated the water, Grandfather is gambling serious resources on finding underwater lakes of drinkable liquid and selling it to the highest bidder. In this way, perhaps the speculation is not too far from the truth.

Yet that is not all that awaits the miners and expedition parties underneath Serenity Falls. Documents uncovered in Monsoon's temples reveal a long-forgotten tower heralding the borders of the Forgotten City. How it came to exist down in these depths remains a mystery. Was the tower somehow relocated to the Pits when Chaos walked across the

One Land with anger? As there are no indications Grandfather is aware of this find, the General is eager to send his troops into the Pits and claim the tower for his own before it is too late.

Grandfather, Warlord of Serenity Falls

Major Character

Despite his brittle bones and hunched posture, his hand carved wooden cane keeping him upright, this warlord is a force to be reckoned with simply because of his ambition and willingness to spill blood to meet his goals. Wherever Grandfather goes, Kiki stands at his side to provide the physical intimidation matched only by Grandfather's dire reputation.

WISE BEYOND HIS YEARS D10+1/7/4
A CRUEL WARLORD D8/5/3

Homeland: Serenity Falls

Qi Power: Untapped

Unique Features: A frail elderly man who walks with a cane, Grandfather dresses in ornately classic western attire with a nautical theme.

Mind Over Fist (Motivation): Whenever Grandfather overcomes someone's physical use or attempt of force in a scene without ever having to resort to violence, he gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Raised From Birth (Connection): Grandfather has been a part of Kiki's life since she was a baby. This has created an undying father/daughter loyalty between them. Whenever one saves the other from a complication, they both gain +1 Vitality (**not** per lead character). Whenever one benefits from their connection in a scene, so does the other.

Feeble (Hindrance): Grandfather's power comes from his emotional grip over the people of Serenity Falls, not from any physical prowess or skill. Whenever he gains a complication that physically limits him, he cannot spend Vitality to remove it with a single detail.

Resource Slots: Well-Informed (+1 steps); Wealth (+1 steps); and 1 more

Vitality: 20

Bonus Challenges: Grandfather has several bonus challenges he can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. He starts each scene with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

A Fearsome Reputation (Trigger): A well-known history of cruelty to his own people has given Grandfather a reputation unlike any other warlord. From the moment any character first meets the warlord, they suffer a penalty complication of -1 step that remains until they use a description to remove it. When they do, it triggers a Tricky complication roll or Grandfather can spend 1 bonus challenge to make it last the session.

Command: By spending a bonus challenge, Grandfather grants a bonus turn to any ally within Close range. This can only be done once per round.

Damage Trigger: Whenever Grandfather takes damage, he can immediately grant a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls to an ally within Close range.

Frail, But Not Weak: Because of Grandfather's age (between 60 and 80 years old), Grandfather has fewer Vitality than would be expected.

Innocent Lives (Trigger): Grandfather has no qualms using the children who live in his home as shields and hostages. Any character further than Melee range from Grandfather at the start of their turn have the Innocent Lives restriction complication preventing them from using area-based attacks and qi powers without harming the children instead.

Kiki Never Disappoints (Signature): Just as Grandfather appears to suffer a terrible complication, Kiki suddenly phases through her master and makes the roll ineffective. This signature can be triggered whenever the Protected detail trigger prevents a complication roll that would have been otherwise effective. Grandfather shares this signature with Kiki.

Protected (Trigger): Whenever anyone attempts to physically harm Grandfather, Kiki can spring into action and block the attempt without spending Vitality to interrupt. So long as Kiki is within Melee range of Grandfather, she automatically increases Grandfather's Defence by +2 steps.

Sharp Eyed: As the Serenity Falls perk.

Kiki

Major Character

From an early age, Grandfather knew there was something special about this girl; not just her ability to phase through solid objects, but her fondness for cruelty. Rather than cleanly slice through an enemy with her legendary weapon, Crescent Whip, she prefers to pick them apart and bring them to their knees before finishing them off. It is the only time she ever laughs.

GRANDFATHER'S GUARDIAN

D8+1/7/4

CRUEL TO THE BONE D8/3/2

ALWAYS IN MOTION D6/3/2

Beg For Your Life (Motivation): Whenever a Writer describes a character begging Kiki to spare their life, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Raised From Birth (Connection): Grandfather has been a part of Kiki's life since she was a baby. This has created an undying father/daughter loyalty between them. Whenever one saves the other from a complication, they both gain +1 Vitality (**not** per lead character). Whenever one benefits from their connection in a scene, so does the other.

Childhood Flashbacks (Hindrance): Kiki's allegiance to Grandfather knows no bounds and keeps her bound to serve him at all times. Whenever Grandfather is targeted by a complication roll, she must use an interrupt to protect him or attack an opponent to prevent anything from happening to her ward. If she cannot use an interrupt and Grandfather takes damage, she experiences flashbacks of her childhood being raised and trained by Grandfather. The Writers determine the specifics, but each flashback only lasts for a fraction of a second and provide only one detail worth of information.

Resource Slots: The Crescent Whip (+1 steps or +2 damage per blade); phasing (+2 steps); and 1 more

Vitality: 25

Damage Trigger: Whenever Kiki takes damage, she can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls or give her detail to Grandfather to use immediately.

Sharp Eyed: As the Serenity Falls perk.

Street Fighter: As the Serenity Falls perk.

Homeland: Serenity Falls

Qi Power: Phasing (grants +2 steps when applied as a resource)

Unique Features: Dressing as an innocent and naive young woman of stature, her mannerisms are those of a deadly warrior eager to spill blood. The long chain of her legendary weapon is wrapped around her body when not in use.

Kiki Never Disappoints (Signature): Just as Grandfather appears to suffer a final complication, Kiki suddenly phases through her master and makes the roll ineffective. This signature can be triggered whenever the Protected detail trigger prevents a complication roll that would have been otherwise effective. Grandfather shares this signature with Kiki.

Crescent Whip (Legendary Weapon, 5 qi points): A 10' long chain with curved blades on either end, the Crescent Whip is linked to Kiki though her love for cruelty. So long as she fights dirty and inflicts unnecessary cruelty with the weapon, Crescent Whip extends out to Close range by spending 1 qi point and benefits from her phasing qi power, allowing her to ignore any Cover modifiers to an opponent's Defence.

YUNG ZHI

There are three major sections of Yung Zhi, considered by many in the One Land as the best option in a world with few remaining options. From the long ride down The Devil's Throat past miles of desperate refugees seeking access, to the high impassable crowds and teetering towers of feeble construction consuming the Shell, to the high-life nightclubs and open gang warfare of the Pearl, everything about Yung Zhi symbolizes corruption.

Blocking off access to inhospitable lands to the northwest, Yung Zhi exists within a massive gorge at the tail end of a enormous cavern that runs hundreds of miles. This landscape is what provides the City protection from the worst the Wastes has to offer, and there are many who believe Chaos wanted it that way; Yung Zhi makes up for what it lacks in ecological disasters with a humanitarian crisis. Overpopulation is an understatement. Not that this matter concerns Xang, its warlord, or the numerous gangs who operate in her neon-lit modernized hotels, casinos, bathhouses, and nightclubs. If anything, the gangs have done what they always do with any situation – found a way to profit from it.

Yung Zhi is located at the northeastern borders of the One Land.

It is ruled by the warlord, Xang, and her second-in-command, Bolo.

Yung Zhi is home to numerous gangs, known as the Seven Families, all under Xang's control. Each gang serves a specialized role in both the Shell and the Pearl.

There are three zones within the City: The Devil's Throat, the Shell, and the Pearl.

The Devil's Throat and the streets of the Shell are incredibly overpopulated and poor, while those who live in the Pearl have access to modern technology, including automobiles and machine guns.

Swaying towers of wood were built to accommodate so many people in the Shell.

Sights & Sounds

Yung Zhi is a study in duality, a comparison of the desperately poor and the overzealously wealthy. In the outer circle of the City, known as the Shell, people struggle to get by in crowds that trample anyone not steady on their feet. Around the eternal nightlife of those living in the Pearl, neon lights and gasoline engines thrive here in what could be a combination of your early 20th Century Chicago and the Whitechapel region of London in the late 19th Century.

The gangs of this City, under the manipulating hand of Xang and her top enforcer, Bolo, vie for a piece of every action on any street. From extorting struggling soup kitchens and skimming a little off the books, to full-on automatic gunfire in the streets, these gangs are the literal and figurative heart of the City. It is why those who have found a way to make a living in the Shell are so desperate to make it in the Pearl. Sharp dressed suits,

fancy cars, warm bath water, and the money to throw away on such amenities stands in sharp contrast to beggars, street urchins, and prostitutes plying their wares. This is a place where crime is the rule of law and not committing a crime may be the only crime you can be convicted of. Criminal law and the code of honour one displays to one's boss and their surrogate family is what makes Yung Zhi tick. And the Tommy guns. This is what happens when the mafia gets a chance to run a City.

Rampant Crime: Overpopulation leads to crime on an epic level in Yung Zhi and it becomes near impossible to notice even the smallest pickpocket slipping a much-needed coin from someone's pocket. By spending 1 challenge, the Director can commit a small street crime against a lead character without making any complication rolls. Only restriction and inception complications can be used with this challenge.

Construction Catastrophes (Trigger): The swaying buildings of poorly constructed ideas and crude lumber (typically using the wreckage from a previous collapse) lead to almost daily disasters, and those who stir up trouble inside these buildings can make matters worse. Whenever a character rolls a natural 1 on a complication roll inside a building in the Shell, it automatically creates a restriction complication or alters a set piece connected with the building. When the number of complications or alterations equals the total number of lead characters in the scene, the building collapses.

Warlord's Rule

Ruling an entire City for a decade, even if your focus remains only on the upscale neighbourhoods, requires a crafty mind. This is what made Xang such an excellent choice for the position when she was chosen by the seven major crime families in Yung Zhi, and this is why she remains there today. She also has an uncanny ability to control the gangs like puppets dancing on a stage for children. On an almost daily basis, she plays her underlings like chess pieces on an unseen board, pitting them against each other so that they are far too busy struggling to keep peace with each other to threaten her rule. Sometimes this calls for open warfare between some of the gangs, sometimes between all Seven Families. Most of the time, only a few deaths are required to send the message. Such violence is what keeps new blood and fresh ideas moving into the Pearl.

Each of the City's main gangs is governed by one of the Seven Families, each assigned a particular vice and district in the Pearl as well as subsequent operations in the Shell, such as slave labour, electricity production, gasoline refinement, and more. Profits are dispersed based on the total percentage of property a gang or family controls in one of these two neighbourhoods, leaving those outside of this arrangement to fight for recognition when enough bodies have fallen on the floor to leave a noticeable absence.

Dark Secrets

While this remains a well-known fact to all the warlords, particularly to the Council of Iron in Rust, little is known about how Yung Zhi came to harness electricity. When Deckland Burr escaped from Rust and sought out a new home, he came to Yung Zhi. In exchange for setting up the infrastructure needed to provide modern features without the toxic fumes of his homeland, Deckland was able to set up shop and create the single most important form of transportation operating today: The Salvation. What concerns the Council is what else the genius inventor may have passed on to the Seven Families. To counter this possibility and to enact revenge against the City for sheltering a known fugitive (including concealing Deckland from bounty hunters and other legitimate efforts), the Council has planted the seed of rebellion in the Devil's Throat. A seed that has begun to grow in the Shell and may soon enter the Pearl itself.

Xang, Warlord of Yung Zhi

Major Character

Widowed at a young age, Xang inherited her title as warlord of Yung Zhi after personally taking revenge against the Seven Families for her husband's murder. When this bloody personal revolution was over, she rebuilt the City from the ground up and quickly cemented that reputation by executing one innocent person for every gangster she killed in retribution.

ONE STEP AHEAD D10+1/7/4

Matriarch of the Family D8/5/3

Bite The Hand That Feeds Them (Motivation): Xang's machinations keep her allies and enemies from forming an alliance that would remove her from power. Whenever she can pit two sides against each other, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Show of Power (Motivation): People need to be taught a lesson and others must be made to watch before they make the same mistake. Whenever Xang makes a public display of force against a threat to her power, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Vengeful (Hindrane): Her need for revenge can blind her to other dangers. Whenever another group or individual gains her attention, she is unable to set up triggers and suffers a -1 step penalty to her Defence involving any other threats to her power until she takes a complication from this other group or individual. If Xang is successfully able to get revenge against her original target, this hindrance goes away until the next time.

Resource Slots: Poisoned metal claws (+1 steps or +1 damage plus complication; see below); heightened senses (qi power, +1 steps); and 1 more

Vitality: 35

Damage Trigger: Whenever Xang takes damage, she can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls.

Bonus Challenges: Xang has several bonus challenges she can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. She starts each scene with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

Grace of a Cat: As the Yung Zhi perk.

Multiple Opponents: Despite her small stature, Xang can fight more than one opponent at a time. By spending a bonus challenge, she can make 2 more complication rolls with a -2 step penalty each.

Poisoned Claws: Xang's weapon of choice is a pair of small, metal claws worn over her palms. With each finger coated in an assortment of vile poisons, she can place a restriction or inception complication on any character who takes damage from the claws. If the damage is applied with an absolute, the complication remains until the end of the scene.

Tiger's Claw (Signature): Either from a crouched or fallen position, Xang executes a perfect spinning leap and enters the fighting stance of a tiger.

Willing To Make Sacrifices (Trigger): Once per scene, Xang can spend a bonus challenge to set off this event trigger and suddenly present her opponents with a difficult choice. She reveals an innocent life who will be executed or otherwise harmed unless her opponents surrender to her. If directed against a lead character, Xang can use an innocent character connected to them and place a -1 step penalty complication on that lead character.

Homeland: Yung Zhi

Qi Power: Heightened senses (can target 1 additional character with step penalties)

Unique Features: A slight woman of middle age, Xang dresses in traditional clothes and moves about slowly in her day-to-day activities. It is rare for her to speak; she normally uses interpreters to speak for her as she whispers in their ear.

Bolo

Major Character

A legend in his own right, Xang's second-in-command personally monitors the events about to unfold to ensure everything goes according to his warlord's wishes. Once a member of the famed Desert Sun Gang that terrorized the Wastes, Bolo has settled down into a kind of "retirement" living the life of a professional gang boss in the home of organized crime. Feared for the killing blows delivered by his iron fists, it takes a lot to draw this infamous qi warrior into a fight but not very much to incite his full fury once blood is drawn.

Homeland: Yung Zhi

Qi Power: Fists turn to solid iron (+2 steps when applied as a resource)

Unique Features: A large, muscular master of kung fu with a long scar running down the left side of his head; missing his left ear.

BONEBREAKER (D10+1/7/4)

TRUST NO ONE (D6/3/2)

REFUSES TO GO DOWN (D6/3/2)

Loyal To A Master... And Himself (Motivation): While Bolo is a committed lieutenant to Xang, his allegiance is always to himself first. Any opportunity permitting him to pursue Xang's goals and further his own at the same time is always a step in the right direction and he gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Proven To Be The Best (Motivation): There is a reason for Bolo's reputation as one of the One Land's best martial fighters, and this qi warrior is always looking to prove he has not rusted with age. Whenever Bolo is not defeated by enemies whose total Vitality exceeds his own at the start of the scene, he gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Suspicious (Hindrance): A career spent in crime and treachery has made Bolo a very suspicious man and he has been known to make situations worse from time to time. Any inception complication used to trigger this hindrance can only be removed when Bolo uses his full description.

Unsocial (Hindrance): Resorting to physical violence means Bolo rarely needs to use social skills to solve problems and that can sometimes make delicate situations (especially in a high-profile position) problematic. He suffers a -1 step penalty to any social-based complication roll.

Resource Slots: Iron fists (+2 steps or +2/+3 damage); Kung fu (+1 steps or +2 damage) +1 more

Vitality: 30

Damage Trigger: Whenever Bolo takes damage, he can immediately use a free detail with a d6 for any complication rolls.

Grace of a Cat: As the Yung Zhi perk.

Intimidating Presence (Trigger): Due to Bolo's physical prowess, brute strength, and a fearsome reputation, anyone in Bolo's presence automatically triggers the Intimidated inception complication. This causes them to fear Bolo and they cannot make any aggressive moves against him or speak any lies until it is removed.

Shatter Bones (Signature): Bolo blocks an incoming attack with his iron fists, breaking bones. This signature can be triggered whenever Bolo places a restriction complication against an opponent's appendage whenever that opponent rolls an ineffective complication roll.

MONSOON

Contrary to popular opinion, the jungle paradise of Monsoon is not a safe haven and the biggest threat does not come from the General's military and elite samurai warriors; it is the poison that drips from every living organism concealing this ancient city. The lush greens and vibrant sounds of wildlife permeating this southwestern region of the One Land disguise venoms and toxins capable of killing within seconds, deforming the infected area so that it requires amputation, or laying in wait for months at a time until the victim dies of a massive stroke in their sleep. Anyone who lives in Monsoon does not take the natural threats of their homeland lightly.

The roads beyond the bordering watchtowers leading to the central hub of Monsoon are closed to all but its native residents. Conscripted into service at a young age, the people of this militarized City are dedicated to their warlord with as much fervor as those following the Minister in Rust, and, as it is with that leader, there are damning veils hiding the truth from the masses. Yet this warlord is a visible and active leader of his people, one who handles all affairs personally and efficiently. An armed powerhouse decades in the making, the General of Monsoon prepares to launch an assault with his highly trained and equipped army of samurai and soldiers to claim all the One Land as his dominion, or so say the rumors. All that he waits for is a sign from the encrypted passages and prophecies buried within the ancient temples and monasteries of the Elemental Spirits beneath the jungle canopy.

Monsoon is located in the highly poisonous southwestern jungles of the One Land.

The City is ruled by General Hoth Kap Sing, a brilliant military tactician considered to be the only fair and just warlord in the One Land.

An army of highly trained soldiers and elite samurai warriors are at the General's disposal; even the average citizen of Monsoon is loyal to their warlord.

Firearms are forbidden beyond the outer watchtowers guarding Monsoon.

The jungles are home to many surviving temples dedicated to the Elemental Spirits, which the General believes holds the key to curing the One Land of the blight brought on by Chaos.

Sights & Sounds

Monsoon is a city steeped in traditions that thrive on continuing the life that once was before Chaos' Wrath. Ancient beliefs and a sense of honour is reflected in Monsoon's architecture, fashion, and customs as the General has brought his people back from the brink of self-destruction. Their faith in the old Elemental Spirits, long believed to have abandoned the rest of the One Land, is seen in every possible representation, with towering temple spires sheltering worshippers in prayer and schools teaching the next generation how to continue leading a pure life in the name of the old ways. Underneath it all lies a highly structured military code with soldiers posted at the ready to defend the people from the uncounted dangers surrounding them. All those within a particular caste – from servants to soldiers to samurai – are equal, regardless of race or gender. In a war against the forces of Chaos, one cannot risk casting aside a single sword.

The jungles of Monsoon continue to creep into their day-to-day lives with intelligent vines snatching unsuspecting children and suffocating them before help can arrive. Rather than trim these dangers from their borders, the people have taken to calling upon

the deadly poisons as tests of their fortitude and place in the order they have carved out of anarchy. Those who wish to join the military must survive an intentional injection of a random poison, while a samurai's oath cannot be made until they have returned to their post after a night alone in the jungle. Bordering the gargantuan stone walls of Monsoon is a garrison of archers capable of pinpoint accuracy, despite the ever-growing danger seeking a way inside.

Forgotten Customs: Only those well versed in the ancient traditions of life before Chaos' Wrath are prepared for adapting to life in Monsoon, and even those tend to change as the General declares new laws seemingly at random. By spending 1 challenge in reaction to a character's description, the Director can deem one of the character's details to be illegal or dishonourable according to Monsoon law and place a restriction or inception complication on the character. This complication can only be removed by applying a full description in the presence of a Monsoon samurai or any other important official within the General's court.

Poisons Abound (Trigger): Nothing is safe to touch, eat, or drink in the jungles of Monsoon. Any direct contact or description that results in a character exposing themselves to any of the local flora or fauna triggers an automatic Tricky challenge-based complication roll without the Director spending any challenges. The Director can choose to enhance the complication roll's Defence to Damn Hard by spending 1 challenge.

Warlord's Rule

The General has ruled Monsoon for nearly two decades and gained the people's loyalty with his devotion to honour and tradition, traits that brought them back from near extinction. Once the guardian to the previous warlord, the General had his master arrested and brought to justice before a court on charges of treason after learning she had turned to black magic to gain immortality. While he rules this hidden city as its warlord, the General maintains his commitment as guardian of Monsoon to this day, but has expanded his resources to seek absolution in the teachings of the Elemental Spirits. Including the All-Father, whom the monks of this City regard as a separate entity from Chaos.

As fair and just as the General is to his people, justice is delivered with swift retribution. Those who have sworn allegiance to their warlord, mainly his samurai warriors, take their own lives should they fail to complete even the simplest task. Soldiers can be exiled into the jungle on suspicion alone, their survival acting as proof of their innocence.

Dark Secrets

Khar's hold on his duty as avatar of the Great Mother hangs by a thread; Roth, his predecessor, has survived their duel. During their fight, the former warlord of what was then called Roth'tep rolled off the edge of a ledge and fell several hundred feet into the snow. Never to be found... by the barbarians. After a long and hard struggle off the mountain, he was picked up by a scouting party from Monsoon and currently remains locked up within one of the General's prison towers.

Buried within the sewers of Monsoon and kept hidden from most of its people, a once lost temple to the All-Father has been discovered and the General has spared no expense on interpreting its walls inscriptions and scriptures in its books. Some within his military council believe the General has lost his mind. In the years since the temple was opened, he has displayed signs of dementia, and there are those who fear the General must soon be relieved of duty, a task placed on the shoulders of his top commander, Wind.

General Hoth Kap Sing, Warlord of Monsoon

Major Character

The ruler and saviour of Monsoon would be considered weak in the eyes of his fellow warlords were it not for the scale and ability of his vast army and devoted people. It is said the Council of Iron is jealous of the reverence granted the General compared to their own Minister, yet he is also feared because of his strict policy of honour and faith. However, with his mind deteriorating, the General grows more and more dangerous with each passing day.

RULE WITH HONOUR D8+1/5/3
A TRUE SAMURAI WARRIOR D8/5/3
FAITH IN THE OLD WAYS D6/3/2

The Secrets Are Buried There (Motivation): The General has dedicated his life to uncovering the means to end the One Land's afflictions within the many temples of his city. Whenever he can end a scene with more information gained by the teachings of the Elemental Spirits, he gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Unquestioning Loyalty (Motivation): To rule absolutely, you must sometimes reveal your people's absolute loyalty. Whenever the General's command results in the loss of another person's life, he gains +1 Vitality per lead character. That loss of life must occur within the same scene as the order given.

Dementia (Hindrance): Suffering from an early onset of short term memory loss and confusion, the General has a tendency toward sudden mood swings and altered opinions in the middle of a scene. Whenever he rolls a natural 1 on a complication roll, he suffers an additional inception complication brought on by his condition.

Blind To Traditions (Hindrance): His adherence to the old ways has created conflict within the General's court and the people of Monsoon because his interpretation is exacting to the letter. If a character can point out a fallacy in these traditions, the General cannot place a non-physical complication on any other characters for the remainder of the scene.

Resource Slots: Samurai Armour (+1 steps); Silverfox (+1 steps and +2 damage); and 1 more

Vitality: 35

Bonus Challenges: The General has several bonus challenges he can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. He starts each scene with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

Damage Trigger: Whenever the General takes damage, he can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls. By spending 1 bonus challenge, he can increase it to a d10.

Difficult To Kill (Signature): Suffering a blow that would fell an ordinary warrior, the General's qi power instantly heals the injury. This signature can be triggered whenever the General receives damage from an absolute.

Healing (Qi Power): The General's qi power is very ironic considering his stature: he can heal wounds by touching people or concentrating on himself. It can also be used to remove certain complications, as per the Director's ruling.

Homeland: Monsoon

Qi Power: Healing (see below; can heal two characters simultaneously)

Unique Features: Armed with his legendary katana, Silverfox, and decked out in the regal full plate armour of a samurai warrior, the General stands tall and proud without a sign of age or stress on his face.

Silverfox (Legendary Weapon, 7 qi points): An ancient katana resting at the hip of every ruler of Monsoon since the ancient days, Silverfox is committed to protecting the people of the city. So long as the General uses this legendary weapon in the best interests of Monsoon and its people, it grants a +2 damage bonus when applied to a resource slot. It can apply both a +1 step bonus and its damage bonus by spending 1 qi point. By spending 1 qi point, Silverfox blocks any physical attack, including absolutes and qi powers. When this occurs, the complication roll is simply nullified.

Trained To Perfection: As the Monsoon perk; whenever the General assigns Silverfox to a resource slot, he gains a +1 shift bonus to any complication rolls.

Command and Conquer: Every order the General gives is obeyed without question or hesitation. By spending 1 bonus challenge, the General grants a bonus description to an ally so long as that character chooses a different potential than any previous descriptions in the same round.

Wind

Major Character

The heir to the throne of Monsoon and leader of the General's troops (excluding samurai), Wind is the sole surviving sister of three fallen siblings. Once Storm, Rain, and Lightning fought at her side, but years of war with the catar ninja thriving in the jungles have taken them to the next life. Wind will not allow their deaths to be in vain.

WHIRLWIND OF MOTION D8+1/5/3

SERVANT OF MONSOON D6/3/2

AN HONOURABLE SAMURAI D6/3/2

Homeland: Monsoon

Qi Power: Telekinesis

Unique Features: Etched onto her chest plate is a typhoon bearing down on a scattered army. She carries no weapons into battle.

Avenge My Brothers (Motivation): Whenever Wind completes a scene by defeating her mortal enemy, the catar, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Protector of Monsoon (Motivation): Whenever Wind defends Monsoon or any of its people from a direct threat, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character at the end of the scene.

Blind To The Truth (Hindrance): Her unquestioning loyalty to the General has caused her to miss the signs of his failing health, even those pointed out by other members of the warlord's inner echelon. Any inception complication placed on Wind that involves the General's health and ability to lead automatically remains until the end of the scene.

Never Touch Me (Hindrance): Her qi power has made physical contact uncomfortable to the point of phobia. Whenever a character touches Wind, she cannot use her Failure Is Not An Option perk for the remainder of the round.

Resource Slots: Telekinesis (+2 steps or +2 damage); Strife's Armour (+1 steps); and 1 more

Vitality: 25

A Quick Study: By spending a description to watch a single opponent, Wind can discern a weakness in the form of a hindrance or complication and inflict a -1 step penalty to that character's Defence when applied. Once this step penalty is applied, Wind must use another description to gain it again.

Crushing Defeat (Signature): Lifting an opponent off the ground with her qi power, Wind crushes their head without so much as batting an eye.

Damage Trigger: Whenever Wind takes damage, she can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls.

Failure Is Not An Option: As the Monsoon perk.

KHAR'TEP

To the rest of the One Land, the mountains of Khar'tep are the end of the world. Stories tell of savage wildlands consumed by the anarchy of Chaos' Wrath in a way we have never experienced, while some believe there are new lands and settlements waiting to be discovered. Only those who have climbed to the highest peak of the Great Mother, the gargantuan mountain range that protects the scattered clans under the rule of Khar of the Hawk Clan, know for sure. Few not loyal to the barbaric warlord would survive the trek to the bottom, let alone the march to the top. The clans view the mountains as a religious testament to the Elemental Spirits and dare not risk non-believers contaminating it with their apathy and blasphemy.

Faith and the axe are testaments to the people of Khar'tep and their ability to survive at the icy top of the world. Life is not a long road, they are told, and soon death will claim them. There is no afterlife, only the here and now. Their belief in the harshness of their beloved mountain are etched on their faces in the form of frostmarks, tattoos burned into their skin by a warming compound painted and exposed to the elements to symbolize their clans, fallen children, and anything else to mark their accomplishments. Yet the fires of war rage in their eyes as only those who fall in battle gain a form of immortality. The mountain is harsh, and these people would have it no other way.

Khar'tep occupies the whole northern mountain range and is known to them as the Great Mother.

Not a single community, Khar'tep exists as a collective of five clans named in tribute to animals who best represent a chosen Elemental Spirit: the Hawk Clan (Honour), the Goat Clan (Balance), the Bear Clan (Patience), the Wolverine Clan (Strife), and the Rabbit Clan (Innocence).

Khar of the Hawk Clan is the current leader of Khar'tep, known as an avatar after defeating his predecessor in ritual combat. The name of this mountain changes to match that of its warlord.

While peaceful and barren at the base, the mountains are eternally frigid with powerful winds and snowstorms raging every day.

Each clan has an elder, a guardian, and a shaman who meet with the warlord before each season or in times of war. Each have undergone a ritual to take on the anthropomorphic form of an animal, giving their qi a physical manifestation.

Sights & Sounds

There is little to see past the blowing snow and heard past the howling winds. It is a constant state of harsh winter in the mountains of Khar'tep, and those who dare expose their skin experience the horrors of frostbite in minutes. Only because of their ancestors' work carving out roads winding across this jagged and icy rise to the heavens can the clans move about today. The frozen bodies of uncounted criminals and trespassers dot the mountain, yet the clans have embraced this climate and sport their ferocity and tenacity with frostmarks on their face, chest, back, and arms. There is no mistaking a Khar'tep warrior with numerous kills to her name.

Each clan lives a nomadic life as settling in one area is often impractical. While the Great Mother can hold back the effects of Chaos' Wrath for a time, the force of evil brought down on the mountain eventually becomes too much for the weakened guardian. Each day brings prayers and tributes to the Great Mother to grant her the strength to maintain her watch against anarchy in the form of stories, songs, and poetry. Because they must travel light at a moment's notice, the clans are not one for possessions. They own what they can carry on their backs; the rest is consumed by the mountain and time. Only in times of great distress does a clan move within close proximity of one another; this scattered society is a conscious choice to ensure there is always another clan hiding under Great Mother's care ready for revenge.

The axe is symbolic as both a dangerous weapon in battle and a handy tool at home. Perhaps the only physical craft practised here, each axe is customized with sigils, runes, and depictions of a clan's animal or Elemental Spirit. While all the five children of the All-Father are worshipped openly, followed by the Great Mother, each clan regards their chosen Spirit as their prime guardian. Each clan's elder oversees the worship of the pantheon, the shaman interprets the words of their chosen Spirit, and the guardian guides her people in the ways of the Great Mother. Taking another's axe is only allowed if the owner is killed in fair combat.

Deadly Cold: A character in a scene exposed to the cold and wind never forgets its bite. Unless a character has equipped themselves with something to keep themselves protected from the climate and assigned it a resource slot in the scene, they lose 25% of their current Vitality at the end of a scene. This loss occurs after additional Vitality is awarded. Any cold-based complications, or others brought on by Khar'tep's environment, cannot be removed by spending Vitality; the character must use a full description to remove the complication.

Thin Air (Trigger): Straining oneself at such a high elevation can lead to serious impairments. Whenever a character rolls an absolute in Khar'tep they automatically suffer a penalty complication unless they choose to negate the absolute's benefit and allow the opponent to shift.

Warlord's Rule

Never let the clans' devotion to the Elemental Spirit assume Khar's rise to power as divine influence. The clans are firm believers one's destiny is brought about by one's own actions, and they only allow their avatar to be someone who has proven themselves as a great guardian, elder, and shaman. This is the avatar's role, to embody the role of three individuals within one warrior. Tradition dictates all avatars must be qi warriors gifted with the mantle of a clan's guardian, elder, or shaman. As guardian of the Hawk Clan and wielder of fiery wings sprouting from his back, Khar was long considered a suitable avatar to lead his people in these dark times and he is still beloved by all. But his rule has been short.

Leading a people renowned for their ability to take care of themselves against all odds, Khar has time and ambition to expand his people's reach elsewhere. Since his victory over Roth only months ago, Khar initiated an aggressive expansion in the lowlands, with raiding parties marching into the borders of Yung Zhi and ambushing refugees and Outcast camps. Claiming weapons, technology, food, and livestock is the primary goal of these raids, Khar believes the Great Mother will soon be unable to fend off Chaos' energies unless her people find a new way to provide. To this young avatar, the answer lies in the lands of the other warlords. To keep their way of life secret from outsiders, these raiding parties consist of warriors and hunters from all clans working as one. This has not been seen since before Chaos' Wrath.

Dark Secrets

Secrecy is of great importance to Khar'tep, for the eyes of the other warlords would gaze greedily upon the Great Mother if they knew what the clans had in their possession: water. Giant underground lakes have pooled under the mountain to create a vast network of fresh water reserves. Khar was not aware of the struggles of the other cities when he ordered the raiding parties, and he now understands the target these lakes will place on Khar'tep if they are discovered.

Roth of the Goat Clan, former avatar of the Great Mother, still lives, locked up in a tower in Monsoon. When Roth fell into a crevasse after taking a deadly strike from Khar's axe, no one expected the aged shaman to survive the fall, let alone the wound. None in Khar'tep know about his survival... save for Khar. So long as Roth continues to breathe, the young avatar's rule over his people can be challenged and Khar could find himself banished naked into the Great Mother's heart. If the General should learn of this requirement for Khar's rule, the warlord of Monsoon will certainly use this prisoner to his advantage.



Never underestimate the ingenuity of the warriors from Khar'tep.

Khar, Warlord of Khar'tep

Major Character

The youngest avatar to sit atop the Great Mother, Khar took on the form of a hawk-man when he became the teenage guardian of the Hawk Clan. Seeking to expand his people's reach across the One Land, this beloved hero of the mountains is fast becoming a threat to the fragile peace existing between the warlords.

FEARED BARBARIAN WARRIOR (D10+1/5/3)

PROTECTOR OF KHAR'TEP (D6/3/2)

UNCANNY AWARENESS (D6/3/2)

Speaks To Great Mother (Motivation): More than a fierce warrior, Khar is attuned to his spiritual side thanks to the ritual performed as the guardian of the Hawk Clan. As a result, he can enter a meditative state and speak with the Great Mother for advice, gaining +1 Vitality per lead character.

Homeland: Khar'tep

Qi Power: Fiery wings

Unique Features: Sharing features with his clan's animal totem, Khar is without wings until he invokes his qi power. At his side is his battleaxe, Grimm, a double-sided axe with half the head broken off in his duel to become avatar.

Tributes (Motivation): Adored by his people, Khar is frequently bestowed with prayers and gifts from the various clans. Whenever he is offered a tribute from his people or visitors, he gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Never Back Down From A Fight (Hindrance): While a positive trait in Khar'tep, it is something that is easily exploited. Khar is honour-bound to accept all challenges, regardless of the timing of a situation, and only if it is a fight to the death. If a challenger presents themselves as per tradition (chosen by the players), Khar must fight them.

Paranoid (Hindrance): Khar knows his predecessor is still alive and does everything to keep it a secret, including from Grimm. Any mention of Roth in his presence causes Khar to act irrationally and allow another character to place an inception complication on Khar that lasts until the end of the scene.

Resource Slots: Grimm (+1 steps or +3 damage); Fiery Wings (+1 steps or +2 damage); plus 1 more

Vitality: 35

A Gruesome Victory (Signature): Khar ends another character's life in a particularly gruesome and bloody fashion that ends up covering him in his enemy's blood.

Bonus Challenges: Khar has several bonus challenges he can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. He starts each scene with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

Damage Trigger: Whenever Khar takes damage, he can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls. By spending 1 bonus challenge, he can increase this to a d10.

Fiery Wings (Qi Power): Khar can launch fireballs from his wings to make ranged attacks against his enemies. Despite these wings, he cannot fly and uses them to block attacks.

Grimm (Legendary Weapon, 7 qi points): This two-handed waraxe has served every avatar for generations and only works for the rightful leader of the Great Mother's people. When used in battle against the enemies of Khar'tep, it can cause massive tremors in the ground capable of cracking open stone or creating landslides. By spending 1 qi point, it can alter a set piece as if the Director spent a challenge. By spending 1 qi point, Khar can throw Grimm for a ranged attack against single target (or multiple targets by spending 2 qi points) and have the axe return to his hand at the end of the outcome.

Kills For A Living: As the Khar'tep perk; Khar uses two-handed melee weapons.

Terrifying Presence: Covered in numerous frostmarks and sporting scars from a series of deadly battles and raids, Khar is an intimidating figure. Any intimidation-based complications placed on another character by Khar automatically last until the end of the scene or he can spend a bonus challenge to increase any penalty complication to -2 steps.

Crazed Attack: Khar's ferocity has lead him to infamy as the mountain's greatest warrior, even if he places himself at great harm. Khar can spend 1 Vitality to gain an additional +2 damage bonus once per round.

Trya of the Bear Clan

Major Character

Captain of Khar'tep's most effective and deadliest raiding parties, Trya has learned the ways of the outside world at Great Mother's feet. She does not lead the raids; instead she infiltrates the numerous communities they attack. Her extensive time with the people and Outcasts has lead her to question her avatar's orders.

ADAPTATION (D10+1/7/4)

WARRIOR OF KHAR'TEP (D6/3/2)

Close Call (Milestone): Whenever Trya avoids being discovered by talking her way out of it while infiltrating a community, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Aid The Weak (Milestone): Whenever Trya provides assistance to an innocent person (typically an extra), she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Conflicted (Hindrance): Her exposure to other cultures and people has given Trya reason to doubt the purpose of these raids. If she is exposed to a description or outcome that places the community she is infiltrating or a person within that community as innocent or similar to the people of Khar'tep, Trya's current potential is reduced to its base step until the start of the next round.

Who Am I? (Hindrance): Trya has spent so long being someone else, including the leader of Khar'tep's greatest raiding party, that she has almost forgotten her life in the Bear Clan. Before these raids, she was a mother who faced a tragedy. If she is confronted with her past or given cause to think about it, she cannot use Vitality to remove any complications faster.

Resource Slots: Shapechanging (+2 steps); plus 2 more

Vitality: 25

Quick On Her Feet: Trya's greatest skill is her ability to quickly create plausible lies and assume the correct answer to questions she does not know while infiltrating a community. Once per scene she can re-roll her first social complication roll in a scene without spending Vitality, or spend 1 Vitality to force a character to re-roll a social complication roll against her.

Bear Form (Signature): Trya assumes the form of a large, feral bear.

Damage Trigger: Whenever Trya takes damage, she can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls.

Ignore the Pain: As the Khar'tep perk.

Homeland: Khar'tep

Qi Power: Shapechanging (+1 step bonus)

Unique Features: Only three people know what Trya looks like: Khar and her parents. Her qi power always keeps her true appearance a mystery though she almost always takes on the appearance of a woman as a matter of pride.

RUST

Were it not for Rust's engineering marvels, it is likely no one would even know this City existed. Unlike the other Cities, Rust is not built atop the ashes of its former self nor is it a survivor of Chaos' Wrath. Not in the typical sense. The parched desert where the people of Dharos constructed their massive spires remains mostly intact, save for the salvaged scraps taken underground, yet hidden behind a veil of toxic fog and deadly electrical bolts jumping from one spire to another. There is little doubt the land that was once Dharos took the brunt of the damage.

Modern day Rust is a mixture of scrap engineering and powerful advancements whose people thrive in the industrious nature of their cavernous City and cower under its oppressive regime. The Council of Iron preaches penitence for the crimes humanity brought about by angering Chaos, and keeps everyone not on the Council chained to impossible morals and high standards of behaviour. Sickness brought on the air filtration system, known as the Lung, and contaminants found within the salvaged metal from the surface world is common in Rust. Many who travel to this City are gravely disappointed by what they see after hearing tales of splendid marvels of modern technology hiding under the desert.

Rust is hidden in vast catacombs under the former northeastern city of Dharos.

Ruled by the Minister, a holy figure revered by citizens, and governed by the Council of Iron, the people of Rust exist in a strict religious state where purity of heart is more important than physical health.

Qi powers are forbidden in the City. Any natives of Rust discovered to have qi powers are forced into concentration camps and "purged" of their abilities. Many die in the process.

Numerous illnesses and diseases permeate the people, brought on by contaminants in the air filtration system that helps them breathe and the infections within the metals used to create their magnificent inventions.

Engineering is seen as a common way of life and many of the people in Rust invent unique machines, tools, weapons, and more using scraps from the surface world.

Sights & Sounds

Everything about Rust is dank and depressing. Save for the rocks of the cavern walls, nearly everything about the City is rusted metal and artificial light. From the walls to the floor to the pipes that wind their way across every open space, life for these people is a constant struggle highlighted by the chance to prove their worth to the Council by creating the next great invention. Ingenuity is seen as the path to purity in the afterlife, a message repeated by the limitless images and messages found on the walls and spoken by bards both official and not.

Despite this harsh climate, there is no denying how impressive Rust truly is. Everything about it was created by the people for the people and they are very proud of what they have accomplished. One need only see the devastation of the surface world to know they were not supposed to be alive today and it is for this reason they view the Minister and his Council as their guiding light. While the people are proud to serve the Minister, there are harsh lessons always on display for those who question their leaders. Public hangings, beheadings, floggings, and more are common occurrences. Armed sentries known as dominions patrol the streets and back alleys in search of offenders, particularly those with qi powers who sully the City with their abominations.

Whatever invention can be imagined is found here, in the streets and within every home. If it operates on electricity, steam, or perpetual motion, it is found in Rust so long as one does not mind its rusted appearance. Highly educated and devoutly religious in both their church and their work, the people display engineering schematics in the same way others hang murals. This City is what brings steampunk to this world and anything is possible... for a price.

Disease: Despite their progress, the people of Rust live with permanent diseases, afflictions, and other medical conditions brought on by the metals of the surface and the contaminants pumped into their air. Any outsiders or non-natives to Rust not already afflicted by a disease contracted within these walls is at risk. Unless a character has taken precautions to protect themselves, the Director can spend 1 challenge to inflict them with a disease-based complication that cannot be removed until after they leave the City. For every day spent in Rust, this complication remains in place for three days.

Lest Ye Be Judged (Trigger): Any character who does not comply with the Council of Iron's strict standards, including any public display of qi powers, is at risk of being arrested and processed for "re-education." If these transgressions are displayed out in the open, they can trigger a response from a group of nearby dominions (see below) at the Director's discretion. If the blasphemers can correct their mistake or leave the scene before the end of the following round, they avoid this trigger.

Dominions

Extras (Group, 2 per lead character)

Homeland: Rust

Qi Powers: N/A

THE COUNCIL HAS SPOKEN (D6/3/2)

Resource Slots: 1

Vitality: 3 each

Reinforcements: Whenever the group takes 10 damage, additional 1d4 reinforcements arrive at the end of the following round.

The Warlord's Rule

With uncounted effigies displayed on every street and in every home in Rust, it can be easy to believe the Minister controls the day-to-day functions of the City or leads the sermons that the people follow blindly or by force. This is not the case. The Council of Iron, those personally selected by the Minister for their specialties and devotion to the cause, rule over the people, protecting them from the blasphemy of the outside world. Proving their devotion requires physical sacrifices; each Councillor has augmented their bodies with artificial limbs, appendages, senses, and more. Even then, none are as augmented as the Minister himself, a fully mechanized humanoid standing more than ten feet tall whose vital organs are housed within a metal shell torso.

There are nine members of the Council, all but one charged with a district to tax and enforce their laws using sermons and dominions. Their servitude to the Council is for life, though their role within the Council and the district they govern rises and falls based on their machinations. Above them all stands Prefect Hassaf Youz, the Minister's Voice. The makeup of the Council and its functions in the City come direct from the Prefect as only she has looked upon the Minister's true face and proved her worth to lead the Council and the people of Rust. It is she who dictates the rule of law and the sermons given to the people every day, and those who question her choices are no longer around to question her again.

Dark Secrets

All governments have disturbing secrets that would otherwise reveal the fallacy of their power; the Council of Iron is no exception. The truth is there is no Minister and has not been for generations. When Rust was founded, a sole qi warrior rose to power and brought the people underground before succumbing to the diseases that would spread like wildfire in just a few years. Desperate to keep hope alive, the Council developed the myth of the Minister and take all necessary steps to protect that secret.

The Council has ambitions outside of their City, even though their xenophobic teachings indicate otherwise. While their faith is a sham, their belief in the purity of humankind is unquestionable. They view qi powers as proof of Chaos' infection of the land and seek to wipe out all qi warriors within their borders and across the One Land. All teachings of the Elemental Spirits who brought Chaos' Wrath upon them are forbidden and the Council preaches a New World purged of anarchy and the destruction of the Shard of Hope, which they belief allows Chaos to remain a threat to everyone alive today.

Prefect Hassaf Youz

Major Character

Supreme leader of the Council of Iron, the Prefect is the true saviour and warlord of Rust. What remains of her body is now encased in an iron shell adorned with religious schematics and symbols dedicated to a path of absolute purity. Her arms and legs have been amputated so that her iron body can take on various shapes, sizes, and lengths as well as create numerous weapons.

PREFECT OF RUST (D8+1/5/3)

WHATEVER IS NECESSARY (D8/5/3)

AMBITIOUS (D6/3/2)

Convert the Unbelievers (Motivation): All machinations aside, the Prefect is a true believer in her cause and would rather convert someone willingly rather than oppress people. Whenever she can convert a lead or supporting character to her faith, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Foil A Plot (Motivation): Years of rulership and constant plots against her power have made the Prefect a cautious person. She thrives on foiling plots to overthrow her before they ever come to fruition. Whenever she can do so, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Dependent on Technology (Hindrance): Without her iron shell, the Prefect is exposed to the elements that cause her people to rot. Whenever she is directly exposed to any complications native to Rust (such as disease), she only applies half of her available details to her next description.

Germaphobe (Hindrance): Years without direct skin-to-skin contact has created a major phobia. If the Prefect's skin is ever touched by another character, she must use 1 additional detail to counter this contact as if she were removing a complication. If the physical contact results in a complication, she must spend 1 Vitality to remove it.

Homeland: Rust

Qi Powers: Untapped

Unique Features: A thin, striking woman with long, oily black hair, there is little of her body visible underneath her iron shell. Sparks of electricity ripple across her body as the unique conduction device powering this armour creates more than required to function and must occasionally be released in a violent blast.

Resource Slots: Iron shell (+1 steps or +2 damage); plus 2 more.
Vitality: 35

Adapt: After suffering a complication other than damage, the Prefect can adapt her iron shell to avoid any similar complications in the same scene by spending a bonus challenge after removing the triggering complication.

Anything Could Be A Resource: As the Rust perk.

Bonus Challenges: The Prefect has several bonus challenges she can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. She starts each scene with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

Damage Trigger: Whenever the Prefect takes damage, she can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls.

Electrical Surge (Signature): After unleashing a massive surge of electricity from her iron shell, the Prefect steps out the smoke and forms a new weapon.

Honour Guard: The Prefect is guarded at all times by elite dominions chosen to serve and protect her. They function exactly as standard dominions (see Sights & Sounds) except they have 5 Vitality each and increase their potential to a d8.

Impenetrable Armour: The Prefect's iron shell is a walking fortress built with layers of thick iron and other alloys that make it near impossible to penetrate. Only by using 2 details to concentrate and aim for a weak or exposed point in her shell can an opponent cause damage. If the opponent is using explosions, it only requires 1 detail.

Keen Sense of Danger: As the Rust perk.

Remote Access: Built into her iron shell are sensors capable of activating escape hatches, steam vents, and other contraptions built into the foundation of Rust itself. By spending 1 bonus challenge per lead character targeted, the Prefect gains use of these remote accesses to trigger a Tricky challenge-based complication roll.

Mellish the Forbidden

Major Character

Believed to have been executed over a decade ago, this rebellious shopkeeper flaunted his qi power and threatened the Council's command over its people. Refusing to flee his homeland and taking up the cause of leading the rebellion to overthrow the Council and expose the truth about the Minister, Mellish the Forbidden is a true threat to everything the people of Rust hold dear.

ALWAYS A PEACEFUL WAY (D10+1/7/4)
 THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE (D8/5/3)

Open the Peoples' Eyes (Motivation): While not aware of the truth behind the Council, Mellish knows many of its fallacies and seeks to expose them to the people of Rust to protect them from themselves. Whenever Mellish converts a lead or supporting character to his cause, he gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Deep Trauma (Hindrance): Mellish came to a path of peace and resistance through violence and it haunts him to this day. Whenever he is reminded or reflects on the day he lost the use of his legs, all potentials are reduced to their base step until the end of the following round.

Resource Slots: 3
Vitality: 20

Homeland: Rust

Qi Power: Cure diseases

Unique Features: Paralyzed from the waist down by dominions trying to apprehend him ten years ago, Mellish is a small and elderly man who looks like a hunched over wizard in a wheelchair.



A Calming Presence: Combining his demeanor and physical stature, Mellish has a knack for calming tense and possibly violent situations. Whenever a character within eyesight of Mellish attempts a complication roll involving violence or one that would push the scene towards violence, they must roll twice and use the lower result.

Saviour (Signature): Mellish brings a lead or supporting character back from the brink of death using his qi power.

Smarter Than Most: As the Rust perk.

THE WASTES

If you do not understand, or should you underestimate, the ferocity and devastation of the Wastes, perhaps you are not the heroes we seek after all. What more could possibly be written? To truly comprehend the insanity manifested as physical law, you must go there and see it for yourself.

Sights & Sounds

This is the part of our world that exemplifies a post-apocalyptic landscape. A place where all manners of epic catastrophe take turns raining down magma, storms, and violence on the land, and every day is a struggle for survival. Yet underneath it all lay scant moments of beauty that remind you even the foulest villain once made this world out of love. Then as soon as it appears, it is gone. There is a kind of balance in the randomness because nothing lasts forever, and every kind deed must be met with harsh retribution.

Among these forgotten souls are the mysteries of a world that once was and the Fallen City crushed under the full brunt of Chaos' Wrath. Every Outcast tells their own version of the magnificence that was the jewel of the One Land, the trigger for the anger that would shake the world. Relics of this ancient civilization abound in the Wastes if you know where to look. Those who seek them for personal gain or in the name of an Elemental Spirit face the full fury of the Wastes and its manifestations. Only accidental survivors seem to find their way inside.

The Wastes is a wide area of parched desert located in the heart of the One Land.

No one individual or community claims leadership over the Wastes. It is instead home to Outcasts, who thrive on living away from the rulership of any warlord.

The radiation brought on Chaos' Wrath causes Outcasts' qi powers to physical scar them as their abilities became tapped at an early age before most children can learn self control.

The Salvation travels along the outer edges of the Wastes providing transportation between each of the Five Cities.

The Wastes seems to operate with some semblance of intelligence and can react to the violence and plight of those who call it home or find themselves desperately lost.

The one constant is the Salvation, revered as both the ultimate mode of transportation and a sign of hope in an otherwise bleak land. Some even pray to it as if it were a deity. One can catch its trail quickly enough as there are signs of its passing all over the Wastes. Its presence seems tolerated by the chaotic forces of this land for it brings as much violence as it does opportunity, something the Wastes relishes like one would a fine meal. The train and its loyal Caravan have traveled as deep into the heart of the Wastes as the edge of Mount Ori... but that only happened one time.

Unpredictable Climate: At the beginning of every scene in the Wastes, choose a Writer to determine the climate for the scene. If the Director is able to use this climate against the lead characters by spending challenges, that Writer gains +1 Vitality at the end of the scene.

Manifest Hindrances: While in the shifting borders of the Wastes, anything is possible. Illusions, elemental beasts, earthquakes, instant volcanoes...anything you could dread. More than just random consequences and obstacles, the Wastes reacts as if it is sentient and capable of knowing one's greatest fears and darkest thoughts. It then spits them back at you in an effort to break you. By spending 1 challenge, the Wastes create a physical manifestation of a lead character's hindrance.

Attracted to Violence: Once a total of 10 points of damage has been caused in any scene taking place in the Wastes, the aggressive energies of Chaos's remaining power become attracted to the battle and unleash fury on everyone involved. Every additional point unlocks a new threat to the scene. As the points continue to climb, these threats morph into deadlier forces looking to bring the skirmish to an end.

11-20: A sandstorm/snowstorm blows over the area and engulfs everyone. As all characters would have to suffer Concealment penalties, Concealment does not apply in this scene. However, characters cannot see beyond Close range.

21-30: Acidic rain falls in the middle of the sandstorm. Anyone ending their description exposed to the rain loses 1 Vitality.

31-40: An earthquake trembles deep within the earth's crust and causes a tectonic shift in the landscape. As giant spiked rocks emerge from the ground splitting it open, all characters must use their last detail per description to grab hold of something or else they automatically take the Prone complication and are unable to remain standing.

41-55: The dead rise! Anyone killed during this scene returns to life and attempts to bring down the current survivors. These undead are immune to damage and automatically gain the Aid Another Character step modifier so long as there are more than one within Melee range.

56+: The Director creates something truly powerful.

Calming The Wastes: All violence must conclude sooner or later, either because both sides reach a stalemate, or there are no more people to kill. But the Wastes does not like to be appeased with false sentiment and offerings of peace. For every round in which no characters take further violent actions against each other, reduce the total damage score by 3. As this lowers the overall score, adjust the Wastes' reactions accordingly. But as soon as violence steps up again within the same scene, increase the overall score by 10.

The Outcasts

No one person rules the Wastes. No one would dare. But it is not uninhabited. Those desperate enough to seek life here versus one in the Five Cities has seen enough violence and depravity to view this as a better option; let that sink in for a moment. The Outcasts are scattered across this vast terrain with hundreds of small wandering communities seeking shelter wherever it exists for as long as it remains. Some have taken to bandit raids along the border settlements of the Cities or even the Salvation itself, but all have turned to a life of peace and acceptance. They come to the aid of the lost and wounded, offering them a chance to make a name for themselves in a world that would just as soon forget them.

Outcasts born in the Wastes are almost always endowed with qi powers to such a degree that they are scarred by them. This does not make them more powerful as much as it marks them as being closer to the source of their powers than anyone else. Those who have been able to tap deeper into their qi than others born to the Five Cities harness truly strange and terrifying powers. For this reason, it is rare for them to venture into the streets of any City without drawing unwanted attention and revulsion.

Regardless of their time within the Wastes, many Outcasts develop psychic premonitions of varying accuracy. Some reveal themselves to be true in time, others are completely false. Or perhaps it is that some of them are prevented from ever coming true and so those futures are avoided entirely – the subject causes much debate within our order. This questionable accuracy has lead a few false prophets to set up shop along the border communities that do trade with some Outcasts.

The Fallen City

When Chaos struck, it was at the heart of the One Land both geographically and spiritually. While few scrolls or depictions remain of the forgotten capital, save for those buried deep in the temples of Monsoon, the stories of its beauty and democracy linger in the homes of every impoverished soul alive today. Yet remnants of the Fallen City are found scattered across the Wastes, buried deep under the sand and stone. Legend tells of six watchtowers, ancient markers along the border of the expansive Fallen City, capable of unlocking the location of the ultimate secret of the One Land. Discovering the ancient homeland of their ancestors is a prize sought out by many warlords, the General of Monsoon above all. Should this mystery one day be solved, it will bring about an evolution in the plight of our people.

The Salvation

Major Character

A cross between the steam engine train and an armoured tank, this windowless, seemingly crewless masterpiece of engineering never stops for anything. Guarded by numerous automatons, including warmechs, every angle is covered by canons, flamethrowers, and other heavy firepower. Using an endless supply of gear and tactics to handle any obstacle the Wastes can throw at it, The Salvation has been known to reconfigure and repair most damage and restrictions by adjusting plates and components with ease. There are many who believe these adaptations are a sign of some form of intelligence, possibly conceived by the very chaotic radiations of the Wastes. It would explain many things, especially since no one (not even those in the Caravan) have ever seen an operator or engineer.

Homeland: The Wastes

Qi Power: N/A

Unique Features: A giant locomotive engine built like a tank with heavy firepower and warmechs.

AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE (D12+1/9/5)

ONE STEP AHEAD (D8+1/5/4)

PROTECT THE PASSENGERS (D8/5/4)

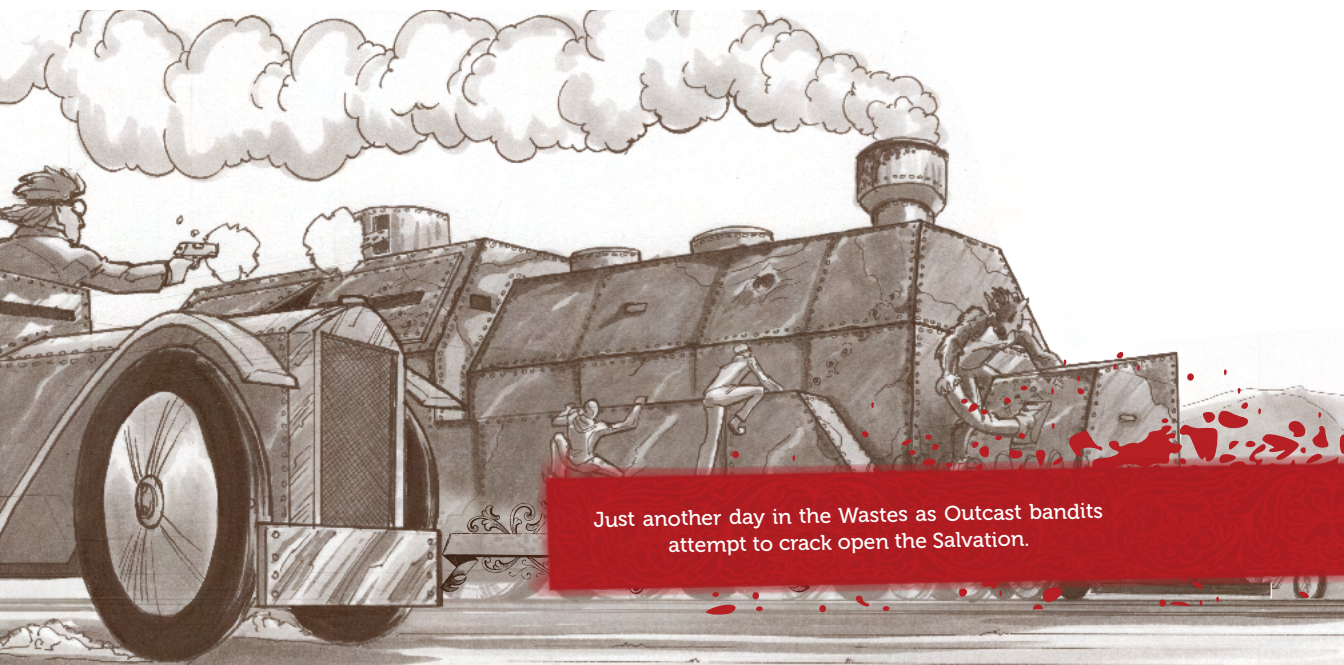
Resource Slots: 3

Vitality: 50

Adaptation: The key to the Salvation's endurance driving through the Wastes day after day for years are its back-up features and the ability to reconfigure its parts. These near flawless transformations are the Salvation's most amazing feature and the reason it can handle all forms of complications like any living character.

Bonus Challenges: The Salvation has several bonus challenges it can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. It starts the story with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

Built To Take A Beating: Built to withstand and push through anything the Wastes can dish out, this marvel of modern steampunk can spend 1 bonus challenge to roll its potential's dice to determine its Defence. The Director can choose to use either the result or the potential's original Defence, but the bonus challenge is spent either way.



Just another day in the Wastes as Outcast bandits attempt to crack open the Salvation.

A Little Help: The Salvation can spend 1 bonus challenge to grant the Caravan a second description in a round. It can also spend 1 Vitality to allow the Caravan to gain an additional interrupt.

Return The Favour: Whenever the Salvation takes damage, it (or the Caravan, if the Director prefers) immediately retaliates without spending Vitality.

The Caravan

Extras (Group of 3 per vehicle)

Always right behind the Salvation, and offering it support should things get out of hand, the Caravan is a well-armoured mobile defense keeping an eye out for the assorted vehicles brave enough to travel the Wastes in a group. Rotating between a rather impressive number of roaming biker gangs and rogue nomadic tribes scattered across the Wastes, many of them have developed a somewhat deific loyalty to the Salvation. For them, protecting the train is a way to fight back against everything that is wrong with the One Land and they will die to keep it running.

Homeland: The Wastes

Qi Power: Various (see the Random Qi Powers table on page 133)

Unique Features: A ragtag group of survivors in steam-powered motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles ride around the Salvation and the other vehicles under its protection.

NOBODY CAN STOP US (D6/3/2)

Resource Slots: 1

Vitality: 9 per vehicle

Heavy Firepower: The Caravan does not need to spend Vitality to complicate a group of extras.

THE TIME HAS COME...

Every warrior is a poet of battle. Many poems are brief and quickly forgotten, some never gaining a moment's spotlight. Yet for every thousand poems spoken in silence, one finds an ear and its words are shared with others. As the pool is thinned, some come to stand the test of time and create rich memories and experiences that shape the lives of those who hear them. Each of us believes in the union between warrior and poet, the power of words to equal blade. As the Director, we ask you do us justice in how you choose to present our home to those in your world. We also do not seek to put words in your mouth – each rendition of this story is unique and deserves its own chance to shine in the sun or become lost in the long grass.

Do our people proud, warrior-poet.





BOOK FIVE: THE PATH DISCOVERED

"Creation can be a dangerous thing. But not creating is a mistake we'll never learn from."

– The Fifth Verse of Honour's Oath

Playing the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** is a shared storytelling experience powered by your imagination and that of everyone else playing the game. In between these moments of controlled spontaneity are complication rolls to provide random shifts in the outcomes, yet it is always a story under your control. Perhaps no other players have more control over the course of the story than the Writers. What burdens does this place on the Director?

In this chapter, you will discover the inner meanings behind the mechanics and become enlightened with insights to directing the game.

To manage the expectations of the Writers as well as challenge them in a manner that is befitting the story and interesting to the craft of storytelling requires a person of honour. It seems only fitting that this book, written to guide all Directors on their journey through the ins and outs of this game and how to use it to present our home, matches many of the lessons taught in the scriptures dedicated to Honour.

This book includes an assortment of guidelines, suggestions, and opportunities to apply these mechanics in a manner that suits the story everyone wants to tell. It provides recommendations for using details and outcomes to create dynamic fight scenes with as many or as few blow-by-blow accounts as desired. You will also discover advice on creating a world that already exists by using initiatives and creating potentials to maximize your impact on your characters' chances in the One Land in your quest to become an honourable Director.



A VIOLENT GAME

Make no mistake, this is a game where violence is an integral part of the storytelling experience. Disputes are handled with physical threats and bloodshed, but even that can be an oversimplification of what can be done. Violence can be tragic as well as mind-numbing, shocking, and excessive. Simple and complex characters alike resort to violence and it can have consequences or simply exist to excite the audience. Regardless of the intent or desired effect, it is how things get done in the One Land.

Consider how violence defines these characters, how it affects their view of their homeland and the rest of the world around them, even how those factors view the way in which your characters use it. Violence can be implicit or explicit at varying rising tides. More importantly, it is perhaps the biggest decision facing the entire group because not only does it affect how everyone provides their descriptions, but also indicate where limits should be set to ensure everyone sees them the same way.

THE WRITERS' DUTIES

Knowing the Writers' responsibilities in this game allows the Director opportunity to aid them in their quest to tell a great story and focus on their own tasks of presenting a vibrant, troubled world. At its heart, this game is about the Writers telling their version of the One Land, its people, and the events that become legends for generations to come. With the co-operation of the Director, all Writers are the driving force of the tales told during play with the mechanics acting as a structured format to facilitate the storytelling process, and the dice throwing in a random curveball to keep everyone on their creative toes.

While not the only game to allow such narrative control, and far from the last, the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** combines the traditional roles of an individual gamemaster and a group of players while offering a shared narrative experience for all players. This is a conscious choice, one where the burden of establishing tone and setting remain with the Director to free up the Writers to do what they do best – a traditional approach to game design. All while keeping a loose flow that can change in an instant, and where the mechanics support the storytelling experience – an independent, narrative approach.

At their heart, stories in the One Land are about surviving the deadliest events and unforeseen consequences against a fantastic backdrop of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and violence. The Director's role is to add these elements to their story through the outcomes they provide to Writers' descriptions and the supporting characters and extras they describe to work against the lead characters' goals. This means the Writers' primary job is to make the game fun by focusing on their own characters and how they affect the world. If you have played any roleplaying or story games before, this is a universal approach. Here, that experience allows Writers to flesh out the details as they see fit to suit their characters' needs, background, and other aspects to invest their own creative energy into a setting that becomes their own.

For Writers, this is about telling their version of a story set against the backdrop of the One Land. The Director is there to keep everything moving in the direction desired and chosen by all players during that first session when the formats and key initiatives were laid down, and to challenge the Writers by challenging their characters. Present

THE DIRECTOR'S DUTIES

descriptions from the characters' points of view and work from the material provided by all players, particularly the other Writers. In a world where characters can conduct electricity from within or race at the speed of sound, there is a lot of room to try out some ideas and come up with a story all your own.

THE DIRECTOR'S DUTIES

This leaves the Director to become the living embodiment of the setting and the people who live their lives in its shadow. If the Writers and their characters are the cause, the Director is the effect. This is not your world, it is theirs, but they did not step forth to lay claim to it until after generations of ancestors and history made it what it is today.

Our actual One Land is far more specific than what has been presented in these pages and this was a conscious choice. It can be far too daunting and distracting to paint a portrait that leads many to view only the paint on the canvas and not the message it holds. As the Director, it is your task to help make this world come alive and work within the foundations created at the table by all. Your primary duty is to make this world believable, a function inherent in the very mechanics of this game.

Above all else, it is your duty to ensure that all players enjoy the game. These are willing participants promised an experience like no other and they turn to you for fairness, opportunity, and entertainment. Whenever the game fails to deliver or places the pace at risk, do what you feel is best to keep the players invested and enjoying their time together.

CREATING THE STORY AS YOU PLAY

Controlling the story means controlling how long it takes to reach the conclusion and doing so during the course of telling the story without laying down a foundation to build on runs the risk of spilling out across the floor, running too long, and ending up with something that has strayed too far from the original duration (as discussed in **Book Three: Endless Possibilities** as one of the key formats). By establishing long term goals, all players commit themselves to honouring those values honed at the beginning of the story.

Do not mistake this for sticking to a strict storyline! This is far from the case, as the entire purpose of your tale is to tell it your way. Moments occur to reshape your initial expectations, encouraging everyone to divulge from the main storyline into a side quest that may end up revealing more about the lead characters than anyone could have anticipated. Chapter goals provide a reward for sticking to the essential story beats needed to keep the story engaging and action-packed at the beginning of each session. You may also choose to set your next chapter goals at the end of a session while the story is still fresh in your minds.

Setting chapter goals requires a basis of the story everyone is going to tell, and this is broken down into three phases: the main plot, the number of sessions involved, and setting chapter goals.





What Is The Main Plot?

All stories have a central plot. Without it, there is no conclusion, only a series of ongoing events connected by the characters involved. As all the players gather to begin the genesis of their story by creating characters, establishing formats, and reviewing the rules of play, this is the time to discuss the main plot.

What will this story be about? Does it focus on a particular lead character? Who is/are the major supporting character(s) in this story? Above all else, what is the story's **concluding factor**? This is the benchmark that indicates the story is about to end and a grand finale awaits to reveal the final outcome of these events. For example, if you are telling a story about rescuing a warlord's son held hostage by Outcast bandits, the concluding factor could be when the son has been freed and in the lead characters' hands.

When Time Is A Factor: Some groups may wish to focus on the number of sessions available to play over the story's concluding factor. Many plots can be devised without establishing a likely conclusion and if this works best with the players, ignore establishing a concluding factor.

How Many Sessions?

Approximate the number of sessions your group wants to spend telling a particular story. Whether it is based on how much time players wish to spend playing the game overall or how much time until they want to move on to a new story can be a major factor.

Every time the players gather to tell their saga, discuss the overall goals, story arcs, and plot hooks you want to reveal before the session is done. What is a reasonable amount of time the players prefer to reach the concluding factor? Or simply how long does everyone want to play? Setting a story duration according to a strict number of sessions helps the Writers stay on their own track, even if they stray far off course from the original plan.

Now divide these into the number of sessions you want to assign for the three **phases** of your story: the beginning, the middle, and the conclusion. There is no limit to how many sessions can be assigned to each phase, and each one determines the additional Vitality awards for closing motivations or restoring connections.

The Beginning Phase: This first phase of your story is all about establishing the lead characters, the major supporting characters, and the main plot. By the end of the beginning phase, all players should have successfully laid down a foundation for the rest of the story to come. No Vitality awards are given for closing motivations or restoring connections during the beginning phase, but each lead character can receive +1 Vitality for each potential introduced into the story without the use of a complication roll. For example, a lead character with a potential called Shepherd could be introduced working in a local soup kitchen or running an underground network to help people flee the tyranny of Rust. These Vitality awards are handed out at the end of each scene, when applicable.

The Middle Phase: The main plot is actively addressed and targeted during this phase of the story, with the Director pitting the lead characters against several dire situations. This phase is all about finding a way to end the dilemma of the main plot and provide the means by which the lead characters wrap up the story in the conclusion phase. During the middle phase, characters can close their motivations and restore connections to receive Vitality at the end of a scene as discussed in **Book Three: Endless Possibilities**.



The Conclusion Phase: It all comes to a head now as the lead characters actively attempt to bring the story to an exciting conclusion. Whether the players wish to continue with another story afterwards determines if characters address motivations and connections or leave them for another time. However it turns out, the characters can instantly receive Vitality awards during a scene when they close a motivation or restore a connection. Characters cannot create new motivations during the conclusion phase.

USING INITIATIVES TO CREATE YOUR ONE LAND

What you have read about the One Land in Volume One is only the beginning of what's to come. There is one trick to learn about being a Writer - this is only the canvas. Paint on it as you see fit with whatever paints and brushes you prefer, stretch it out to make it larger, or complete only a section at a time. In other words, the world is yours to do with as you will. But remember you are doing so as part of a group, a team of Writers and a Director seeking a glorious tale all their own. This means working together using the mechanics as presented with the setting as a launch pad.

Initiatives were designed to help all players maintain a level of authority in the development of the story and allow everyone to specialize in owning various ideas or aspects of its creation. For example, one player could be charged with introducing all background characters in the impoverished streets of Yung Zhi while another player is considered the best at creating wild steampunk contraptions coming out of Rust. Everyone could simply build up a list of initiatives as they go or players comfortable with more traditional games could turn to the Director for most of what's encountered in their One Land. There is no wrong way.

An initiative is a lightbulb added to your story, be it through a background character, a long-forgotten moment in history, a connection between two characters, or simply how badass a sword looks. Once an initiative has been introduced to the story, it is placed inside a glass display case and taken out whenever required, a tool to help players maintain a vision of their ideas, even if that vision is still in motion. They allow everyone the opportunity to create in a safe space where the rules provide the means to ensure something doesn't take a turn in an unwanted direction. Yet they are also intended to be flexible; if someone suggests an alternate or additional idea you did not consider before, you are welcome to accept the idea and alter your initiative. Stories are always evolving and so should initiatives when something new feels better than the original iteration.

Initiatives are also an effective tool for the Director to keep the story's major characters and their goals in mind. **All materials provided in this book are considered the Director's initiatives at the beginning of the story, including the rules.** That is the default setting of this game. As with Writers, the Director is always encouraged to accept new ideas offered by the Writers during play or stick with the original version. Remember, the Director is also a player in the game and gets to provide descriptions based on the potentials and motivations of her characters. This mean you get to have fun too.

With the Director's initiatives as a starting point and the formats chosen by the group at the beginning as the base, each additional initiative adds a new layer to the story. Sometimes they are replaced or adjusted to support the weight and balance of the other levels, sometimes they are removed completely to make sure the story doesn't collapse.





A drive-by ambush in the streets of Yung Zhi.

By placing the final vote in the hands of their creator, initiatives work together to create one solid story.

When Does Something Become An Initiative?: Any story element, connection, physical object, character, even a story beat or plot twist can be considered an initiative if it is important enough to a player. Perhaps the player wants to use it later in the story for something else, even if they don't know what that is yet. Initiatives are best handled openly. Whenever a player wants to make something an initiative, it should be announced to the Director. Otherwise, the Director is the final arbitrator on whether an aspect of the story or its characters was initiated by a player in the game.

Introduce An Initiative Before Applying It Mechanically: While not a rule of play, players must introduce initiatives before using them to create a step bonus, resource, or anything else that offers an in-game benefit. In other words, before you suddenly pull out that ancestral shotgun powered by your own qi, introduce it in a previous description. This allows everyone to know what to expect and avoid any unwanted surprises, even if that introduction was made beforehand using only one detail.

Should You Keep Track Of Initiatives?: There can be any number of initiatives recorded onto character sheets and scene notes; it is best to be selective about which ones you want to lay claim to by recording it in your notes. Any initiatives not directly based on the current state and history of your characters should be documented by player name for future reference. Otherwise, the group can easily recall the player to first introduce an initiative or the Director can randomly assign it to a player. As a rule of thumb, if no one remembers if it is an initiative or not, assume it is not and create an initiative with the new idea.



CHOOSING YOUR POTENTIALS

The right potentials allow a character to stand out and be recognized as something unique in a world covered in debris. They are the visual cues, visible scars, distinguishing features, known moves, and emotional ticks of every character built to suit the needs of their player. Because there are no predetermined potentials, the door is wide open. Directors are expected to create characters – and their potentials – on the fly. This can be problematic at first without a few pointers to help keep those potentials in line with what you need to make the most of your characters and their chances in the One Land.

Physical, Mental, and Social Situations: Can your potentials help them deal with numerous possible scene goals, not just ones involving violence? Can your potentials help characters talk their way out of trouble? Catch something from the corner of their eye? Establish allies in just the right places? Consider using potentials capable of coming into play in a variety of situations. Not all of them need work across the board, but they should be able to help you contribute to the story when combined.

Key Initiatives: These are the foundation of your story, the core elements from which everything else will develop. Use these to help frame your potentials and lock down what will matter most to your characters.

Built On Roles: Particularly with extras and supporting characters, potentials define roles in the scene. What are they there to do, prevent, or enable?

Built On Values: A potential represents a character's defining attributes and those come down to their personal values. Surviving the harshness of the Wastes takes fortitude and skill, yes, but there is a line individuals will not cross...even when it comes to matters of life and death.

SETTING SCENE GOALS

Keeping your scenes the right length requires setting proper scene goals. If they take too long, characters have to wait longer than expected to regain much needed Vitality. If Vitality is too easy to acquire, the game quickly becomes just as easy to complete and loses its excitement. Being able to continue with the story relies on every scene's goals.

The average session of four hours in your world involves 3 to 4 scenes in the story. Using this baseline, discuss as a group how many goals must be set to complete the main plot of your story (or at least complete the current session for longer stories). Think of these as stages to completing the story. If everyone feels 6 stages are needed to complete the story, at least one scene requires multiple goals. While these are harder to complete, they are also a chance for more Vitality.

Consider these recommendations when discussing the next scene's goals.

Each scene is drawn from previous scenes. Use what has transpired as a guide for building the next scene's goals. Think one step ahead. What opportunities does this scene create for the next one?

Is there something for each lead character? As there are other characters (and players) involved in the scene, discuss how everyone can contribute towards achieving scene goals before locking them in place. The characters may need to split up to achieve multiple scene goals or figure out a way to work together on solving their problems.



Goals reveal information about the main plot. A scene goal should be important to the main plot, even one as simple (and vital) as the lead characters meeting for the first time. Without this meeting, the story cannot proceed. As the story continues, the goals should focus more tightly on the main plot until the very last scene.

Some steps may require multiple scenes to achieve. These can be divided into smaller steps or a list of requirements to complete the step and are awarded as individual scene goals over the course of numerous scenes.

Avoid multiple fight scenes to complete multiple goals in a scene. The exception to this would be if your story is near the conclusion, in which case the lead characters only need ensure their survival to the end of the scene, and therefore the story.

A scene should always include risk. The lead characters should especially face danger through physical harm, apprehension, separation, or any other possibility developed over the course of the story. That risk should be central to the conclusion of the scene, where the characters are more likely to spend and lose Vitality.

BUILDING A FIGHT SCENE

In a game as combat heavy as the *High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game*, creating exciting fight scenes is the key to getting the most out of these rules. Each strike, gunshot, and swing are extensions of the character's will to live in the rugged wilds and city streets of the One Land. They are moments for characters to express how they confront their enemies and maintain their honour through physical motion, whether poetic and cinematic or straightforward and brutal.

A **fight scene** is any moment in the game (including the middle of an existing scene) in which characters face physical action and danger. This includes chases, battlefields, shootouts, and much more. Your details are the key to providing exciting descriptions during a fight scene as they allow characters opportunity to accomplish multiple attacks in a single round to build up to an ultimate result. Each detail is an action incorporated into the description that allows your character to handle multiple enemies simultaneously while picking them off one-by-one through the complications you roll, as well as outcomes provided by the other players.

Maximizing your details in a fight scene for intense fight scenes can involve any of these best practises. Many of them involve the concept of **flourishes**, additional minor elements built into a detail that offer no mechanical effect. Any flourish offers up an exciting visual to the fight scene adding to its intensity without bogging the game down with a growing list of complications. They may present themselves as complications but are not part of the character's key detail nor triggered by a complication roll.

Not Every Detail Is Awesome: A hero may be interesting at first because of their fighting style, charisma, or other reasons but quickly becomes uninteresting when it is clear they never intend to do wrong. Characters are flawed anti-heroes in a world that doesn't prefer to work in their favour – they will miss! Opponents block or dodge, and some things simply act as a distraction for the next move. Mix in blocked details here and there in your descriptions.

Not All Attacks Deal Damage: Superficial wounds, punches to the head, kicks to the groin, and others are examples of physical attacks hitting their mark without creating serious consequences for the victim. That means no damage. Only when the acting character chooses to attempt damage with a complication roll does damage apply. The rest of the strikes are flourishes to add to the cinematics.



Flourishes Are Not Complications: If an opponent is described as falling to the floor without a complication roll, that's just a flourish. She can get right back up without having to use a detail. Only when dice are rolled to determine who receives a complication does it require details to remove.

Set The Fight's Conclusion as a Scene Goal: Only fight scenes involving extras should occur unplanned in the middle of an existing scene. Otherwise, set the desired conclusion of the fight scene as the scene's goal to ensure enough Vitality is regained when the fight's over. It also ensures complications do not hinder your efforts if the next scene is a fight scene.

Taking On A Group: While a group of extras is not defeated until they reach 0 Vitality, that does not mean individual extras cannot be taken out with a simple detail or two, even with a flourish. There is a balancing act to dealing with a group as taking out too many extras too early results in a smaller number who can withstand a harsher beating longer.

Don't Be Afraid Of Complications: Spend too much Vitality on shifting complication rolls and that last fatal hit may be closer than you think. Unless an opponent has rolled high enough over your Defence to make damage a viable option, many complication rolls results in another complication, such as a restriction or penalty. Work with them! You can remove them on your next description.

Using Vitality To Set Fight Scenes

Because life is hard in the One Land, so too are the fight scenes once they involve major and supporting characters. More importantly, a good fight scene in stories like those told with the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** needs tension and believable danger to captivate an audience. In this case, the players are the audience. Creating a dangerous fight scene is a matter of setting the number of Vitality between all the opponents.

For a tough fight that the lead characters work together to overcome, there should be an equal number of total Vitality between the lead characters and their opponents. In other words, if the lead characters have a total of 45 Vitality, so will the opponents' combined Vitality. If the lead characters have increased their potentials since the story began, the opponents gain +3 Vitality for every increase.

The rest comes down to addition and subtraction, though there are some recommendations for quick use during a story.

- **For a quick and easy fight that offers little to no danger to the lead characters**, only use extras equal to half of the lead characters' total Vitality. Additional Vitality among the extras, even in a group, only makes the fight scene longer.
- **Major characters** have damage triggers and are intended to battle multiple opponents simultaneously.
- **Never use more than half of your current challenges over the course of a fight scene.** Save them for the final fight scene of the story. Tough fight scenes at the end of the chapter should end with several challenges equal to the number of lead characters in the story.



Framing Your Fight Scenes

Creating a memorable fight scene can begin with the first important act of any scene: framing it. **Framing a scene** refers to the initial setups that create the look and feel of the scene, be they visual aesthetics or tone. These are the flourishes a Director adds to the fight scene; they offer little to no mechanical effect on the scene but make it stand out as a unique fight scene for your group.

Use the following recommendations for framing your fight scenes.

- **If the fight scene involves a supporting character**, add a visual element to the scene. This could be environmental or physical; anything that makes this scene unique compared to any other fight scene that could take place at this exact moment. This element does not place any complications or possible mechanical effects to the fight scene, even when using challenges.
- **If the fight scene involves a major character**, this visual element can be enhanced by the Director by spending challenges.
- **If the fight scene takes place in the conclusion phase**, add a physical threat to the setting. This can include traps, steep ledges, acid rain, or anything else you dream up. This is a danger all characters must address with at least one detail or else automatically suffer a complication. If the fight scene involves a major character, that character can use bonus challenges to use the danger to their favour.

PRESENTING OUTCOMES

An outcome is a means of providing an incredibly freeform monologue by a player that helps move the story forward, as well as providing reactions and results based on the previous description. If a description is used to open a door, the outcome is the initial discovery inside. If a description is throwing someone through a plate glass window thanks to a complication roll, the outcome is the moment when the glass shatters and that character somehow finds herself grabbing hold of a ledge and hanging on for dear life.

For Directors, outcomes can be the tool in which the style, cinematography, choreography, framing, and formats come to life. Think of descriptions, complication rolls, and all other in-game elements leading up to the outcome as the writing on the page; the outcome is how it looks, feels, and sounds to the audience in a theatre. They are the consequences to decisions both good and bad, the results of random chance and honed skill, all coming to light in your own words. That is what an outcome provides to the game.

Use whatever tools or methods you like based on the formats chosen at the beginning of the story. Set up an outcome with camera shots and lighting styles, get in depth with physical descriptions and minute details, or simply provide a general impression for other players to embellish with future descriptions and outcomes of their own. Outcomes are what help make your story unique, and they build up the next description for the next player. They are equal to descriptions in plot development and excitement. Have fun with them!



THE SECRET TO SURVIVING HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI

Loners are a dime a dozen in the One Land. They come and go as quickly as the seasons in the Wastes, most of them before anyone ever hears the tale about what could have made them so great. If you want to survive and eventually thrive, you must work together. Or learn how. Quickly.

The **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** is also designed to “improve” as the story continues through system mastery. In other words, the more you play, the more you discover how to overwhelm your opponents using teamwork and coordinated moves by using the game’s mechanics against itself. As all players continue their exploits and play the game with greater accuracy and confidence, additional options intended to allow each group of lead characters to apply their own method of enacting justice or taking what’s rightfully theirs become apparent.

What Is Vitality?: Knowing where you stand compared to the warlords and powerhouses of the One Land is found in a character’s Vitality. But what does that mean? Vitality is more than just an expression of a character’s longevity in the story or their presence in the scene. It is a measurement of how vital they are to the story. Alone, there are many others just as significant and some who are far more vital to the stories about to unfold in the One Land. When you add multiple characters’ Vitality together – when they work together – you unlock influence and power that rivals the Salvation itself!

CREATING LEGENDARY WEAPONS

Everything prior to this section involves the implementation of any story, regardless of who they focus on and for how long. As the plot thickens in the middle phase and the lead characters face a growing number of tests, they may prove themselves worthy of a legendary weapon. These epic tools are an extension of the past returning to play a role in the One Land’s future, marking the new heroes of this generation as blessed by those who shaped its origins.

Yet not every qi warrior can simply pick up a legendary weapon, let alone recognize one on sight alone. They must prove themselves worthy and compatible to the forces and conditions that shaped their creation, an event typically forged in great tragedy. A legendary weapon’s return to the present is a means by which they can amend a crime, right a wrong, or prove their value in history.

While there are a handful of legendary weapons in the One Land, as found in **Book Four: A Land Paved In Blood**, Directors are encouraged to create original legendary weapons for their story’s lead characters. A character only ever has a chance to wield one legendary weapon in their lifetime and it is a commitment not taken lightly. Use the following guidelines for creating a legendary weapon.

Choose A Shared Potential: What is it about the character that would cause a legendary weapon to bond with them? Select one of the character’s potentials and adapt the legendary weapon’s goal to exist in close proximity.

Augmenting The Character’s Abilities: How can the legendary weapon improve the character’s chances in battle or enhance their qi power?



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI ROLEPLAYING GAME

Spending Qi Points: On what can the character spend qi points to augment the legendary weapon? Set a maximum of one enhancement that best matches the weapon's goal for every one of the character's potentials.

Give It A Personality: Bonding with a legendary weapon is a varied experience. Some wielders share a telepathic bond with their weapons, others simply feel its presence at all times. The deeper the connection between the character and the legendary weapon, the stronger its personality.

Name The Weapon: With these aspects in mind, allow the player whose character carries the legendary weapon into battle to name it.

YOU ARE READY TO BEGIN

There comes a time when no more training is possible and a student must be tested to gauge the impact of their training. One can only study the teachings of previous masters and esteemed scholars for so long before they must hold a weapon in their hand and stand before the enemy with bated breath and fiery rage. For you, that time is now.

These are the final lessons we have to offer in your mission to save the One Land. Consult everything we have taught you in moments of doubt, learn from your mistakes, and never underestimate the values you have gleaned from us. What do these lessons mean to you? How do you carry them forward? Perhaps the most important question of all is knowing how you adapt to suit the needs of the game, its story, and its people?

There are no more answers to give you. Take this book and go forth, young apprentice. We await your success on the field of battle.





BOOK SIX: THE SCORCHING OF THE WORLD

"Some of us want to watch the world burn."

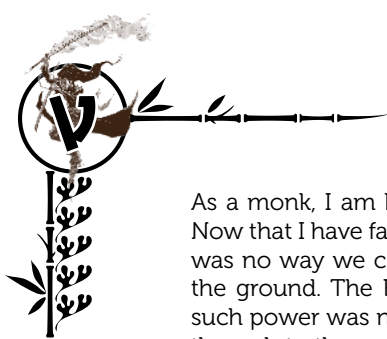
— From the Monsoon Proclamation of Xaos

This world is not meant to exist. Not any more. The creator of those who now struggle to feed and raise their families has already chosen our fates. We are to burn to ash and blow away in the wind, never to be heard from again. The entity that allowed us to be has rescinded that offer. To refuse Chaos' Will is to speak heresy and risk a greater calamity.

I should know. I am the Guardian of the Shard of Hope, the last obstacle one must face if one were to try and take it. Or I was, before the magnificence that was Heaven's Peak fell against an army of ignorant soldiers on a madman's leash. But that is a tale for later in this book.

They say you should know your enemy before you challenge them, or else risk walking straight to your grave. Never underestimate your opponent, all of that. They also say the abyss stares back at you. True words and ones I have taken to heart in my years locked within the crypts beneath our beloved monastery. Solitary was my purpose, not just because of my ward but due to the very power that threatened anyone who would dare try to bring Chaos back from the brink. My qi is death itself and it is a power I would have gladly used to stop anyone who sought to crack the Shard. Chaos' Will (or what others call his Wrath) may have doomed the One Land to destruction but the ignorance of his children, the Elemental Spirits, spared us from annihilation.

In this chapter, we shall reveal the nature of our enemy and how Chaos is planning to finish the end of the One Land.



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI ROLEPLAYING GAME

As a monk, I am beholden to all the Spirits and was duty bound to protect the Shard. Now that I have failed, all I am left with is the aftermath of the next doom to come. There was no way we could have stopped the forces that brought Heaven's Peak toppling to the ground. The Elemental Spirits were not there to protect us, to aid us in ensuring such power was never released. It can only be Chaos's Will. So I now serve him to see it through to the end.

And I am not alone. For generations, each Guardian has kept a small but dedicated network of eyes and ears in the Five Cities. When our home was destroyed, we all knew what path lay before us. We became the Xaos, Chaos followers who seek to bring about the end of the One Land. We are informed and involved in the daily machinations of the warlords, the gangs, even the nomads wandering between the Five Cities. With the Shard of Hope now cracked, we are quick to act as Chaos's agents for his swift and steady return to power.

In light of my failure to protect the Shard, I am left with only my own choices to make and I have chosen to complete Chaos' last command. The One Land must be destroyed. We are the Xaos, those who do what must done. Those who stand in our way are the enemies of the All-Father himself and must be defeated.

For my contribution, I have compiled the history of what has brought us to this new doom as well as those who stand at the forefront of the revolution. Should you wish to use it as a collection of enemies to fight and obstacles to overcome, so be it. My intention is to reveal another path to your quest, a second means to show my brothers and sisters the errors of your way. Some of you seek to burn the One Land as much as I do. This book is your fuel. All it needs is the spark that sets it all ablaze.

THE LEGEND OF BLACK SCORPION

What you have learned thus far has been ancient history. What I am about to share reveals a secret kept from most of those living today, save for the warlords and their elite commanders. It is the first order of business for the Xaos: to spread the word about the cracking of the Shard of Hope and the return of Chaos to the One Land. It is a story I know all too well because I was there.

Many know the stories of the one they call Black Scorpion and her army of deadly – and some would say insane – qi warriors, the Desert Sun Gang. They are either the liars who told such tales or the oppressed who heard them. The truth is known only to those involved in her history and those who have brushed aside the falsehoods in search of truth. Who could have suspected that this murderous bandit would become both the vengeful wrath of Heaven's Peak and the symbol of Chaos' return?

There are many legends and tales about Black Scorpion. Some of them are true, others are terrifyingly false, yet all of them are meaningless without peeling away the outer layers of gossip. No City lays claim as her birthplace, leaving many to believe her born in the Wastes among the Outcasts, and whatever her true name, it remains buried out there in the swirling sands. She possessed a natural talent for the martial arts and showed skill with a sword not long after she could walk. Yet it was her terrifying, and at times uncontrollable, raw qi that made her stand out amongst others; she could look into one's heart and bring forth their greatest fears. Fueled with a fiery rage, the girl they would later call the Black Scorpion was an outsider among the Outcasts, unable to direct such abilities.

THE LEGEND OF BLACK SCORPION



As one of the few people who knew about the monks of Heaven's Peak, her mother sought to gain access for her daughter but was quickly cast aside. There was a darkness, they said, deep within her soul that would one day burn a hole in her chest. While they could not deny her talents and believed she contained the ability to control her qi, the monks chose not to tutor her in their arts.

Before long, the girl fell in with the Desert Sun Gang, riding with them across the outlands of the Wastes and into the Five Cities she had heard so much about as a child. Their leader at that time was the infamous bandit king, Ho-Sun, and he recognized the raw talent this girl possessed – a talent he knew would one day become powerful enough to lead the Desert Sun into greatness. By the time she was eighteen, the girl they now called Black Scorpion was second-in-command and lead many raids and heists across the One Land. When Ho-Sun was felled during an ambush by the Watchdogs of Serenity Falls, Black Scorpion took up the mantle of gang leader.

By her twenty-fifth year, the bandit was wanted for dozens of murders, robberies, raids, and other crimes in all Five Cities. Every warlord wished to see her kneel before them before removing her head, and each grew more and more desperate to apprehend her. When that fateful day came, armies had been dispatched by every city to hunt down and eliminate the Desert Sun once and for all with bragging rights to be awarded to the warlord claiming responsibility for their demise. Unfortunately, they never came close.

Ambushed by Grandfather's forces as they rode towards Serenity Falls, many of the Desert Sun were killed, their leader horribly wounded. Yet Black Scorpion managed to escape into a sandstorm. Weakened and near death, she stumbled to the only place where no warlord dared approach: Heaven's Peak. Under oath to never turn away the dying, the monks took her in and treated her wounds. They say the bandit leader died... twice... and was successfully brought back to life by their traditions and mastery of qi. When she awoke fully healed and ready to stand on her own two feet, three months had passed and every warlord in the One Land believed her rotting in the ground or lost to the wild void of the Wastes.

Something happened then that has yet to be explained. The monks – the very ones who turned her away as a child – allowed Black Scorpion to live within their home and study the ways of qi mastery. There was still much darkness in her heart but there was one monk above all others who advocated long and hard for her training. Her name was Violet Blossom and she became Black Scorpion's mentor in the mystical path to unlocking her true potential and inner peace. She warned the bandit leader that she could remain atop the spire so long as she forsook her dreadful past and no longer answered to her old name. Reluctantly, Black Scorpion agreed to these terms and began a new journey as Sun Su Chi. For years she lived with the monks, developing her powers. She grew to become one of their community and, more importantly, came to fall in love with Violet Blossom, whom she considered her saviour. It was a complicated time for Sun Su Chi as monks are forbidden from pair bonding, a truth she struggled with for all the years she adored her mentor from afar while standing so close. While she could never give voice to her love, she did all that she could to redeem her wicked past while studying with the monks of Heaven's Peak.



A mural depicting the concluding battle of Chaos' Wrath.

The Battle of Heaven's Peak

The secret life of the once bandit, thief, and murderer was revealed by happenstance. A wandering merchant named Jonas came to conduct trade with the monks and recognized Sun Su Chi for who she once was, a fact that he sold to the General of Monsoon for a hefty reward. In an unprecedented turn of events, the five warlords of the One Land met to discuss a united attack against the monks of Heaven's Peak and finally eliminate the one who had brought them so much shame. Determined to act without failure this time, each warlord contributed forces for an assault on Heaven's Peak with orders to kill everyone encountered until the criminal was caught or slain in battle. Few outside of those involved are aware of such an effort, for the warlords cloaked their actions in shadow.

Even through the unpredictable tornadoes, enraged elementals, and other fierce obstacles of the Wastes wore down their numbers, enough soldiers and weaponry survived the trek to make a worthwhile assault on the monastery. Their attack was merciless. Armed with canons, the combined forces of the Five Cities pummelled the base of the spire with wave after wave of explosions, threatening to bring the tower of rock toppling to the ground. Our people, along with Sun Su Chi and Violet Blossom, took the battle to the troops in an effort to cease their attack, but they were horribly outnumbered. In the end, the paradise that was Heaven's Peak fell to the ground, becoming nothing more than a ruin of crushed bodies, homes, and rubble. Many monks, including Violent Blossom, died defending their home.

ADDING BLACK SCORPION TO YOUR STORY



These ignorant troops and their blind warlords did not know the true purpose of Heaven's Peak nor did they comprehend the artefact buried deep at the base of the spire, The Shard of Hope. When the spire fell, the calamity cracked the Shard and allowed the weakened essence of Chaos to flee into the land he had created in rage. By the time I could fathom the destruction around me, it was too late. And like all the others, I fled.

But not Sun Su Chi. With a legendary ferocity unleashed by those who had sought to destroy her, and with her newfound mastery of qi, she sliced apart the legions of soldiers and sent the rest fleeing into the Wastes. When the battle was over, Sun Su Chi was no more. Black Scorpion had returned.

Those of us who survived retreated to caves or made dangerous treks to hide within plain sight across the Five Cities, each of us tending to the chores assigned us when we donned these robes and took our vows. Some of us formed the Xaos and dedicated our lives to completing Chaos' Will, as the Battle of Heaven's Peak was a clear sign of destiny.

What the warlords feared as a simple bandit has now been magnified by revenge of the darkest kind. Her murderous past merged with enhanced qi training, Black Scorpion returns to the lands outside the Wastes seeking the blood of those who ordered the levelling of the spire. While there have been reports of her at a watchtower outside of Monsoon, she remains in hiding. Plotting, planning, aspiring to get her revenge on those that destroyed everything she fought for and those who died because of her.

ADDING BLACK SCORPION TO YOUR STORY

Whether you choose to aid her cause or hinder her pursuits, many players may wish to pit their potentials against the terrifying powers of Black Scorpion. If you have not yet purchased a copy of **High Plains Samurai: Legends**, feel free to download a free PDF on our website and run the storyline with her name on it. While there are plans to include this major character in future products supporting the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game**, there is no reason why she cannot begin her path to revenge in yours.

Black Scorpion

Major Character

Once upon a bygone time, Black Scorpion was the leader of the Desert Sun Gang. A bandit captain turned legendary hero, she was believed to have been killed by a legion of Monsoon soldiers at an ambush deep in the Wastes. Something happened to Black Scorpion after all those years lost, believed to be a ghost. Whatever it was, it left a scar deeper than that ambush.

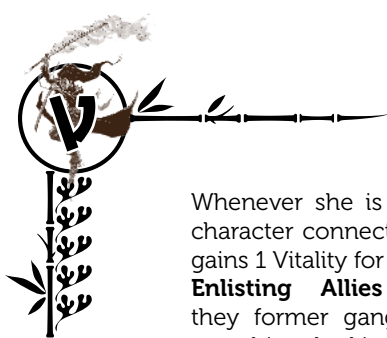
LEGENDARY FIGHTER (D10+1/7/5)
A BANDIT TO BE FEARED (D8/3/2)

Revenge for Heaven's Peak (Motivation): The grief and responsibility for the massacre at the Battle of Heaven's Peak weighs heavily on Black Scorpion. Only death can bring justice for the monks and her true love, Violet Blossom.

Homeland: The Wastes

Qi Power: Terror

Unique Features: Half of this tall woman's face is covered by a white mask with a small black scorpion on the side of the temple; she wields a poisonous samurai sword believed to have once been used to slay a former warlord of Monsoon.



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI ROLEPLAYING GAME

Whenever she is able to kill a major character connected to the Battle, she gains 1 Vitality for each lead character.

Enlisting Allies (Motivation): Be they former gang members or new anarchists looking for revenge, Black Scorpion can attract a crowd. Whenever she is able to recruit a supporting character to join her cause, she gains +1 Vitality per lead character.

Distant Relationships (Hindrance): Having paid far too great a cost to bond with another person again, Black Scorpion is psychologically blocked off from using any emotion other than anger. The rest of the time, she is a blank slate. This hindrance limits how she can engage with others.

Unquenchable Rage (Hindrance): Visual reminders of the Battle can trigger a rage augmented to terrifying limits by her qi powers but this quickly tires her out. While in a rage, she cannot spend Vitality to shift a result in her favour.

Resource Slots: Scorpion's Blade (+1 steps or +2 damage; see below); Charismatic leader (+1 steps); plus 1 more

Vitality: 30 (or 34, if Black Scorpion achieved her objective in **High Plains Samurai: Legends**)

All-Out Assault: By spending a bonus challenge, Black Scorpion gains an additional description in the same round. She cannot use the same potential for her description twice in the same round.

Bonus Challenges: Black Scorpion has several bonus challenges she can use. These bonus challenges work exactly as regular challenges but can also be used for additional perks provided here. She starts the story with 1 bonus challenge per lead character.

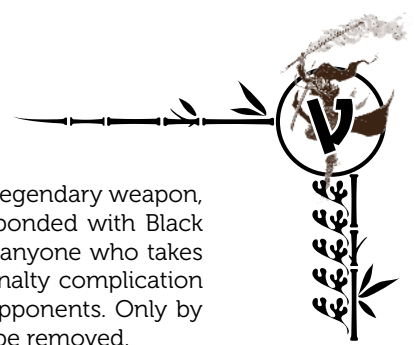
Damage Trigger: Whenever Black Scorpion takes damage, she can immediately use a free detail with a d8 for any complication rolls.

Lasting Terror: By using 1 bonus challenge, Black Scorpion can inflict a qi-based penalty complication that lasts until the end of the current scene on a character. Any character afflicted with this complication suffers a -1 step penalty to all complication rolls against Black Scorpion whenever they meet again, regardless of the time between scenes. This complication lasts until the end of the next scene.

Multiple Targets: Black Scorpion can target two characters using her qi power without any step penalties.



THE XAOS



Scorpion's Blade (Legendary weapon, 6 qi points): This katana is a legendary weapon, a rare artefact given life during a moment of great tragedy. It has bonded with Black Scorpion and only provides this perk to her. By spending 1 qi point, anyone who takes a damage complication from this sword will also suffer a -1 step penalty complication to one of its victim's potentials as the weapon's toxins weaken its opponents. Only by applying a full description or using a qi power can this complication be removed.

By spending 1 qi point, the Scorpion's Blade can be used to create a poisonous mist that also provides Black Scorpion with the Light Concealment step modifier. This mist lasts for several descriptions equal to the number of lead characters currently involved in the scene and affects everyone within Close range.

Terror (Qi Power): By inflicting her targets with terrifying visions that can hardly be separated from reality, Black Scorpion can place the Terrifying Visions inception complication on the character. So long as this complication remains, the character cannot cause damage to Black Scorpion. This complication cannot be removed easily by spending Vitality.

Applying Black Scorpion's Qi Power

Rather than directly telling the lead characters they are suddenly terrified and want to run in fear, Black Scorpion's qi power is meant to evoke visceral reactions of fear and intimidation by creating visions of trauma, bloodshed, and power beyond imagination. Her power allows her to create mental images detailing her absolute dominance and the bloody consequences inflicted on those who interfere with her plans. Think of her use of this qi power as more of a psychic attack. This can be done using the following approaches to her descriptions and outcomes with this qi power.

Replicate numerous qi powers. If the Writers believe she has numerous qi powers at her command, she becomes that much more intimidating.

She appears invincible. Her terror power can be used to make it look as if she does not suffer physical damage.

Alter her physical appearance and assume multiple forms. Appearing to have the ability to turn into terrifying monsters, demons, and other nightmarish forms can aid in applying her terror power.

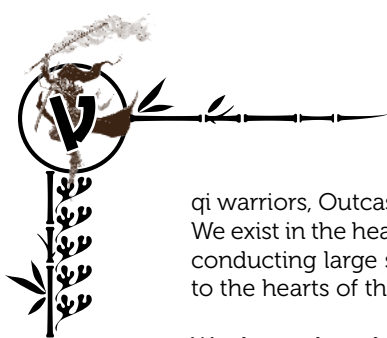
Once the lead characters discover the true nature of her qi power, they can attempt a complication roll to break free of it. Otherwise, it automatically takes effect.

Whenever the lead characters are affected by her qi power, Black Scorpion wears half-a-mask over the left side of her face with a scorpion etched along the side. Once they have broken free of her power the mask is gone.

THE XAOS

Small in numbers though we are, the Xaos are a force to be reckoned with. Founded by a handful of survivors from the Battle of Heaven's Peak, we have gathered to us many angry and rebellious individuals seeking to bring down the warlords' rule and purge the One Land of its sins by fire. Chaos bides his time as his energy returns; we need only clear him a path and remove all possible obstacles to the completion of his final act. The Fourth Mark. The great purge that will wipe all life from the world.

Rather than collecting in easily detected vast numbers, we Xaos operate in small **cells** of no more than half a dozen dedicated followers. Each cell exists of its own accord, using its practises, tactics, or even languages to avoid detection. The capture of one cell does not affect others for we rarely connect with another cell. Our cause attracts a variety of



HIGH PLAINS SAMURAI ROLEPLAYING GAME

qi warriors, Outcasts, even some untapped looking for a purpose greater than their own. We exist in the heart of every City and hide in the vast expanses of the Wastes, sometimes conducting large scale attacks on essential infrastructure or assassinations to bring fear to the hearts of those who believe they are safe within the walls of their homeland.

We do not brand ourselves or pledge allegiance to Chaos or each other. To prove you are willing to become one of the Xaos, you must reveal you are willing to die for the cause and make our enemies believe you have passed into the afterlife because of your actions, only to return in a bold proclamation. These are the soldiers we call **ghosts**, those who have defied the odds and proven themselves chosen agents of Chaos. This act of defiance must be personal; you must destroy a part of your past that once defined you as a person in harmony with the One Land. Only then can one become one of the Xaos.

Like the monks of Heaven's Peak and all those who contributed to this tome you read now, all ghosts of Xaos are stripped of their names. We are both one and many simultaneously. Each ghost bears responsibility for unique tasks and no one person commands all others. Our very operation is an affront to the norms of this society and we would have it no other way.

DESTROYING THE ONE LAND

Buried deep within the streets, temples, and towers of every City in the One Land, we Xaos have many plots afoot. Our goal is to stir anarchy within the Five Cities so that Chaos can feed off their fear, anxiety, and violence. Every worried mother, wounded soldier, and burning home is an elixir that forges the fires Chaos spews across the earth. We are his chefs preparing a fine delicacy for our saviour, as it is with all Elemental Spirits.

We seek to topple the power structure of the Five Cities and bring about the end of civilization as we know it. Our master will handle the rest.

We also seek to weaken his children through the anarchy we spread. It is why some cells focus on the death of the common citizen to weaken Innocence's resolve, why fear causes desperate actions that hinder Honour's defences, and so forth. Each act is meant to shock and confuse by spreading Chaos' name across every public gathering, for it is a name we all remember. And there are many ways this can be done.

CREATING YOUR OWN CELL

Those who have proven themselves to be loyal to the Xaos' cause by becoming ghosts are free to join up with an existing cell, when invited, or form their own. They must break all communication with any other Xaos not in their cell or else risk exposing the others. From there, it is a matter of choosing your path to anarchy.

As players gather to discuss their goals, formats, and other choices that form the backbone of their particular story, use the tools provided by my brothers and sisters to choose the path you wish to take. Form chapter goals to frame the pace of progress you seek; do you wish to topple a City within a fortnight or have you the time to slowly slice away at a warlord's power?

PLAYING "EVIL" CHARACTERS



Each cell has a **path** they take, and there are three common paths of the Xiaos, though this does not cover them all. Use these to establish a clear direction for your cell and frame your story's formats. Your choice can also be used as a kind of group initiative where anyone in the group can call for a rewrite if a description threatens to take the story off the chosen path.

Espionage: Unlocking the secrets of the rich and powerful, including the warlords, weakens their power by taking away the illusion. This involves a combination of stealth, tactical assaults, betrayal, and deep cover interaction within an existing community to learn what really makes the One Land tick. Such information can be dangerous when exposed to the public or to those closest to them.

Assassination: Taking out major characters that pull the strings from behind the curtains can topple governments when pulled in the right order. In a world of wire-fu action and incredible abilities, this often leads to open confrontations against epic backdrops. After all, the major characters of the One Land did not ascend to power without learning how to crush their enemies in combat.

Rebellion: There can be great honour found in our cause as those beholden to the will of the people, the true masses of the One Land. These cells revolt against their oppressors and seek to bring a sense of justice to a lawless land. These cells may be more well-intentioned when it comes to the fall of civilization and instead view rebellion as an opportunity to prove to Chaos they are a people worth sparing.

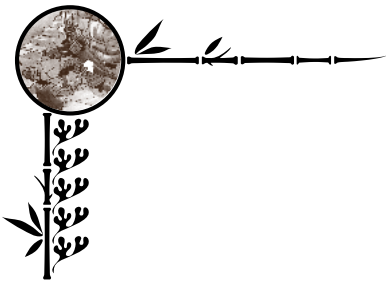
Once you have chosen a path, the tools with which you can bring it all crashing to the ground is provided in this very book. The major characters and their hindrances, the secrets of the Five Cities, the clues to uncovering the secrets of the Fallen City...Why else do you think we allowed its completion? There is as much material provided by my brethren for disabling this world as there is for saving it. With this knowledge, the Xiaos can use it to spark the rage that finishes it all. It is only a matter of time.

PLAYING "EVIL" CHARACTERS

There is very little difference between the lead characters of any story, be they the heroes who seek to stop us or ones beholden to a noble cause. The foundation of this game is built on a premise that each of the lead characters are at a morale tipping point in their lives as the story begins. They have done whatever it takes to survive in a harsh setting, though there has always been a cloud hanging over them. Something was not right or a change in the wind, as the expression goes. Your story takes them on a path that causes them to choose which side of civilization they stand with: will they be the heroes or will they be the villains?

What makes characters evil are their actions. It is what they do, not why they did it, that crosses the thin line between good and evil, aggressive and passive. In this world, putting a dagger to a person's throat to steal their food is not the same as slitting their throat before robbing them. And it is a direction that can lead to issues unless all parties involved are aware of the moral lines they are not willing to cross. Tread carefully in this direction; it is easier to be the heroes they never expected than to play the villain affronting the norms.





Do you think you have what it takes to stop Me? The fate of entire worlds does not rest in the hands of an insignificant speck that would rival a flea on the leg of an elephant such as you. What chance do you have to save this world?

I have called for its destruction. This has been a simple delay, one brief moment of imprisonment in an eternity. The time We lost is not what angers Us, it is the insult that Our children would think themselves superior. You and the others like you are merely the pawns in a divine war, a necessary casualty.

Tell your stories, noble reader. Regale us with the tales of heroes rising from the ash to stop a god from enforcing his Will, if you choose. Or stand by My side, it matters not. Our will shall be done, with or without you.

Chaos has spoken!



THE APPENDIX

"Wait... how much Vitality do we start with again?"

– An anonymous monk before there was an Appendix

You have all the information you need at your fingertips, but there is a vast difference between learning a game and playing it. For this reason, the remaining page of the **High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game** contains this Appendix with the following tools. Further tools, including customizable character notes, scene notes, cheat sheets, and more, can be found at highplainssamurai.com.

3 passages from the **Atlas of the One Land**, an expanded look at the world of High Plains Samurai

the Character Creation Checklist for all character types

a series of Random Qi Powers tables for all character types

an index

A collection of useful tools to help play the game, as well as some samples from the Atlas of the One Land at highplainssamurai.com



ATLAS OF THE ONE LAND

The Atlas of the One Land is an ongoing expansion of the setting for the High Plains Samurai Roleplaying Game. Discover new locations, creatures, characters... and submit your own!

THE SUNKEN LIGHTHOUSE

Finding a decent place to kill your enemies without suffering from the blinding conditions of Serenity Falls' sandstorm used to be a problem... until now.

Duelling can be impossible in the constant sandstorm that engulfs Serenity Falls on a daily basis. One would assume this would help curb the violence the plagues the City and bring some semblance of order to Grandfather's domain but that is not the case. Not by a long shot. Luckily (depending on your point of view), some curious explorers have found the perfect spot for death and justice to make a deal.

About a two-hour ride southwest of the City as you ride along the jagged cliffs of the Lost Ocean, there is a marker. A hollowed metal pole with several flags (some blown off by the sandstorm's ferocity) and holes crafted at various points emit a specific tone alerting blinded combatants looking for the Sunken Lighthouse. The marker reveals a section of the cliffs that broke off from the mainland and sank into the ocean that is no longer there. With some cautious climbing, it is possible to make it down to the bottom and stand on the parched ocean floor.

The battered lighthouse that once stood at the top of the cliffs warning approaching ships of the dangers ahead now rests on a precarious angle, its beacon slowly turning its soft and broken light for eternity, the creak of its metal parts echoing off the rock walls and into the void that stretches out as far as the eye can see. The terrain is littered with debris, chunks of rocks, and perfectly preserved bodies out in the open and tucked out of sight. Decay does not exist at the bottom of the Lost Ocean, it seems. But that is not what makes this location prime for dueling. There is no wind here. The sandstorm literally ends at the top of the cliffs and blows itself back into the mainland. Down here, the parching sun or cooling moon provides complete illumination and a clear shot for two or more warriors to dispense whatever form of justice they feel suits the crime.

If this place feels out of sorts and far too convenient for the One Land, you would be correct. There is a curse afflicting the Sunken Lighthouse and those who dispense death on its ground: those who kill another here are haunted by the ghost of their victims. It does not matter the reason, not even self-defence. Kill another person here and their spectre will follow you until your life ends. Ask someone who has been stalked by their victim for a year as they are about blow the back of their head off with their own gun and they will tell you it is better to fight in the City.



New Hindrance: Haunted by Ghosts

Any lead character who takes a life at the Sunken Lighthouse will gain a bonus hindrance that is not connected to a motivation or connection. This hindrance will represent the ghost of their victim(s) haunting them for the rest of their days and will never be removed unless the players can develop a story that revolves around making amends that will allow the ghost(s) to rest. Otherwise, this hindrance is permanent and functions exactly like all other hindrances.

RED LEATHER DEN

A thriving high-class casino in the heart of Yung Zhi catering to those who have spilled blood for money.

Any business operating in the Pearl – that elite inner circle of Yung Zhi where the rich and powerful mingle – caters to a select clientele. What benefit is there to having means in such an impoverished world if you cannot use your influence to only associate with your own kind? In the case of the Red Leather Den, one of the City's most elite and distinguished casinos, membership comes at a cost. Someone else's life.

Bounty hunters, assassins, and various mercenaries come to the Red Leather Den to unwind and talk shop. Each of them is on a well guarded list and granted membership solely on the discretion of its mysterious owner. So mysterious that no one exactly knows who owns the Den and whoever it is certainly has their ear to the ground. Infamy as a killer of killers, a well respected bounty hunter called on by a warlord or two, even killing a previous member of the Den will automatically get you access to some of the finest wines, games of chance, and comforts this side of... well, anywhere. New members receive a personally delivered invitation welcoming them to the benefits of a hard life and can enjoy this access for life. To date, only one member has ever had their membership revoked – myself. It seems poking your nose into unmasking the Den's shadowy owner is the one line that cannot be crossed.

The interior of this two-storey casino merges crimsons and golds with rich leather sofas, chandeliers, and numerous intricate touches such as paintings, water fountains, and other amenities most of those who have earned access can rarely enjoy anywhere else. Whatever games tickle your fancy are available inside, from blackjack to mahjong to pi gow. While the owner's identity remains a tightly concealed secret, Michelle Lao serves as their liaison and manager of the Den. She runs a tight ship and ensures everything about this casino exceeds expectations. An excellent source of rumour and gossip in Yung Zhi, Michelle is one of those people who knows a guy who worked with this bounty hunter once who may be able to get you past the guards at some random place no one's ever heard of before. Saying she's connected is an understatement.

So what exactly is the Den's fascination with professional killers? Some believe the owner is a former bounty hunter themselves and this casino is their retirement. A few have speculated the owner is none other than Xang herself and there's some good points to back up this theory. No one turns to bounty hunters and assassins more than a warlord and the Den is a means of keeping close connections with some of the One Land's most dangerous gunslingers and sword slingers. Even the possibility of Yung Zhi's warlord paying the bills on this casino keeps everyone on their best behaviour – no sense pissing off the one person who could have you killed without question, right?



THE VEIL

Hidden within the toxic fumes along the outskirts of Rust lies a complex black market where anything is up for sale.

Rust is notoriously protective of its creations. The same can be said for its citizens but they are treated as cattle more than a resource. In the winding tunnels of that underground city, the engineers are the heroes who rise up from the slums to make a name for themselves. Those who cannot build, steal.

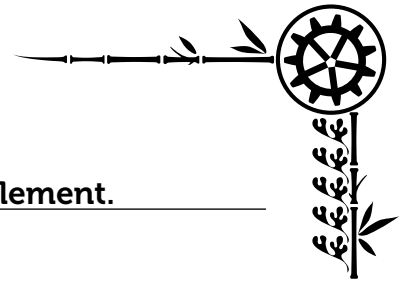
There is a toxic curtain concealing Rust from the rest of the world. Somewhere within all that pea-green fog are the remains of once was once the city of Dharos, a now uninhabitable shadow of its glory days. The edges of that curtain remain toxic to your lungs but it is not thick enough to scald your skin on contact or induce psychotic nightmares. They call this place the Veil. It is highly recommended to bring some form of oxygen tank or alternate form of breathing with you or else your time in the Veil will be brief and permanent.

Scrappers, a loose collective of organized black marketeers and gunrunners, sell anything and everything they can get out of Rust to the highest bidder. With drooling warlords eager to keep a leg up on their enemies and defend their belongings, business is good. Warmechs are the prized trophy for every powerful figure in the One Land and there has been a surplus of sales in the past couple of years, particularly to Monsoon if you believe the rumours. Each scrapper is in business for themselves and they will do anything to get an edge against their competition, yet they consider themselves part of a family who turn to a corrupted example of Deckland Burr's teachings. While the Salvation's inventor saw technology as something to help connect the One Land, scrappers see it as a chance to even the playing field by taking out the big players. Let the people have equal stake in this world, they say. Be this false bravado or a worthy cause, scrappers look after each other. An attack on one is an attack on them all.

Surviving the Veil

Whenever a scene takes place in the Veil, all characters will have to take precautions to avoid the following danger. It should be noted this is by no means a representation of how bad it is beyond the Veil; travelling deeper into the fog towards Rust is a far worse danger.

Toxic Fog: A thin fog of sickly green rolls over this valley at all times until it finally dissipates and becomes the Wastes. At the end of every round the characters spend in the Veil, they lose 1 Vitality. This can be avoided by assigning a resource slot to an alternative breathing apparatus (such as an oxygen mask) or by using a qi power. The fog also inflicts a light concealment step penalty on anyone who does not wear protective eyewear or use an appropriate qi power.



RANDOM QI POWERS

First step, roll a d8 to choose a dominant power element.

d8	Power Element
1	Fire
2	Psychic
3	Electricity
4	Strength

d8	Power Element
5	Awareness
6	Shadow
7	Agility
8	Motion

Next, roll a d6 on your power element's random table.

This is your random qi power.

d6	Fire Qi Power
1	Manipulate/control existing flames
2	Create fire
3	Burning touch
4	Exploding touch
5	Create mist
6	Become consumed in flames

d6	Psychic Qi Power
1	Read minds
2	Compel others
3	Remote viewing
4	Invisibility
5	Alter personal appearance
6	Create illusions

d6	Electricity Qi Power
1	Shocking touch
2	Create electrostatic field
3	Control metals
4	Create lightning
5	Control winds
6	Disintegrating touch

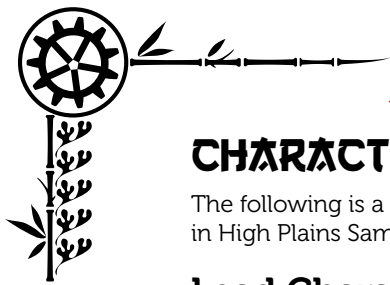
d6	Strength Qi Power
1	Superhuman strength
2	Unbreakable
3	Jump great heights/distances
4	Iron fists
5	Create stone
6	Create a concussive wave

d6	Awareness Qi Power
1	Witness auras
2	Telepathy
3	Incredible hearing
4	Tremorsense
5	See visions of the future
6	Cure illnesses/wounds

d6	Shadow Qi Power
1	Summon/create a weapon
2	Disappear into shadows
3	Teleport between shadows
4	Turn into mist/shadow
5	Perfectly silent
6	Pass through objects

d6	Agility Qi Power
1	Superhuman agility
2	Spider climbing
3	Slippery/cannot be grappled
4	Rapid fire attacks
5	Change size (shrink/grow)
6	Superhuman squeezing

d6	Motion Qi Power
1	Teleportation
2	Super speed
3	Levitate
4	Freeze people/slow objects
5	Create sound waves
6	Create vibrations/earthquakes



CHARACTER CREATION CHECKLIST

The following is a collection of step-by-step lists for creating different character types in High Plains Samurai. Page numbers are provided in brackets.

Lead Characters

Devise a concept for your lead character. (42)

Choose a homeland and select a perk.

If you will play an **untapped** character (someone without a qi power), choose a second perk from your homeland. (22)

Serenity Falls (23)

- A Knack for Blending In
- Sharp Eyed
- Street Fighter

Yung Zhi (24)

- Dodging Trouble
- Grace of a Cat
- Street Smarts

Monsoon (25)

- Failure Is Not An Option
- Hardened Like Steel
- Trained To Perfection

Khar'tep (26)

- Ignore the Pain
- Kills For A Living
- Steady As A Goat

Rust (27)

- Anything Could Be A Resource
- Keen Sense of Danger
- Smarter Than Most

The Wastes (28)

- Predicting Chaos
- Wild Potential
- Out Of Control

Choose a role and record your code of honour and perk. (44)

The Unstoppable Hunter (45)

- Refuse to Fail

The Raw Apprentice (45)

- Eager To Learn

The Hardened Outsider (46)

- Shake It Off

The Noble Warrior (46)

- Raised In Tribute

The Deadly Shadow (47)

- Master of Inception

The Rogue Scholar (47)

- Armed With Facts

The Innocent Pawn (48)

- Against All Odds

The Vengeful Spirit (48)

- Never Fall

The True Believer (49)

- A Mission of Great Importance

Create your qi power. If your character is untapped, select a bonus perk from your homeland in Stage 2. (50)

Create two potentials using any of the five questions below. Assign one potential to the d8 step and the second to the d6 step. Record your Defence and details for both. (51)

- What is their reputation?
- What is a line they will not cross?
- What is their fighting style/core belief?
- How have they survived in the One Land?
- How do they solve problems?

Create at least one motivation/connection for your character. Create a hindrance to go with it. If you wish to have more than one motivation, you must create an equal number of hindrances. (57)

Create a signature for your character.

Record the number of Vitality gained whenever your character applies their signature to a description. (59)

Record your starting Vitality based on the total number of lead characters in this story. (60)

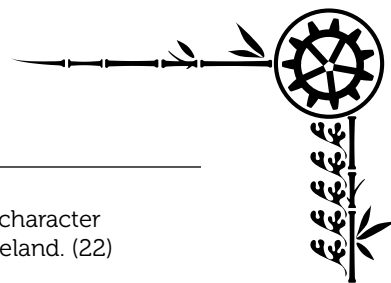
- If there is only one lead character, they start with 20 Vitality.
- For 2-3 lead characters, they start with 16 Vitality each.
- For 4 lead characters, they start with 12 Vitality each.
- For 5 or more lead characters, they start with 10 Vitality each.

Lead characters have 3 resource slots.

Record any resources you wish to start your story or leave them empty until the start of the first scene. Assign each one a step bonus or a damage bonus. (68)

Optional: Spend some of your starting Vitality to improve your character at the start of the story. (63)

CHARACTER CREATION CHECKLIST



Major Characters

Devise a concept for your major character. (42)

Choose a homeland and select a perk. If you will play an untapped character (someone without a qi power), choose a second perk from your homeland. (22)

Serenity Falls (23)

- A Knack for Blending In
- Sharp Eyed
- Street Fighter

Yung Zhi (24)

- Dodging Trouble
- Grace of a Cat
- Street Smarts

Monsoon (25)

- Failure Is Not An Option
- Hardened Like Steel
- Trained To Perfection

Khar'tep (26)

- Ignore the Pain
- Kills For A Living
- Steady As A Goat

Rust (27)

- Anything Could Be A Resource
- Keen Sense of Danger
- Smarter Than Most

The Wastes (28)

- Predicting Chaos
- Wild Potential
- Out Of Control

Create your qi power. If your character is untapped, select a bonus perk from your homeland in Stage 2. (50)

Create an additional perk. If you choose to use this perk to give the major character bonus challenges, create two perks that can only be activated by spending bonus challenges.

Create three potentials (one at d8 and two at d6) or create two potentials (one at d10, one at d6). Record your Defence and details for both. (51)

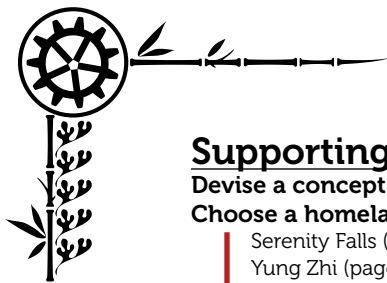
Create at least one motivation/connection for your character. Create a hindrance to go with it. If you wish to have more than one motivation, you must create an equal number of hindrances. (57)

Create a signature for your character. Record the number of Vitality gained whenever your character applies their signature to a description. (59)

Add a damage trigger. If you wish to include additional triggers, limit yourself to one per three lead characters in the story. (70)

Major characters have 3 resource slots. Record any resources you wish to start your story. Record the step bonus and damage bonus for each resource or leave some of your resource slots blanks. (68)

Determine your major character's starting Vitality (minimum 15). Consult the section on Powerful Characters for those with more Vitality. (75)



Supporting Characters

Devise a concept for your supporting character. (42)

Choose a homeland. (22)

- Serenity Falls (page 23)
- Yung Zhi (page 24)
- Monsoon (page 25)
- Khar'tep (page 26)
- Rust (page 27)
- The Wastes (page 28)

Create your qi power. If your character is untapped, select a bonus perk from your homeland in Stage 2 or create an original perk. (50)

Create two potentials and assign each one a d6. Record your Defence and details for both. (51)

Supporting characters have 2 resource slots. Record any resources you wish to start your story. Record the step bonus and damage bonus for each resource or leave some of your resource slots blanks. (68)

Determine your major character's starting Vitality (minimum 7). Consult the section on Powerful Characters for those with more Vitality. (75)

Extras

Determine if you are creating an individual extra or a group.

Devise a concept for your extra. (42)

Choose a homeland. (22)

- Serenity Falls (page 23)
- Yung Zhi (page 24)
- Monsoon (page 25)
- Khar'tep (page 26)
- Rust (page 27)
- The Wastes (page 28)

Create your qi power. Untapped extras do not gain a bonus perk. (50)

Create one potentials and assign it a d6. Record your Defence and details. (51)

Extras have 1 resource slot. Record a resource you wish to start your story. Record the step bonus or damage bonus for this resource. (68)

Record your maximum Vitality of 3. If these extras are in a group, multiple the total extras in the group by 3 for their maximum Vitality. (60)

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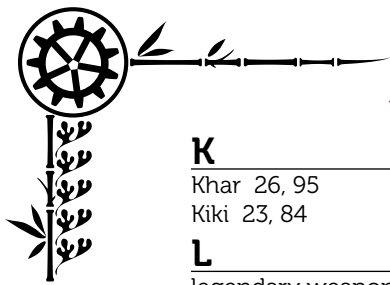
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