

# Chapter of Earth: Basic Rules

## Defining the Characters: Rings, Traits, and Skills

The Rokugani believe all of reality is defined by the Five Rings – the four Elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, and the unifying and all-encompassing Void. Accordingly, in the Legend of the Five Rings RPG the most basic mechanical definitions of any living creature – including, of course, the Player Characters – are the Five Rings.

The Rokugani likewise believe each Element is reflected not only in the natural world but also in the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of every living person and creature. A person who is physically adroit is seen as expressing the physical aspect of Fire, for example, while a clever and knowledgeable person is said to express the mind of Fire, and a person with an aggressive and temperamental nature is said to have a soul of Fire. This aspect of the Elements is reflected in the game mechanics by dividing each Ring into two Traits, one Physical and one Mental. For example, Fire is divided into the Physical Trait of Agility and the Mental Trait of Intelligence.

Any character or creature's Rings and Traits are represented in the game by numerical Ranks which range from 0 to 10. The higher a character's Rank, the better he or she will be at doing things which involve that Ring/Trait. A normal human farmer or other common person will typically have Rank 1 in Rings and Traits, but samurai characters are more capable people and thus start with almost all of their Rings and Traits at Rank 2. Player Characters have the capacity to raise their Rings and Traits to higher Ranks over time, as high as Rank 5 (or very rarely Rank 6). Ranks above 5 are generally reserved for legendary heroes and immensely powerful creatures, with Rank 10 restricted only to divine (or demonic) supernatural beings.

A character's Rank in his four Elemental Rings is determined by his Rank in his Traits – these four Rings are never increased directly. An Elemental Ring's Rank is always equal to the lower of its two Traits. Thus, if a character has an Agility of 2 and an Intelligence of 4, his Fire will be Rank 2. However, if he later increases his Agility to 3, his Fire Ring will also increase to Rank 3.

### **The Ring of Air**

The Element of Air is capricious, playful, and mercurial, but when roused to anger unleashes the fury of the storm. It is swift and instinctive, without patience but also without hesitation. Those who are strong in Air have good instincts, emotional empathy, and swift reactions, while those who are weak in Air are physically sluggish and emotionally distant or oblivious. Air is important for how quickly a Character can act during a fight (represented by the Initiative Rank).

**Reflexes** is the Physical Trait of Air. It represents a character's ability to react to events around him, to move, dodge, and strike instinctively and without taking time for thought. Reflexes is an important Trait for combat, since it affects the ability to dodge and avoid enemy attacks.

**Awareness** is the Mental Trait of Air. It represents a Character's intuition and empathy, his ability to instinctively sense and respond to the feelings and motivations of others. Awareness encompasses persuasion, charisma, and emotional manipulation, and is typically the most important Trait for social interactions.

## The Ring of Earth

Where Air is always in motion, Earth is static, stolid, and unchanging. But while the spirits of Earth are normally peaceful, if they are roused to anger their wrath is truly terrible – the remorseless power of the earthquake. Earth is the Element of resistance and endurance, and is associated with health, resilience, self-reliance, and vigor – both physical and mental. Those who are strong in Earth can withstand injuries, illnesses, temptations, or tragedies which would fell a lesser mortal. Conversely, those who are weak in Earth are frail, sickly, and weak-minded. Earth defines how many Wounds a Character can take before being disabled or killed.

**Stamina** is the Physical Trait of Earth, representing the Element's aspects of toughness and vigor. A character with high Stamina can exert himself for a longer time without penalty, is more resistant to disease and toxins, and can temporarily shrug off the pain and weakness of Wounds while in battle.

**Willpower** is the Mental Trait of Earth, and reflects the Element's aspects of persistence and resilience. A character with a high Willpower is difficult to frighten, daunt, or manipulate, and finds it easier to impose his wishes on others. Willpower affects a character's ability to withstand intimidation and temptation, to resist losing self-control to accumulated Stress, and to stand up to the terror created by supernatural foes.

## The Ring of Fire

Fire is a paradoxical Element, for it is associated with dynamic change, energy, and creativity, but also with violence, passion, and destruction. It can inspire artists or infuse a warrior with potent skill, repair what is broken or illuminate what is dark... but it can also unleash insane rage, violent destruction, madness, and chaos. Those who are strong in Fire are formidable warriors and brilliant scholars, while those weak in Fire are physically clumsy and unimaginative or unstable. The Rokugani strongly associate Fire with swordsmanship, and it is vital to the special form of sword-dueling known as Iaijutsu.

**Agility** is the Physical Trait of Fire, and represents a character's physical athleticism, natural skill, and coordination. Any physical action which does not rely on speed or strength will use Agility. The majority of Weapon Skills use Agility, for example, making it a very important Trait for samurai warriors.

**Intelligence** is the Mental Trait of Fire, and depicts a character's intellect, creativity, and memory. Most Skills associated with knowledge and scholarly study use Intelligence. A character trying to remember something will typically make an Intelligence roll to do so.

## The Ring of Water

Water is the Element of change and transformation, of clarity and cleansing. It is the inexorable force that wears down mountains, the furious wave that sweeps away the mightiest ships, but also the gentle bath that purifies a samurai after battle. Water is associated with motion, strength, and clarity, with clear vision and remorseless power. Those who are strong in Water possess both physical strength and intense perception, able to notice the smallest details. Those who are weak in Water lack muscular power and have dull, imperfect senses.

**Strength** is the Physical Trait of Water, and represents a character's pure physical muscle-power. It is force without precision or accuracy. Characters use their Strength Trait for a variety of physical tasks, such as lifting heavy objects, climbing, or swimming. It is also used when fighting with weapons that rely more on brute force than precision, such as bo staves, war-hammers, and tetsubo.

**Perception** is the Mental Trait of Water, and represents all of a character's senses, especially sight. A character with high Perception can notice all the details of the world around him, picking up subtle clues and spotting hidden foes. Perception is used for archery Skill rolls and in any situation where a character tries to notice clues or detect hidden things or enemies.

## **The Ring of Void**

The Void is very different from the four Elemental Rings. It does not itself represent an Element, but rather the underlying principle that all Elements are truly the same, that at root the entire universe is a harmonious whole that is both everything and nothing at the same time. Void is the unity of all Elements and the absence of any of them, the harmony of existence and the absence of thought. As such, it is at best poorly understood by mortal minds. Even the rare Void shugenja, who are able to commune with it directly, find it almost impossible to describe the Void to others.

Although mortal men and women find the Void extremely difficult to understand, they can nonetheless touch it from time to time, attaining rare moments in which they transcend their limitations. The Rokugani believe this is because humans possess a divine spark which is absent from other creatures, a connection to the Celestial Heavens that allows them to experience moments of perfect harmony with the world around them.

Because of Void's unique nature, it has no Traits – it is purely a Ring. The Void Ring is used for a few select Skills (such as Meditation, in which a Character attempts to harmonize his spirit and purge needless thoughts), is used in Iaijutsu duels, and affects a character's Initiative Rank. However, its most important aspect is that it awards the Character a number of Void Points each game session equal to his Void Ring. Void Points may be spent during play for a variety of benefits and enhancements. The use of a Void Point represents a moment of enlightened insight, a single instant in which the Character is at one with the larger universe and sees all the connections between the different Elements.

A character's pool of Void Points is refreshed at the beginning of each play session, and it is also possible to regain some Void Points during play (primarily through the use of the Meditation Skill). There are many ways to use Void Points, but the most basic and common usages are listed here.

(The exact meaning of these uses may not be apparent right now, but once you have read the rest of the rules, come back and review these again – they will make much more sense.)

- A Character who is making a Skill Roll can spend a Void Point (before rolling) to gain a +1k1 bonus to the roll. He cannot gain this bonus if he is rolling unskilled, but he can opt to instead spend a Void Point to gain +1 Rank in the Skill for the duration of that single Skill roll.

- When a Character suffers one or more Wounds, he can immediately spend a Void Point to negate 1 Wound. This can be done each time the Character is hit.
- At the start of a Skirmish Round, a character can spend a Void Point to raise his Initiative Rank for the first Round of that Skirmish by +3.
- At the start of a Character's Turn in a Skirmish Round, he can spend a Void Point to be able to ignore his Wound penalties until his next Turn (the "Stand Up and Fight" rule – see later in this chapter for details).
- A shugenja Character may spend a Void Point to cast a spell from an Element in which his spell-slots are exhausted (see the *Chapter of Water* for details on spells and spell-slots).

## Skills

Rings and Traits represent a character's innate talents, the gifts he or she is born with. Skills, by contrast, represent the benefits of education, training, and experience. Samurai in particular are highly trained individuals whose education begins at a young age and who spend years in the *dojo* perfecting their skills.

Like Rings and Traits, Skills have Ranks, ranging from 1 to 5. A character with Rank 0 in a Skill is considered "unskilled" and is unlikely to succeed at using the Skill, if he is allowed to try at all. A character with Rank 1 in a Skill has studied the basic principles involved, while a character with Rank 5 is a master. A few select samurai may attain Rank 6 in a single Skill, but otherwise, Skill Ranks above 5 are only possible for divine/supernatural beings.

There are many different Skills available to characters – see the Chapter of Fire for the complete list and for details on what each Skill can do.

## Quick and Simple L5R: The "Roll & Keep" System

The Legend of the Five Rings RPG is built around a core mechanic called "Roll & Keep" which is the default method for resolving any action in the game. The Players and GM should always use to the basic Roll & Keep mechanic to resolve actions unless there are specific reasons to do something different. In fact, for many game sessions it will be the only mechanic you'll need to use.

When a Character (whether a PC or an NPC) tries to do something difficult or which might carry significant consequences for failure, the Game Master decides which Skill and which Trait are applicable to the attempt. In many cases this choice will be obvious – for example, trying to climb a cliff will clearly use the Athletics Skill and the Strength Trait. The Player may also exert influence over the choice, such as by specifically saying that he wants his Character to use a particular Skill. ("I want to use Courtier to influence his attitude.")

To resolve the action, the Player rolls a number of 10-sided dice equal to the combined total of his Skill and Trait. This roll is expressed as (Skill) / (Trait), so if a character is rolling Athletics with the Agility Trait, it will be written as Athletics / Agility.

The Player keeps the results from a number of dice equal to the Trait he is using (hence, “Roll & Keep”). He chooses which dice to keep – typically this means keeping the highest dice, although there is no requirement for him to do so. For example, continuing the story of cliff-climbing from above, if the Character has Athletics of 3 and Strength of 3, he will roll 6 dice and keep 3 of them. This is written in a shorthand form as XkY, where X is the total number of dice rolled and Y is the number of dice kept, so in this case the Character’s roll would be written as 6k3 (six dice, keeping three).

The combined total of the kept dice is compared to the Target Number (TN) of the action. If the roll matches or beats the TN, the action succeeds. If it fails to at least match the TN, the action does not succeed.

The GM decides the Target Number of an action based on how difficult it will be for the Character to succeed. The more difficult the action, the higher the TN. TNs are normally set in increments of 5 (TN 10, TN 15, TN 20), so a relatively easy action might have a TN of 10 or 15, while a difficult action might be TN 25 or 30. For example, suppose our Character rolling 6k3 for Athletics has to make a TN 20 to succeed. The Player rolls and gets 2, 4, 5, 5, 7, and 9. Adding together the three highest rolls (5, 7, and 9) gives a total of 21, meaning he has succeeded.

## **Exploding Dice**

The Rokugani believe mortals have the power to change destiny, achieving great things that surpass their normal limitations. L5R represents this in a number of ways, but one of the most basic is a mechanic called “exploding dice.”

If a die rolls a 10, it is said to “explode.” The die is rolled again and the next result is added to its total. If the second roll is another 10, the die is rolled yet again, continuing until the player rolls something other than a 10. (It is thus theoretically possible to get an “infinite roll,” though in practice this is so unlikely as to be irrelevant.) The combined result is considered to be the result of a single die-roll.

**Example #1:** A die rolls a 10 and then a 3. The result of that die is a 13.

**Example #2:** A die rolls a 10, a 10, and a 7. The result of that die is a 27.

## **Choosing Target Numbers**

The Target Number of an action depicts how difficult it is to succeed at that particular task. TNs are set in increments of 5. An “average” TN is around 15 or 20, an easy TN is 10 (if the roll is needed at all), and harder TNs are 25, 30, 35 or even higher.

Normally, the specific TNs of actions are chosen by the Game Master based on the difficulty of the particular action. Some TNs are set by the game’s rules (for example, the TN to hit a typical zombie is set by the rules at 10); however, the GM can still modify these “set” TNs if he thinks the specific circumstances require it – for example, a particular zombie might move faster and be more difficult to hit.

L5R deliberately does not have a giant list of TNs for every possible action. Instead, the game leaves the GM free to choose TNs based on his judgment of how hard a particular action is for a given set of circumstances. As a general guideline, the following chart outlines some “typical” TNs for various actions. The TN 5 and 10 examples are provided mainly for comparison purposes – in general, a Character should never have to actually roll for a TN 5 action, and very seldom for a TN 10 action.

## Example Target Numbers

<i>TN</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Mental</i>
5	Very Easy	Striking an immobile target	Recognizing an old friend
10	Easy	Striking a zombie	Finding a misplaced item
15	Ordinary	Carrying half your weight	Recognizing someone you knew briefly
20	Mildly Difficult	Lifting your weight	Finding a concealed object
25	Rather Difficult	Striking an armored samurai	Remembering someone's exact words
30	Very Difficult	Scaling a cliff without rope	Opening a Scorpion puzzle-box
35	Heroic	Diving safely from a waterfall	Defeating a master at Go
40	Nigh Impossible	Out-wrestling a troll	Naming all of your ancestors... in order
50	Legendary	Shattering stone with bare hands	Outwitting a Fortune

### When Do I Have to Roll?

There is a tendency in RPGs for Players and GMs to roll for *everything* – even things which are very easy, and even if there is little or no downside for a failed roll. For example, if a Character has to climb a rope down a short cliff, many RPGs will require him to roll because there is a slight chance he might slip and fall, suffering a modest injury.

However, the L5R approach to these situations is a bit different. In L5R, whenever a situation like this arises, the GM should ask himself: will requiring a roll actually make the game more interesting, more exciting, more dramatic? Or will it just eat up time? Will a failed roll have real consequences, or will it just create a small annoyance? If a roll does not contribute usefully to the game, if it doesn't have meaningful consequences for failure, the GM should simply skip the roll and allow Characters to succeed at whatever they are trying to do.

As a general principle the GM should not require Skill Rolls for most actions with a TN of 10 (or less) if the character has at least one Rank in the Skill. The GM can also auto-skip rolls for higher TNs if the character is very skilled (Skill Rank of 3 or more), especially if the consequences for failure are modest.

### Dice Penalties

Several different effects in the game can result in a character suffering dice penalties. Wounds and Stress are the most common source of dice penalties – an injured or mentally shaken Character has a harder time performing actions. However, dice penalties can also come from several other sources, such as spells, special maneuvers in combat, difficult terrain or weather conditions, and so forth. In general, dice penalties are a way for the GM to represent any situation where the Characters will have a harder time performing actions successfully.

A dice penalty reduces the total number of dice a Character can roll. For example, each Wound a Character suffers inflicts a 1-die penalty on any rolls using physical Traits, so a Character with three Wounds is at a 3-die penalty to such rolls.

When a Character suffers dice penalties, they are applied to his *total* number of dice, starting with his unkept dice and then going to his kept dice.

**EXAMPLE:** A Character with a total roll of 6k3 suffers a 2-die penalty. His roll is reduced to 4k3. If he later increases to a 4-die penalty, his roll is reduced to 2k2.

## Keeping Low Dice

Although Players and GMs are required to keep a number of dice equal to the appropriate Trait or Ring, there is no requirement for them to keep the dice with the highest results. Sometimes a Player or GM will want a Character to fail at an action, or to succeed by only a narrow margin instead of a large amount. You can keep whichever dice you want, so long as you keep the total number of dice required by the roll.

## Rolling Unskilled

In some situations a Character may have to try to do something which he has not been trained to do. For example, a samurai in a desperate fight might have to pick up and use a weapon in which he has no training. This is known as an Unskilled Roll. Needless to say, trying to do something you don't really know how to do is quite difficult.

A Character who is making an Unskilled Roll cannot make Raises on the roll, and his dice cannot explode. Since he has no Rank in the Skill, his total roll will only be equal to the Trait involved. Also, he cannot spend Honor Points or Glory/Infamy Points on the roll, although he can still use the other ways of boosting the roll (Void, Favors and Blackmail, Taint, etc).

## Other Types of Rolls

As noted, the most common roll in the basic L5R rules is a Skill Roll, in which a Skill is paired with a Trait. However, there are also other kinds of rolls which can happen in L5R. These are always expressed in the same manner as Skill rolls, with the unkept stat listed first and the kept state second. If only one stat is listed, all dice are kept. The most notable examples of this are as follows:

- Some rolls pair a Skill with a **Ring** instead of a Trait. The GM can do this any time it seems appropriate, but there are specific game mechanics that always do this. The most notable example is with shugenja spell-casting rolls, which always use a Ring, not a Trait, and are written as Spellcraft/[Ring]. Rolling with a Ring is also done with Skills that specifically tie to the Void Ring (for example, Meditation Skill Rolls typically pair the Meditation Skill with the Void Ring). Similarly, the climax of an Iaijutsu duel uses the Iaijutsu Skill paired with the Fire Ring.
- Sometimes a Character will roll by pairing a Trait or Ring with **Insight Rank** or **Honor Rank** instead of with a Skill. For example, a Character trying to ignore his Wounds in a Skirmish will roll Insight/Stamina. As before, the Character keeps dice equal to the statistic listed second, e.g. the Trait or Ring.
- There may be instances in which a Character rolls solely with a **Trait** or **Ring**. The most common example of these options are when a character is using a Ring or Trait to resist some sort of dangerous effect, such as a disease, poison, or supernatural curse
- Sometimes the GM will ask a Player to make a roll with a different “secondary” mechanic in the game, such as **Honor**, **Glory**, or **Shadowlands Taint**. (These

mechanics are explained later on in this and succeeding chapters.) These rolls are made in the same manner as any other, with the Player keeping a number of dice equal to the mechanic's Rank, and may even be paired with unkept dice from a Skill or from Insight Rank.

### **The Ten Dice Rule**

No roll in the L5R RPG can ever use more than 10 dice. Normally, this is not an issue since Characters' Traits and Skills are capped at 5, so even the most powerful and experienced Characters are rolling 10k5. However, there are certain game mechanics which can push a Character's total dice above 10, such as a Character who was able to raise one Trait or Skill to 6, a Character spending Void or Honor or Taint to boost a roll, a Character using the Full Attack Tactic (which awards extra dice for attack rolls), a Character wearing armor (which awards extra dice for Defense rolls), or a spell, Kata, or Technique which awards a Character bonus dice for certain rolls.

If a Character is supposed to be rolling more than 10 dice, the "extra" dice are converted into additional kept dice at the rate of 2 for 1. For example, if a Character would be rolling 12k5 dice, this would become a roll of 10k6. If there is a "leftover" die after this conversion, it is ignored. (For example, if the Character was rolling 13k5, it would still only become a roll of 10k6.)

### **Getting Better Results: The "Raise" Mechanic**

The basic L5R Roll & Keep mechanic produces a simple pass/fail result: either the Character makes the TN and succeeds, or he misses the TN and fails. However, there are many situations where a Character wants to accomplish something more than "mere" success.

If a Player succeeds in his roll by a large margin, he has the option of declaring he is increasing – "Raising" – the TN of the action. For example, perhaps a Character wants to strike a particular part of his opponent's body, or perhaps a Character conducting an interrogation of a bandit wants to ferret out more information. In general, the more difficult the extra effect would be to accomplish, the more the original TN must be exceeded – Raised – to succeed. (Hitting an opponent in the eye is harder than hitting him on the leg.)

Raises are measured in increments of 10. Each margin of 10 over the original TN is one successful Raise, and the more Raises a Character achieves, the more impressive the result from the roll.

The maximum number of Raises a Character can get on one roll is limited by his Void Rank – anything beyond that is wasted.

Certain game-mechanics, such as bushi Techniques, may award a "Free Raise," which grants the benefits of a Raise without actually having to beat the TN by 10.

Raises are normally done after the dice are rolled, allowing the Character to benefit from the effects of exploding dice. However, a Player may choose to "call" a Raise before the roll; this is much more risky, since it means a roll that hits the original TN will not succeed. In general, the GM should award a greater benefit to a successful Raise that is called before the roll.



## Effects of Raises

A Raise produces a “better” success from the Skill roll. This improved result can manifest in many different ways, and thus its effect is generally left to the discretion and creativity of the Players and the GM. Want to do something cool, memorable, unique? Need more information, better results, a faster resolution of a scene? Make use of Raises.

The following are some specific effects of Raises that are built into the rules, discussed later in the sections on combat, social conflict, and spell-casting:

- In physical combat (skirmishes), Characters can use Raises to inflict more Wounds or to hit more than one Thug with the same attack.
- Characters in action scenes can use Raises to overcome obstacles more quickly or to conduct Combat Maneuvers such as tripping or stunning their opponents.
- In social conflict, Characters can use Raises to inflict more Stress and Honor/Glory loss on their opponents.
- Shugenja Characters can use Raises to cast their spells more quickly or to greater effect (such as a single spell lasting longer or affecting more targets).

### Why Increments of 5 and 10?

Why does L5R set TNs in increments of 5 but Raises in increments of 10? And why not use intermediate numbers for more precise differentials?

The basic answer is simplicity and clarity. By sticking to increments of 5 for TNs, it is easy to make general distinctions between easier, average, and harder rolls and to remember the TNs when rolling.

For Raises, by using increments of 10 it is both easy to perform the arithmetic involved and easy for GMs and Players to have a clear picture of how “strong” a Raise’s effects should be.

These increments of 5 and 10 may seem overly “simplistic” to some Players. However, consider: is it actually more informative to try to make subtle distinctions between an action that is TN 17 and an action that is TN 18? How do you decide which is which? Larger gaps between TNs eliminate needless complexity and thus needless arguments.

## Defeating the Opposition: Contested Rolls

A Contested Roll is a specific type of roll made when two Characters are acting in direct opposition to each other. The most common circumstances for this are conflict, whether physical or social. In physical combat, an attack roll is usually a Contested Roll of the attacker’s Weapon Skill roll against the defender’s Defense Skill roll. Likewise, social conflict will usually be resolved through Contested Rolls with social Skills such as Courtier and Etiquette.

However, there are also many other actions which can require Contested Rolls. For example, if two Characters are engaged in a wrestling contest, they will resolve it

with Contested Rolls of their Strength. If a Shugenja is trying to disrupt an opponent's spell, they will resolve it with Contested Spellcraft Skill Rolls. Indeed, pretty much any kind of roll in the game can become a Contested Roll if the situation calls for it.

In a Contested Roll, the opponents roll and compare their total result. The winner is the Character with the higher roll. (Note the difference here: In a normal roll, your goal is to *equal or exceed* the TN, but in a Contested Roll, you only succeed if you *beat* your opponent's total.) It is possible for multiple Characters to be involved in a single Contested Roll, in which case the Character with the highest roll out of all of them is the winner.

Characters can call Raises on a Contested Roll in the same manner as on any other roll. In this case, they must exceed the opposing roll by an additional increment of 10 for each Raise.

**EXAMPLE:** An attacking Character wishes to strike his opponent in the leg. His Weapon Skill roll is 31, while the enemy's Defense Skill roll is 20. The attacker has succeeded and beats the defender's roll plus an additional +10, so he calls the Raise. If the attacker had rolled only 29, he would not have been able to call the Raise.

It is possible (though unusual) to have a Contested Roll that is "lost" by all participants due to the roll resulting in a tie. (This can happen slightly more often in the specific instance of Striking in an Iaijutsu duel, as described later in this chapter.) In the case of an attack roll, this is considered a success for the defender (the attack fails to hit him), while in an Iaijutsu duel this is considered a defeat for both duelists. For other sorts of Contested Rolls, the GM may opt to rule that the conflict is inconclusive and must continue for more Contested Rolls until a winner emerges.

## Working Together: Cooperative Rolls

Sometimes, a Character will be in a position to assist another Character's action. In combat, for example, one Character might be able to distract an enemy and thereby make it easier for another Character to attack that enemy. In a court debate, one Character might chime in and support another's argument. There are many other such situations; the GM has final discretion on whether a Character can assist another on any particular action. Limitations on assistance could include the specific nature of the situation (one Character probably can't assist another Character at spotting a clue, for example), physical constraints (there are only so many people who can crowd around and help), and so forth.

A Character who assists someone else gives up his own Action. In return, he adds a die to the roll of the Character he is assisting. If the assisting Character does not have the appropriate Skill for the action, the bonus die is unkept (+1k0 to the roll). If he does have the Skill, the bonus die is a kept die (+1k1).

In general, assistance cannot award a Character more extra dice than his Void Rank. (**EXCEPTION:** Thugs in combat, see the Thug rules.)

## Powering Up: Adding Dice to Rolls

As already noted, the Rokugani believe mortals have the ability to change destiny and thwart fate. This is represented in the game by a number of mechanics, such as exploding dice and the Final Moment rule (see later on in this chapter for details on the Final Moment), but the most widely used method is to add dice to a Character's rolls. Adding

dice allows Players to exert greater control over the fate of their Characters by improving their chances of success.

There are several ways for Characters to do this, but the most powerful is Void. As noted in the earlier section on Rings and Traits, the Void Ring awards a character Void Points for each playing session, and these Void Points can be spent for a number of different uses – including the ability to add a bonus kept die (+1k1) to any Roll.

However, there are several other sources of bonus dice as well:

- All samurai Characters have an **Honor Rank** which represents how well they uphold the Code of Bushido (see Honor later in this chapter for details). Characters have a number of Honor Points available each play-session equal to their Honor Rank, and they can spend these Honor Points to gain +1k1 bonuses to Skill Rolls. Honor Points can only be spent on Skill Rolls, not on most other types of rolls – with the sole exception of rolls to resist Fear.
- Likewise, all samurai Characters have a **Glory Rank** (reflecting fame and good repute in Rokugani society), and some Characters have an **Infamy Rank** (reflecting a bad reputation). They have Glory Points and Infamy Points each session equal to their Rank in each. A Character may spend Glory Points to boost honorable Social Skill Rolls (gaining a +1k1 bonus), or Infamy Points to boost Social Skill Rolls with less-honorable Skills such as Intimidation or Temptation (again gaining a +1k1 bonus).
- A Character with at least one full Rank in the Shadowlands Taint (see the Chapter of Water) gains Taint Points which may be spent on any Roll. A Taint Point awards a +3k3 bonus to the roll, but causes the character to gain more Taint, speeding his path toward damnation.

Normally, a Character enhancing a Roll may use each of the options listed above once on each specific roll. You cannot spend two Void Points or two Glory Points on the same Roll, but you can (for example) spend both a Void Point and a Glory Point if the situation allows the use of both. (**EXCEPTION:** The Final Moment, described later in this chapter.)

## **Physical Combat: The Skirmish**

Samurai are warriors first and foremost, and any samurai story is quite likely to involve violence at some point. Any violent action scene in an L5R game is referred to as a “Skirmish” and is resolved using the rules presented here.

L5R, like most RPGs, uses the convention of the “combat Round” to divide up a fight scene into manageable bits of time. A Round is a very short piece of time, perhaps as little as one or two seconds, and generally no more than 10 seconds. The exact amount of time is not strictly defined because the specific actions and circumstances of combat can change radically from moment to moment. Keeping the length of a Round slightly “fluid” prevents the game from degenerating into arguments about how much can be done in precisely so many seconds.

## Sequencing the Action: Initiative Rank

During a Round, each Character in the fight gets to declare a Tactic and, if allowed, take an Action. The order in which combatants do this is determined by their **Initiative Rank**.

Every Character has an Initiative Rank, which is the combined total of their Air Ring, their Void Ring, and their Insight Rank. (See the *Chapter of Fire* for details on how Insight Rank is calculated.)

Certain other game mechanics can also impact a character's Initiative, such as Advantages (Quick), Kata, Void Points, and School Techniques. (Again, see the *Chapter of Fire* for details on these game mechanics.)

A character's Initiative Rank may also change during the course of a skirmish, due to Wounds or other mechanical effects. Physical injuries slow down a Character in combat. This is represented by lowering a Character's Initiative Rank by the number of Wounds the Character has.

**Example:** A Character whose current Initiative Rank is 7 suffers two Wounds. This lowers his Initiative to 5.

If two or more combatants have the same Initiative Rank, they declare and act simultaneously. However, a Character always acts before any Thugs who have the same Initiative. The GM can choose to break a tie, either by declaring who goes first, or by having the Characters act in the order of their Insight Rank, their Void Rank, or some other suitable tie-breaker mechanic.

**NOTE:** In a skirmish, the GM should adjust the combatants' Initiative Ranks for Wounds at the beginning of each Round. Doing so in the middle of the Round when the Character gets hurt is likely to make things too complicated.

### Optional Rules -- Variable Initiative and Round-by-Round Initiative

The rules for Initiative Rank have the advantage of being very simple, allowing the GM and Players to move directly into a Skirmish without a pause. However, this does mean that Skirmishes are a bit predictable in their sequencing – everyone knows what order the combatants will use each time, creating unrealistic effects such as allowing Players to “pre-plan” their actions in upcoming Skirmishes. GMs and Players who find this unsatisfactory may opt for either of the following alternatives:

- **Variable Initiative.** At the start of the Skirmish, each Character rolls one die and adds the result to their Initiative Rank. (This die cannot explode.) This slows down the game slightly but introduces a certain amount of unpredictability into the Skirmish – faster Characters will usually have the highest Initiative Rank, but this is not guaranteed.
- **Round-by-Round Variable Initiative.** In this option, Initiative is rolled at the start of each Round (at the same time as modifiers such as Wounds are applied) rather than just once at the start of the Skirmish. This introduces more variation and thus more drama into the Skirmish, but slows down the game by requiring more die-rolls.

## Declaring Tactics

In samurai combat, warriors are taught to rely on three basic Tactics: Full Attack, Attack, and Full Defense. A character chooses his Tactic when his Initiative Turn comes up each Round, and its effects last until the start of his Turn on the next Round.

The **Attack Tactic** is the “default” Tactic for a Skirmish, and is the Tactic which a Character is assumed to be using until or unless he declares otherwise. A Character using the Attack Tactic has no constraints on his Actions and makes all his Skill Rolls normally.

The **Full Attack Tactic** represents a warrior throwing himself into all-out attack with little regard for protecting himself. The character gains a +2k1 bonus to any attacking Skill Rolls (both the attack itself and any associated rolls that involve reaching and striking the foe, such as an Athletics Skill Roll to get past an obstacle), but suffers a 3-dice penalty to all Defense Skill Rolls while he is using this Tactic. Also, many sorts of Actions cannot be performed while using the Full Attack Tactic. (See “What Actions Can I Take?” below for details.)

The **Full Defense Tactic** represents the opposite situation – the Character is focused mainly on defending himself, forsaking the opportunity to attack. A Character using the Full Defense Tactic cannot attack at all, and is restricted on what other Actions he can take (again, see “What Actions Can I Take?”), but gains a +2k2 bonus to his Defense Skill Rolls.

- At the start of a Skirmish a Character is always considered to be using the default Attack Tactic until his first Initiative turn. However, the GM can rule that a particular situation would allow the Character to be utilizing another Tactic – for instance, if the Character was exercising extreme caution and alertness before the Skirmish began, he could start the Skirmish already using the Full Defense Tactic.

## What Actions Can I Take?

Each combatant may take one Action when it is his Turn in the Initiative order. A Character does not have to take an Action if he does not want to – he can choose to do nothing – but if so, he forfeits any chance to take an Action until the next Round when his Initiative Turn comes up again. The GM may also rule that a Character loses his Action if the Player is unable to decide what his Character should do. Hesitating in a fight is generally unwise...

There are potentially an infinite number of things a Character could do with an Action. However, in order to provide some guidance, we offer the following list of basic types of Actions:

- **Attack** – The Character attacks someone else, either directly or with a ranged weapon, making a Skill Roll with the appropriate Weapon Skill. This is usually assumed to include some movement by the Character, enough to reach and attack any opponent within Short Range (so long as there are no intervening obstacles). If there are obstacles between the Character and his opponent, the GM may allow him to make an Athletics Skill Roll in order to get past those obstacles or even to utilize them to his advantage. However, if the obstacles are too difficult, the GM

may require the Character to perform a Move Action to get past them. A Character cannot perform an Attack Action while using the Full Defense Tactic.

- **Assist** – The Character focuses on trying to help someone else, such as by aiding their attack on a foe or aiding their ability to defend themselves. This grants a 1-die bonus to the ally for the appropriate Skill Roll – either a kept or unkept die depending on whether the assisting Character has the Skill. A Character must be physically able to assist his ally, which typically means the ally must be within Short Range and there cannot be any significant intervening obstacles. The GM has the final say on whether a Character is able to Assist another. A Character who is using the Full Defense Tactic cannot use this Action to assist an attack, and conversely a Character using the Full Attack Tactic cannot assist someone's defense.
- **Move** – A Move Action (an Action in which the Character does nothing but physically move) is generally only used if a Character is (a) trying to switch between Short and Long Range, or (b) trying to get around some sort of physical obstacle within Short Range. A Move Action may potentially also involve an Athletics roll as part of getting past an obstacle (such as when climbing a cliff, jumping over a pit, or swimming across a moat). A Character cannot take a Move Action while using the Full Defense Tactic.
- **Cast a Spell** – Casting a spell is a Spellcraft Skill Roll. Casting a spell normally takes a number of Actions equal to the spell's Mastery Level, although a Character can call Raises before the roll to try to shorten the casting time. A Character who is casting a spell is assumed to be basically stationary, perhaps walking a few paces, since he must focus most of his attention on speaking the prayers correctly; thus, a Character cannot perform this Action while using the Full Attack or Full Defense Tactics.
- **Skill Roll** – Over and above an attack or casting a spell, there are many other things a Character can do in a Skirmish that involve making a Skill Roll. Obvious examples would include using Locksmith to free a chained-up Character, using Stealth to sneak up on an opponent, using Battle to award bonus dice to allies, using Medicine to try to help a wounded or dying Character, and so forth. In general, this Action cannot be performed while using the Full Attack or Full Defense Tactics, although there are enough divergent situations that the final judgment must be left to the GM.
- **Miscellaneous** – Anything that doesn't fall into the above categories is a Miscellaneous Action. The GM has final judgment on what can be done with a Miscellaneous Action and whether or not it can be performed while using the Full Attack or Full Defense Tactics.

## **Not Everything Requires an Action!**

Does every single thing a Character does in a Skirmish require an Action? The answer is obviously no. There are many quick, simple things a Character can do which do not require using up his one and only Action for the Round. The GM and Players should use common sense and good judgment when deciding what requires an Action and what does not. The following may be taken as some basic guidelines:

- Speaking briefly does not require an Action, but a lengthy speech, or a speech that involves a Skill Roll such as trying to sway someone with Intimidation or Sincerity, does require an Action.
- Drawing a sword, knife, or other easily-reached weapon does not require an Action, but sheathing one does take an Action. Readyng a heavier or more awkward weapon, or stringing a bow, usually requires an Action, although the GM could allow highly skilled Characters (Skill Rank 4 or 5) to do so without an Action.
- Dropping something never requires an Action.
- Pulling out a shugenja spell-scroll does not require an Action, but rolling up a scroll and putting it safely back in the scroll-satchel does require an Action.

## **Attacking**

An attack against a Character is a Contested Roll of the attacker's [Weapon Skill]/[Trait] against the defender's Defense/Reflexes.

If the attacker wins the Contested Roll, he hits and inflicts Wounds on the defender. The number of Wounds is determined by the weapon's Damage Rating and the attacker's Raises – see "Wounds and Death" for details.

If the attacker does not win the roll, the attack misses.

The attack and Defense rolls should be made simultaneously – this is both realistic and helps keep the game moving quickly. When the attacker announces his target, both sides have the option to enhance their rolls with boosts such as Void and Honor. In general, it is a good idea for the GM to require the attacker to announce all such boosts before the defender does so.

An attack against a Thug is a Skill Roll of the attacker's [Weapon Skill]/[Trait] against the Thug's Defense TN. If the attacker meets or exceeds the TN, he hits the Thug. See the Thug rules later in this chapter for more details on fighting Thugs.

- **Using the Environment for Attack:** A Player may come up with a creative way for his Character to use the environment or terrain of the Skirmish to enhance his attack – such as vaulting off a table to deliver a powerful blow. In some cases, the GM can simply allow the Character to do this, but if the specific thing the Character is trying to do is difficult in its own right (such as the aforementioned vault off a table), the GM can require an additional Skill Roll as part of the Attack

Action. This will usually be an Athletics Roll, using whichever Trait the GM judges appropriate for the specific act, and at a TN determined by the GM – typically 20 or 25 depending on what the Character is trying to do. If the Character succeeds (or if the GM allows him to skip the extra Skill roll), he gains +1k0 on his attack roll for that Round.

- **Using the Environment for Defense:** Likewise, a Character may try to make a creative use of terrain, weather, and other aspects of the scene to enhance his defense, potentially rolling an appropriate Skill (such as Athletics or Stealth) if the GM judges it necessary. Success awards the Character +1k0 on his Defense Skill rolls until his Turn on the next Round.
- **Getting Past Obstacles:** A Character who cannot reach his target for a melee attack due to intervening obstacles can try to get past the obstacle quickly with a suitable Skill roll – typically an Athletics Skill Roll with the Strength or Agility Trait, depending on the GM’s judgment. The TN is chosen by the GM but will typically be 20 or 25. With a success, the Character is able to get past the obstacle and attack on the same Action. Otherwise, he will have to use a Move Action to get past the obstacle.
- **Combat Maneuvers:** There are a number of special Maneuvers that a trained warrior can make as part of an attack. These are typically made by calling Raises on a successful attack roll. See “Maneuvers” below for details.

### **Helpless Opponents**

It is possible for a situation to arise in which the defender has no ability to make a Defense Skill roll. Most often, this will be due to the Character having so many Wound penalties that he has no Defense dice left to roll. It can also happen due to a combination of different dice penalties (Wounds, situational penalties, Disadvantages, etc) all combining to reduce his Defense roll to zero dice. In these situations, the Character is assumed to be essentially helpless and unable to defend himself, and an “attack” on him is no different from using a weapon outside of a Skirmish (see the “Weapons Outside of Skirmishes” sidebar later in this chapter).

However, some GMs may consider this to be overly deadly even for a relatively gritty game like L5R. In this case, an alternative is to allow the “helpless” Character to roll a single non-exploding die in his defense. The attack will still inflict a large number of Wounds, but the Character will at least have some chance of survival.

### **Maneuvers**

Characters can use Raises on attacks roll to produce extra or special effects other than merely inflicting extra Wounds. In game terms, all such extra effects are referred to as Maneuvers.



Of course, it is impossible for the game rules to define and encompass the huge variety of different stunts and tricks a Character might try to pull off in combat, but the following represent the most common types of Maneuvers and can be used by the GM to extrapolate how to handle other ideas the Players might have. Note that some School Techniques allow Characters to perform Maneuvers more easily, more potently, or with additional effects – see the *Chapter of Fire* for more details on Schools.

- **Called Shot:** A Called Shot is an attack that specifically targets one location on the opponent, such as the arm or the head. There are many reasons why a Character might wish to perform a Called Shot – for example, perhaps he wishes to shame his opponent by cutting his face. In general, a Character can target a specific limb (arm or leg) with one Raise, the hand or foot or head with two Raises, or an eye, ear, finger, belt, headband, sandal-strap, or other such small target with three Raises. There is no inherent game-mechanic effect for striking a particular body part – it does not inflict more Wounds, for example – but the GM can choose to reward such targeted strikes in a variety of ways, such as rendering a targeted limb weak or useless, letting a strike to the eyes make the victim temporarily or permanently Blind, letting a strike to the head Daze the victim, and so forth.
- **Disarm:** Most samurai are not taught to try to disarm their opponents, since doing so would be dishonoring them – making it a shameful act. However, warriors of a more pragmatic or ruthless bent, such as the Scorpion, the Mantis, or the Crab, are known to attempt such Maneuvers from time to time. A Disarm attempt normally requires three Raises, and the attack inflicts two less Wounds (thus quite easily having the potential to inflict no Wounds). However, if the attack succeeds, the opponent drops his weapon. GMs may choose to add more flavor and options to a Disarm, such as by allowing a bow or a wooden-hafted weapon to be damaged or destroyed by a successful Disarm.
- **Knockdown:** This is a Maneuver designed to knock an opponent prone, either by tripping him or by outright forcing him down with brute strength. A Knockdown normally requires two Raises to succeed, and can only be performed with a melee attack. The GM may also choose to rule that a Knockdown is more difficult to perform with certain kinds of weapons – for example, using a cutting weapon like swords or small stabbing weapons like knives may not be the best choice for such a Maneuver.

## Ranged Attacks

A ranged attack is a general term for any attack which strikes an opponent at a distance – shooting a bow, throwing a spear, hurling a shuriken, flinging out a chain weapon, etc. All ranged attacks can be made at Short Range, but some of them can also be made at Long Range (see “Range” below). Also, ranged attacks can ignore many sorts of intervening obstacles such as furniture, slopes and cliffs, pits, gullies, and suchlike that would block melee attacks.

However... terrain, weather, visibility, and other such things can disrupt a ranged attack, either by creating cover for the defender or by obscuring visibility. (See the “Environmental Effects” sidebar for suggestions.) The GM judges whether conditions are sufficiently beneficial to the defender to affect the chances of a successful ranged attack. If so, the GM awards bonus dice to the defender’s Defense Skill Rolls against the ranged attack. Typically, these will be unkept dice, but extremely tough conditions will award kept dice.

### **Environmental Effects on Skirmishes**

Things like physical obstacles, darkness, fog, and other such aspects of the environment can make it more difficult to attack enemies, especially with ranged attacks, and correspondingly easier to defend oneself against enemy attacks. The GM is the final arbiter on whether the environment may impede the attacker, but the following list can serve as a suggestion/guideline to how to award defensive bonuses or other restrictions (such as movement restrictions) based on weather, obstacles, or other such effects.

- **Strong moonlight, light fog/smoke:** +1k0 to defend against ranged attacks, no effect on melee attacks.
- **Weak moonlight, starlight, thick fog/smoke:** +1k1 to defend against ranged attacks, +1k0 to defend against melee attacks.
- **Complete darkness or blinding fog/smoke:** Treat as though the attacker is Blind (as per the Condition).
- **Light physical obscurement** (thin foliage, shoji screen): +1k0 to defend against all types of attacks.
- **Thick physical obscurement** (dense foliage, thick grass): +2k0 to defend against all types of attacks.
- **Low wall/small boulder/fallen log:** +1k1 to defenses against all attacks (melee attackers may be able to attempt an Athletics roll to evade the obstacle)
- **Fortification/solid wall/large boulder/stockade wall:** +2k2 to defenses against ranged attacks, melee attacks are impossible (melee attackers must use at least one Move Action to get past the obstacle)

### **High & Low: Fighting in Unusual Situations**

There are many special or unusual physical circumstances that can affect a Character’s ability to fight. He might be fighting while hip-deep in a swamp, fighting while balanced on a railing, fighting from horseback, or fighting while lying on his back. In general, the GM can handle these sorts of situations by granting a bonus or applying a penalty to the character’s Skill Rolls. As with many other aspects of the game, a complete list of all

possible situations is impossible, but the following basic examples provide a grounding point from which the GM can extrapolate.

- **Higher/Lower Ground** – In general, attacking from a noticeably higher position (such as the top of a wall) is advantageous, while attacking from a lower position is more difficult. For most situations, a +1k0 modifier or a 1-die penalty is acceptable. If the situation is extremely unbalanced – for example, a samurai trying to scale a wall and fighting against a defender on the top – the GM could increase the bonuses to +2k0 or even +1k1, and increase the penalties to 2 dice or even 3 dice. Also, the GM may rule that certain kinds of Tactics or Maneuvers may not be usable in such situations – for instance, a Character who is trying to scale a siege ladder is probably not able to utilize the Full Attack or Full Defense Tactics.
- **Mounts** – Cavalry are not widespread in Rokugan as a whole, but many commanders and elite units ride horses, and the Unicorn Clan is famous for mounting most of its samurai on horseback. A mounted Character has the same attack benefit as a Character with a modest height advantage (+1k0), while a Character on the ground will suffer a 1-die penalty when attacking a mounted opponent. A mounted Character cannot normally use the Full Attack Tactic, although special training (e.g. School Techniques) can evade this restriction.
- **Prone** – A Character may wind up flat on the ground either voluntarily (hiding, evading archery fire, etc) or against his will (a fall, getting thrown or knocked down by an opponent, etc). Prone Characters find it more difficult to defend themselves in melee, suffering a 2-die penalty to their Defense Skill rolls against melee attacks. A prone Character cannot move faster than a crawl, and cannot fight at all with Heavy weapons. He can fight with Medium and Small weapons, but suffers a 2-die penalty to his attacking Skill Rolls. On the other hand, a Prone Character is harder to hit with ranged attacks, gaining a +1k1 bonus to Defense Skill rolls against them. Getting up from Prone requires a Move Action, although the GM can allow a Character who goes Full Attack to get up while attacking.

## Range and Distance

Some RPGs take a detailed approach to the question of range in combat, tracking specific distances and line-of-sight. However, L5R prefers to take a more abstract “cinematic” approach, to keep the action in a Skirmish moving quickly and dramatically.

Accordingly, there are only three types of Range in L5R: Short, Long, and Extreme.

- **Short Range** means the Characters are close enough to move and attack each other freely. At this range, Characters are assumed to be able to move and make a melee attack against their opponents with a single Action. (This assumes there are no physical obstacles in the way – a Character may still be blocked from attacking if there is an intervening obstruction such as a pit, wall, etc.) All types of ranged attacks may be made freely at Short Range.

- **Long Range** means the only attacks which may be made are with Long-range weapons – specifically bows. Many spells can also be used at Long Range – see the individual spell descriptions in the *Chapter of Water* for details. Hand-hurled missile weapons such as yari, shuriken, and kusarigama are generally not effective at Long Range.

The distance between Short Range and Long Range is not a specific value in feet or yards, but instead is expressed as the number of Move Actions required to traverse the distance between them. This is a minimum of two Actions and a maximum of 10 Actions. (A distance of more than 10 Move Actions is considered Extreme Range.)

- **Extreme Range** is a distance that requires 11 or more Move Actions to traverse. At this range, only siege weapons – catapults and ballistae – and a few powerful spells can be used effectively. Extreme Range is unlikely to come into play very often, but there are some situations (such as sieges of castles) where it can be applicable, so we have included it as part of the game.

### **Weapons in the “Wrong” Hand/Weapons in Both Hands**

Rokugani martial arts teach samurai to fight with their right hand, the “hand of war” in the Empire’s philosophy. Some weapons require the use of two hands, but the training for such weapons still uses the right hand as the “leading” hand – for example, a bowman will always draw/aim with his right hand. Moreover, Rokugani martial training emphasizes the use of two hands even with many weapons that can be wielded with one hand (such as swords), with the right hand as a “dominant” hand that guides the strike.

Because the Rokugani train in this way, there is no need to keep track of whether a particular Character is right-handed or left-handed – his training will not show any consideration for such things. There may, however, be situations in which a samurai is forced to fight with the hand which is normally not his preferred choice – for instance, a conventionally-trained samurai might find himself forced to fight with his left hand because his right hand has been crippled. There may also be situations in which he must fight with only one hand while using a weapon that requires two hands (almost all Heavy Weapons, for example, require two hands to wield properly). In these situations the character suffers a penalty to the attack roll, ranging from 1-die up to 3-dice depending on how severe the GM judges the situation to be.

For the most part, the Rokugani are trained to fight with only one weapon at a time. The idea of fighting with two weapons at once strikes the typical samurai as bizarre and foolish. However, there are a few specific martial traditions which make exceptions to this rule. Certain Kata for smaller weapons such as knives and jo staves involve fighting with a weapon in each hand, so Characters who train in those Kata can fight in that way. Also, the Mirumoto Bushi School specifically trains its warriors to fight with a katana in the right hand and a wakizashi in the left. The effects and benefits of fighting in these styles are described in the sections on Kata and Schools in the *Chapter of Fire*.

Barring these specific cases, Rokugani samurai never fight with two weapons at once. If for some reason a Player nonetheless decides to have his Character wield two weapons at once, he not only gains no benefit from doing so but in fact suffers a 3-die penalty.

## Armor

Rokugani armor follows a relatively standardized design throughout the Empire, using a mixture of lacquered metal plates, layered cloth, and silk ties. The basic suit of samurai armor includes a helmet and a few large pieces which protect the torso and waist, along with lighter plates on the forearms and lower legs. This basic armor is known as *Yoroi* or Light Armor, and is used by warriors who are on duty but not in the field for war. When a samurai goes onto the battlefield to fight for his clan, he wears *O-Yoroi* or Heavy Armor, which adds on many additional protective pieces such as shoulder guards and a neck guard. Wearing armor when not on martial duty, and especially wearing Heavy Armor away from the battlefield, has serious social implications in Rokugan – it suggests that the samurai does not trust the local authorities to maintain the peace. Thus, in most parts of the Empire samurai do not wear armor very often.

Armor improves a character's defense by allowing him to more easily avoid harm from enemy blows, either by stopping them completely or by making it easier to deflect them.

- **Ashigaru Armor:** Typically worn by peasant soldiers, ashigaru armor is occasionally worn by samurai serving as scouts. It consists of a single light protective piece for the torso and a simple iron helmet. Ashigaru armor awards +1k0 to Defense Skill Rolls against melee attacks, but no benefit against ranged attacks.
- **Light Armor:** The basic form of samurai armor. Light Armor awards +2k0 to Defense Skill Rolls against melee attacks, and +1k0 to Defense Skill Rolls against ranged attacks.
- **Heavy Armor:** Used mainly on the battlefield, Heavy Armor offers the strongest protection available to samurai. It awards a +2k1 bonus to Defense Skill Rolls against melee attacks (which increases to +3k1 against unarmed attacks, improvised weapons, and Light weapons) and +2k0 to Defense Skill Rolls against ranged attacks; however, it is also physically awkward and inflicts a 1-die penalty on all other (non-Defense) Skill Rolls that involve physical actions.

## Weapon Damage

If an attack succeeds, it inflicts a number of Wounds equal to the weapon's Damage Rating. Also, if the attack was made with a Medium or Heavy weapon (see below), the attacker may use Raises to inflict +1 additional Wound for each Raise.

Weapons are divided into three categories: Light, Medium, and Heavy. A Light weapon always has a Damage Rating of 1 and normally cannot inflict more Wounds even with Raises. (Some Kata, School Techniques, and spells can increase the damage of Light weapons.) A Medium weapon inflicts 1 or 2 Wounds, depending on its specific Damage Rating, and can cause additional Wounds with Raises – however, it cannot inflict more additional Wounds than the attacker's Void Rank. A Heavy weapon inflicts either 2 or 3 Wounds, depending on the specific Damage Rating, and can cause any number of additional Wounds with Raises.

GMs who consider Heavy Weapons to be too “strong” compared to Medium weapons can opt to cap their additional damage with the Void Rank in the same manner as for a Medium weapon.

Although there are exceptions, in general the weapons in L5R fall into these three categories as follows:

**Light Weapons:**

- Improvised
- Jitte
- Jo Staff
- Kama
- Nunchaku
- Parangu
- Sasumata
- Shuriken
- Soderagami
- Tanto
- Tonfa
- Tsubute
- War Fan
- Unarmed strike

**Medium Weapons:**

- Bo Staff
- Bow (Yumi or Han-Kyu)
- Katana
- Kusarigama
- Manrikikusari
- Masakari
- Nagamaki
- Naginata
- Nage-Yari
- Ninja-to
- Wakizashi
- Yari

**Heavy Weapons:**

- Bisento
- Dai Tsuchi
- Horsebow (Dai-Kyu)
- Lance
- No-Dachi
- Ono
- Tetsubo

## **Weapon Damage Outside of Skirmishes**

The various Damage Ratings assigned to different weapons in L5R are based on the effectiveness and lethality of these weapons in a Skirmish, where the opponent is dodging, blocking, and otherwise trying to both avoid being hit and to minimize the injury if he does get hit. However, what happens when a weapon is used outside of these “game-normal” Skirmish situations?

What happens when a magistrate tries to behead a captured criminal?

Or a ninja tries to assassinate an oblivious guard?

What about a Crab scout trying to strangle a sleeping goblin, or a villain trying to kill a hostage held at knifepoint?

Common sense should apply here. Clearly, in these sorts of situations *any* weapon is lethal, regardless of “attack rolls” or whether it is considered “Light” or “Heavy.” If the GM and players feel the need for a “rule” for such scenarios, the rule is a simple one: in a situation where a Character is attacking a completely helpless target, there is no need for any sort of attack roll, and all weapons are considered to have the same Damage Rating:

**Death.**

## **Mortality: Wounds and Death**

Wounds degrade a Character’s ability to function, due both to pain and to the physical impairments of the injuries. Each Wound a Character suffers inflicts a 1-die penalty on all his physical Skill Rolls (e.g. any Skill Roll that uses a physical Trait) and spell-casting rolls if he is a shugenja. However, there are certain Advantages and School Techniques which allow a character to ignore the penalties for some of his Wounds or even to negate the Wound effects completely. Also, note that any time a Character suffers Wounds, he can reduce the number of Wounds he takes by 1 by spending a Void Point or a Taint Point – see “Resisting Damage” below.

When a Character’s total number of Wounds exceed twice his Earth Rank, he is considered to be at Death’s Door. At that point the Character is unable to take any Actions, and any additional Wound will cause the character to begin Dying; he will die on his Initiative Turn in the next Round. This death can be averted within that time-frame by another Character performing a Medicine/Intelligence Skill roll at a TN of 30. It can also be averted by the Dying Character being successfully healed with a spell or other such supernatural healing effect

A Character whose total number of Wounds exceeds three times his Earth Rank is killed instantly.

### **Resisting Damage**

When a Character is hit in combat, the Player can spend a Void Point to automatically reduce the Wounds from that hit by 1. (Note that for NPCs, Characters can resist damage in this way but Thugs cannot.) Characters with ranks in Taint may also spend a Taint Point to reduce their Wounds in the same manner, but gain a pip of Taint every time they do so.

## **A Tougher Game**

Some players and GMs may feel that the default rules are a bit too “forgiving” for a game that is supposed to be about the dangerous world of samurai, where death is always a sword’s edge away.

The game can be modified in any number of ways to increase (or decrease!) its lethality. However, the most obvious option is to have Death’s Door and actual death take place when a Character’s total number of Wounds equal, rather than exceeding, his Earth x2 and Earth x3.

## **Bonus Wounds**

Some game effects (such as certain spells and the Advantage called Strength of the Earth) can grant a Character additional Wounds. These extra Wounds are always applied at the “top” of the character’s Wound total – that is, they are added on to the total number of Wounds he can take before he reaches Death’s Door.

## **Carapace**

Many nonhuman Characters and Thugs have an inherent ability called Carapace. Moreover, human Characters and Thugs can acquire this ability temporarily from a handful of game effects, such as certain Earth spells. Carapace has a Rank, ranging from 1 to 5. Any time a creature with Carapace is hit, the Wounds he suffers are reduced by the Rank of his Carapace.

## **“Stand Up and Fight!”**

Samurai are famous for their stoic resistance to pain and their ability to keep heroically fighting in the face of grisly injuries. A Character who is wounded can attempt to “grit his teeth” and briefly ignore the penalties of his Wounds. At the start of his Turn in a Skirmish, an injured Character may make a roll of Insight/Stamina, keeping Stamina; the TN of the roll is equal to 5x the Character’s current number of Wounds (however, the maximum TN is 40 regardless of how many Wounds the Character has). A character may do this a number of times in the same Skirmish equal to his Void Rank.

A Character may also invoke this effect without a die roll by spending a Void Point. This may be done any number of times in the same skirmish so long as the Character still has Void Points to spend.

A Character who has Shadowlands Taint may also create this effect by spending a Taint Point, with the usual penalty of gaining more Taint.

Regardless of whether the Character spends a Void Point, spends a Taint Point, or makes a successful Insight/Stamina roll, the result is the same: the Character may ignore all the penalties and effects from his Wounds until the beginning of his next Turn. (Note that this rule allows a Character to act when he is at Death’s Door and would normally be unable to take Actions at all.)

## **The Final Moment**

When a Player Character dies, he may immediately take one final Action with no die penalties of any kind. This is the final act of his life, his final chance to influence the



mortal world before he departs to receive the judgment of Emma-O. He is automatically considered to be using the Attack Tactic for this Action. He may spend *all* of his remaining Void Points and Honor Points (if he has any) on any applicable roll made during this Action; Glory Points may also be spent if they are applicable to the roll. He may not spend Infamy Points or Taint Points on this roll.

When a Non-Player Character dies, the GM has the choice of whether or not the Character is able to utilize a Final Moment. In general, the more powerful and memorable the NPC is, the more appropriate it is for the GM to grant him a Final Moment at death.

### **Capping Wound Penalties?**

In the standard L5R rules presented here, there is no “cap” on how many Wound penalties a Character can suffer. Thus, a Character with a high Earth may easily find himself at an 8-die or 10-die penalty from Wounds, rendering him physically helpless unless he uses the Stand Up and Fight ability.

Some GMs and Players may feel this is too harsh, since it means a Character can be rendered helpless and unable to act despite still being alive and conscious. If so, an alternate option is to set a maximum penalty of 5 dice from Wounds, regardless of how many Wounds a Character might suffer. This makes the game more “superheroic” by allowing high-Earth Characters to absorb large numbers of Wounds and still be able to roll at least a few dice.

### **Healing Wounds**

Injuries will naturally heal over time. L5R’s basic rule in this regard is that a Character’s Wounds will heal after each play session. However, this assumes that each session is followed by a certain amount of “down time” in which the Characters live their normal lives and are able to rest and recover from their adventures. In some situations this may not be possible – the session may end in a “cliffhanger” with the action resuming immediately in the next session. Conversely, some game sessions may include a substantial amount of “down time” within the session itself, such as a journey across the Empire or a long stay at a shrine. Thus, the GM may sometimes wish to track healing times. In such cases the following rules apply:

- A Character who is healthy and avoids strenuous physical activity will heal one Wound per week. This represents the “default” level of natural healing. If the Character actually limits himself to bed-rest, undertaking no activity of any kind, and is cared for by someone with at least 2 Ranks of the Medicine Skill, he will heal two Wounds per week.
- If a Character is doing rigorous things (e.g. continuing to participate in physical adventures, fighting in Skirmishes, etc), he heals only 1 Wound every two weeks.
- If a Character is sick or his injuries are infected, his healing rate is slowed by one week – thus, his default healing rate will be 1 Wound every two weeks, and if he is active he will only heal 1 Wound every three weeks.

## **Villainous Hordes: *Yarou* (Thugs)**

In samurai tales, the heroes often are depicted as cleaving their way through veritable swarms of low-ranking enemies. L5R is no exception to this concept. These lesser villains are known in the L5R rules as *yarou* or “Thugs.” Although Thugs have all the same basic mechanical abilities as other NPCs, and are still broadly defined by their Rings, Traits, and Skills, they are less capable and far easier to defeat.

- **Who Is a Thug?** The L5R rules use Thugs to depict any sort of low-power or low-skill villain who is individually only a minor threat, especially if they rely on numbers or brute strength rather than skill. This category can include the lowest-ranking samurai (e.g. generic castle guards, border patrols, etc), as well as bandits, criminal gangs, peasant rebels, and various low-intelligence creatures and monsters such as goblins and zombies. Most kinds of natural animals are also represented with the Thug rules.
- **Thug Stats:** Thugs have Rings (and Traits) and Skills in the same manner as a Character, but they do not have a Void Ring. Ranks in these Rings, Traits, and Skills will typically be quite low. An “average” Thug (e.g. a typical bandit) will have all Rings at Rank 1 and have Physical Traits at Rank 2; Skills will generally be Rank 1, except for Rank 2 in whichever Weapon Skill the Thug uses to attack.
- **Thug Attacks:** An “average” Thug will roll 4k2 to attack (as derived from the Thug’s Traits and Skills). Thugs always use the Attack Tactic. Attacking Thugs must make a Contested Attack Roll against a Character’s Defense Skill Roll in the normal way; however, Thugs always inflict 1 Wound per hit, no matter what weapon they are using and no matter how well the GM rolls. Thugs cannot Raise on their attack rolls unless their description specifically allows them to do so.
- **Thug Defenses:** Thugs do not get to use their Defense Skill to protect themselves against enemy attacks. Instead, an attack on a Thug rolls against a simple Defense TN. The default Defense TN of a Thug is 15; the tougher the Thug, the higher the Defense TN to hit him.
- **Thug Wounds:** Thugs cannot resist damage in any way, and generally they will die after being struck, even if the attack only inflicted 1 Wound. Tougher or monstrous Thugs can sometimes take more hits. Characters fighting Thugs can use Raises to hit additional Thugs with the same attack, or to hit the same Thug multiple times, in both cases at the rate of one additional hit per Raise. Thus, it is often possible to cut down multiple Thugs with a single attack.
- **Thug Initiative:** Thugs have no Void and no Insight, so their Initiative Rank is always equal to their Air Ring (plus a die-roll if the optional Variable Initiative rule is used) unless they have a special ability that makes them faster. Also, if they are tied in Initiative Rank with a Character, the Character always goes first.

- **Ganging Up:** Although Thugs have no Void Points or other such boosts to power-up their individual attacks, they do have the ability to conduct cooperative attacks using the normal rules for assisting others' rolls. Up to six Thugs may combine their efforts to attack a single Character (provided there is room for six of them to attack). One Thug is the "primary" and rolls the attack, gaining +1k1 for each assisting Thug. Note, however, that even when they "gang up" in this manner, Thugs only inflict their standard number of Wounds (normally 1 Wound).

### **Adjusting the Strength of Thugs**

The rules above represent a basic "default" Thug for L5R, usable as (for example) a bandit, rabid dog, criminal, or ashigaru. However, the GM has the ability to adjust these stats to depict stronger, weaker, or more specialized and unusual types of Thugs to present the PCs with different challenges. This may be done in the following ways:

- **Weaker Thugs:** There are easily depicted by lowering Rings, Traits, Skills, and Defense TNs below the "average" levels depicted above. These lower stats could represent weak but numerous enemies such as a mob of peasants or a pack of dogs. With the addition of special abilities (see below) they represent certain kinds of "weak" but still dangerous Shadowlands creatures like zombies and goblins.
- **Dodging Thugs:** The Defense TN of a Thug may be adjusted up in increments of 5 to represent enemies who are better-trained, faster, or just good at dodging attacks. Note that in addition to making the individual Thugs harder to hit, this adjustment also makes it harder for the Characters to call the Raises needed to hit multiple Thugs with one attack.
- **Strong Thugs:** Thugs may be made more threatening to the Character by allowing them to inflict 2 Wounds or even 3 Wounds per hit instead of 1. However, Thugs are never able to inflict additional Wounds from Raises. It is not recommended that Thugs be able to inflict more than 3 Wounds.
- **Tough Thugs:** An unusually tough Thug might be able to take 2 hits before it goes down. The GM may depict exceptionally resilient Thugs who require 3 or more hits to defeat, but this should be rare and generally confined to non-human Thugs such as wild bears or Shadowlands beasts.
- **Special Abilities:** Thugs may be given a variety of special abilities to make them more interesting. This could be anything from letting them have Character Advantages like Quick to giving them Carapace, flight, or unique/spell-like abilities such as passing through walls or regenerative powers. See the Creatures rules in the *Chapter of Water* for more discussion of special abilities.

## The Price of Samurai Adventure: Bad Things Happen

In the course of a samurai's life there are many unfortunate things that can happen – he can get knocked down during a fight, blinded by dust in his eyes, or stunned by a blow that knocks out his breath. He can be weakened by lack of sleep or tangled up by a fisherman's net. A complete list of every possible effect would be impossible, but the following section lists the most common types, under the general category of Conditions; GMs can use this list to extrapolate the results of more unusual situations.

- **Blinded** – A Character might be blinded temporarily by darkness, smoke, sand in the eyes, and similar effects. He could also be permanently blind due to damage to his eyes (or even being born blind). A blind Character suffers a 4-die penalty to all Defense Skill Rolls and to all other Skill Rolls which are dependent on vision (GM's discretion). He will also have difficulty moving safely, especially if he is running – the GM may require Athletics rolls for the Character to avoid tripping and falling in such situations.
- **Dazed** – The GM uses Dazed to represent any situation where a Character is shaken or confused, with weakened senses and clumsy movements. This could be caused by a blow to the face or some other vulnerable spot, by inhaling a foul gas, by getting drunk, by being newly awoken from sleep, or any number of other circumstances. A character who is Dazed suffers a 2-die penalty to all Skill Rolls. (The GM may increase the die penalty for especially severe effects.) At the GM's option, being Dazed may also prevent a character from using Full Attack or Full Defense Tactics. Normally a character will only remain Dazed for one or two Rounds, but some effects (such as drunkenness) are ongoing. The GM may also opt to let a Character make a Stamina Roll at a suitable TN to shrug off the effects of a Daze.
- **Entangled** – The Entangled effect can be used to represent any situation where a Character's movement is impeded by external burdens or obstructions. Perhaps the Character is caught in a fisherman's net or an enemy has wrapped him in a coil of chain; perhaps his clothes are soaking wet and weighing down his limbs; perhaps he is tied up or shackled; perhaps his enemies are holding his limbs. An Entangled Character cannot use the Full Attack or Full Defense Tactics, and suffers a 4-die penalty to any physical Skill Rolls except for rolls made to escape the entanglement. Escaping an entanglement will typically be an Athletics Skill Roll using either Strength (if the Character can best escape through brute force) or Agility (if escape requires flexibility). In some situations, such as when being squeezed by a creature's tentacles, the GM may opt to ignore Athletics completely and simply have the Character roll Strength. Regardless, the roll can be either be made against a simple TN (for a "passive" entanglement such as being caught in a net) or it can be a Contested Roll (against someone who is "actively" entangling the character, such as an enemy who has wrapped the Character in a kusarigama's chain).

- **Fatigued** – A Character may become Fatigued due to lack of rest or lack of food and water. He may also simply have become exhausted from massive or unceasing effort. A Fatigued Character cannot use the Full Attack Tactic and suffers a 1-die penalty to all Skill Rolls. At the GM's option, a Character who goes without food or rest for a long period of time (such as two or more days) may suffer additional die-penalties as his fatigue worsens, ultimately becoming so exhausted or starved as to be incapable of taking Actions at all.
- **Stunned** – The Stunned effect represents a brief but extreme disabling of a Character, such as having his breath knocked out or suffering a paralyzing nerve strike. A Stunned Character cannot take any Actions and cannot make Defense Skill Rolls to protect himself – any foe can simply kill him with an Action. Typically a Stunned effect will last one Round, but at the GM's option (or if the specific effect requires it) it can end more quickly or last longer.

## Falling

All sorts of adventure stories feature scenes in which the heroes fight on the edges of bottomless pits, climb up the sheer walls of castles, and otherwise dare the threat of falling. Samurai stories are no exception to this. However, L5R does not require GMs and Players to track the specific distance of a fall. (Does it really make much of a difference whether a fall is 18 feet or 23 feet?) Instead, in L5R a fall may be one of three distances: Short, Long, or Fatal.

- A **Short** fall is one which a skillful character may be able to survive without serious injury. Depending on how far the fall is (and on whether there are additional factors such as sharp rocks at the bottom), a Short fall will inflict 1, 2, or 3 Wounds. However, the falling Character may roll Athletics/Agility at a TN equal to 10x the number of Wounds inflicted by the fall. With a success, the Wounds are reduced by 1. (This is in addition to the normal option to reduce Wounds by spending a Void Point.)
- A **Long** fall is more dangerous and much more likely to be lethal. Damage from a Long fall is at least 4 Wounds, and can be as high as 10 Wounds depending on the length of the fall. Damage from a Long fall cannot be averted with an Athletics roll, although a Character can still use a Void Point to reduce the number of Wounds by one.
- A **Fatal** fall is a fall of such a great distance that there is no possibility of survival. (For example, falling off the side of a thousand-foot cliff.) The GM should never inflict a Fatal fall on a Character arbitrarily; if there is the possibility for a Character to suffer a Fatal fall, there should be legitimate chances to avoid it – as a last resort, at least allow an Athletics/Reflexes roll to grab the edge.

## Poison

Poison figures prominently in many fantasy stories, and in the world of L5R it is a special and notorious tool of the Scorpion Clan, which uses it not just to kill but also to weaken,

humiliate, or otherwise ruin the lives of its enemies. Samurai from other clans who care more about victory than about Honor are also known to employ poison. Finally, poison may be encountered on the fangs or claws of dangerous creatures, both natural and supernatural.

Many poisons do not take effect immediately – they have an onset time before the victim begins to feel their effects. The GM should adjudicate the onset time of a poison based on its nature and virulence. In general, the more dangerous or lethal a poison, the faster the onset time – although assassins have been known to employ lethal poisons which require several hours to reach full effect.

In game terms, poison falls into two categories: **Debilitating** and **Lethal**.

**Debilitating** poison causes pain, weakness, paralysis, blurred vision, hallucinations, and similar symptoms that render the victim physically vulnerable but are not actually lethal in themselves. A Character who is afflicted by Debilitating poison suffers a die-penalty to his Skill Rolls – the more virulent the poison, the higher the die-penalty. (Thus an extremely potent Debilitating poison may render a Character unable to take Actions at all.) These effects last until the poison works its way out of the Character's system, a process which may take anywhere from a few Rounds to several days, depending on the severity of the poison.

- Much like with Wounds, a Character in a Skirmish who is afflicted by debilitating poison may make an Insight/Stamina roll (at a TN chosen by the GM based on the virulence of the poison) to act more effectively until his next Turn. However, poison is difficult to completely ignore – the Character reduces the penalty by 1 die by making the roll, and one additional die for each Raise, but can never reduce the die-penalties from poison to less than 1-die.
- A Character with the Medicine Skill can attempt to treat a poisoned Character, rolling Medicine/Intelligence at a TN chosen by the GM. Success allows the Character to act with only a 1-die penalty. The GM may choose to rule that an extremely virulent poison will take multiple Actions to successfully treat with Medicine. Also, because poison is considered a rather dubious topic for a samurai to study, a Character from a highly honorable background may lack the knowledge to properly treat a poison, resulting in a higher TN on the Medicine roll.

**Lethal** poison inflicts Wounds on its victim, with the number of Wounds chosen by the GM based on the virulence of the poison. A Character can partially mitigate this effect with an Insight/Stamina Roll against a TN equal to 10x the total number of Wounds; with a success, the number of Wounds is reduced by 1. Void Points can also be used to reduce poison Wounds in the normal manner.

An extremely potent Lethal poison will simply kill the victim, bypassing any need to calculate Wound totals. However, a wise GM should be wary of inflicting an “auto-kill” poisoning on a Character without offering legitimate chances to avoid it.

## **Fear**

Samurai are expected to embody the Code of Bushido, which includes the Virtue of Courage. Moreover, Rokugani culture believes Fear is not merely shameful and dishonorable, but also one of the Three Sins, making it even more ruinous than other moral failings to a samurai's repute. However, for all their courage, samurai are still human beings; in dangerous or unnatural situations (especially those involving supernatural horrors such as the undead) they can find it difficult not to succumb to their sinful side.

Fear effects are most commonly created by monsters, spirits, spells, and other such supernatural threats. However, they can also be brought about by exceptionally startling or desperate non-supernatural situations. Some samurai are themselves such potent and terrifying opponents that their war-cries or merely their presence can invoke Fear in their enemies.

A Fear effect is given a Rank, from 1 to 10, based on how strong it is. Most game mechanics which create Fear will list the strength for that specific Fear effect, but the GM can modify the number for unusual situations, and of course the GM chooses the strength of a Fear effect for situations not covered by the existing rules.

A Character confronted by a Fear effect must make a Contested Roll of his Insight/Willpower against the Rank of the Fear. The roll may be boosted with Void Points or Honor Points (this is the only non-Skill Roll which may always be boosted with Honor Points). If the Character fails to overcome the Fear, he suffers 1 rank of Stress, plus 1 additional Stress for each Raise by which he failed the roll.

## **Samurai Vs Samurai: Iaijutsu Dueling**

The iaijutsu duel is a special form of sword-combat practiced in the samurai caste. It is traditionally used to resolve personal insults, conflicts of honor, and other such serious disagreements between samurai. Iaijutsu duels can also take place on the battlefield when one warrior specifically challenges another.

An iaijutsu duel begins with both duelists standing a few paces apart, facing each other, with their swords sheathed and in a stance to draw. (A few duelists, notably in the Dragon Clan, choose instead to begin the duel with their sword drawn but in a lowered position.) In a formal duel held in court there will be a judge who announces when the duel may actually get underway – however, many duels take place outside of that context, and in those cases the duel is considered to start the moment the two opponents take up their stances. The duelists spend some time studying each other, trying to spot a weakness or hesitation – this process, known as “focusing,” may take as little as a few seconds or as long as many minutes, and in a few rare duels it has been known to last for hours, neither duelist able to spot an opening to draw and strike.

Eventually, the duelists draw their swords and strike. Some duels are to first blood and end the moment one combatant is wounded, while other duels are to the death, with each duelist trying to cut the other down.

In game terms, an iaijutsu duel is a special event that is separate and distinct from a Skirmish. A duel does not have a specific timeframe, and can take as little or as much time in the game as the dramatic circumstances require. However, regardless of the amount of time involved, a duel always involves three steps:

## **Step One: Assessment**

At the beginning of a duel, both duelists take up their stances and each duelist attempts to get a read on his opponent's skill and capability by observing his stance. In game terms, this is resolved by having each duelist make a Skill Roll of Iaijutsu/Awareness, against a TN equal to 10+ [5x the opponent's Iaijutsu Rank]. (Note that some School Techniques and Kata award bonuses to the Assessment roll.) A successful roll awards one of the following pieces of information of the duelist's choice, plus one additional piece of information for every margin of 10 by which the character beat the TN. Also, if one duelist beat the other duelist's total Assessment roll by a Raise (margin of 10 or more), the winner gains a +1k1 bonus to the subsequent Focus roll.

The information which can be learned from Assessment comprises the following:

- The opponent's Void
- The opponent's Fire
- The opponent's Iaijutsu Skill Rank
- The opponent's Insight Rank
- The current number of Void Points the opponent has available
- The opponent's current Wounds, if any

At the end of the Assessment step, either opponent can opt to declare defeat – that is, he may decide he is outmatched and cannot win the duel. It is considered honorable for a samurai to acknowledge a superior opponent in this way. A duelist who acknowledges defeat must accept the consequences of that defeat – including death, if the duel was to the death.

## **Step Two: Focus**

The duelists focus their attention and enter an almost trance-like state of concentration, looking for the moment of weakness that will allow a successful strike. This is resolved as a Contested Skill Roll of Iaijutsu/Void. (Note that some Techniques and Kata may award bonuses to the Focus roll.) If a duelist wins the Contested Roll, he gains a +1k1 bonus to the subsequent Strike roll. For each additional Raise (margin of 10) by which he wins the Contested Roll, he gains another +1k1 bonus to the Strike roll.

## **Step Three: Strike**

The duelists draw/raise their blades and attack each other. This is resolved as a Contested Roll of Iaijutsu/Fire, applying any bonuses earned in the Focus stage. (Again, Techniques and Kata may also award a bonus to the Strike roll.) If one duelist wins the Contested Roll by at least 5, he wins the duel; if the duelists' rolls are within 5 of each other, a "karmic strike" occurs – both of them lose. (Note that this is a specific, unique exception to the normal rules for determining who wins a Contested Roll.)

A defeated duelist suffers the effects of losing, which vary depending on the form of the duel, as follows:

- If the duel is to the death (normal for any battlefield duel and any duel fought over a serious matter of honor), the loser dies. There is no need to count up Wound



totals or compare them to Earth – the all-out nature of an iaijutsu duel means the Strike is invariably lethal.

- In a duel to first blood, the loser is considered to be defeated (and must pay whatever cost that entails in terms of public embarrassment, loss of Glory, etc) but physically he suffers only a superficial cut. At the GM's option, the cut may be serious enough to inflict 1 Wound, but never more than 1.

### **Choosing Different Results for a Duel**

Occasionally, a Character may (for whatever reason) choose to try to spare his opponent in a lethal duel, or to try to kill his opponent in a duel to first blood. In this case, if that Character wins the duel the results will be those dictated by his choice.

However, making such choices carries significant consequences. A Character who refuses to kill in a lethal duel is dishonoring himself and shaming his opponent, and can expect dire social consequences as well as losses of Honor and Glory. A Character who kills in a duel to first blood is demonstrating either incompetence or bloodlust, and will suffer loss of Honor and Glory and gains in Infamy, as well as legal and social consequences.

#### **Timing of Duels and Use of Die-Boosts in Duels**

A duel is not a Skirmish and the three steps of a duel do not directly correspond to Rounds in a Skirmish. However, a GM who wishes to run a duel in the midst of a larger Skirmish (a “battlefield duel”) may opt for simplicity's sake to treat the three steps as each taking one Round of game-time.

Regardless of how the GM treats time in a duel, at each of the three steps (Assessment, Focus, and Strike) the Characters may boost their rolls in the normal fashion – by spending Void Points, Honor Points, or even Taint Points if they have them. If a Character has a Technique that lets him boost his Skill rolls in other ways, he may apply those boosts as well.

## **The Power of the Spirits: Spellcasting**

Rokugan is a fantasy world, one where the Elemental spirits which suffuse all of reality can be invoked and manipulated by those with the ability to speak with them. In L5R, spellcasters are referred to as *shugenja*. They are priests, not “wizards” in the conventional fantasy sense, and have a variety of religious duties such as blessing the crops, presiding over weddings and funerals, and protecting their lands from the influence of evil spirits or bad fortune.

Rokugani spells are actually prayers to the Elemental spirits (called *kami*) which comprise the world. Thus, every spell is associated with one of the four main Elements – Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. (There is a form of magic which invokes the Void, known only to the Phoenix Clan, but it is not accessible to Player Characters.)

Casting a spell requires the shugenja to speak aloud the specific prayers which will persuade the spirits to produce the spell's effect. These prayers are complex and difficult to remember, so a shugenja will normally read them off a scroll; the scroll-

satchels which shugenja carry are as much a mark of their station as their robes and samurai haircuts.

In game terms, casting a spell is a Skill Roll of Spellcraft/[Ring] using the appropriate Ring for the spell. However, casting a spell is an unusual activity, so the following additional constraints apply:

- The power of a spell is expressed as its Mastery Level, which ranges from 1 to 5. The higher a spell's Mastery Level, the more complex are the prayers required to cast it successfully. Thus, the TN for the Skill Roll to cast a spell is equal to 10 plus 5x the Mastery Level of the spell. A Mastery Level 3 spell, for example, will have a TN of 25 (10 plus 3x5).
- The greater complexity of casting a powerful spell also means it takes longer to cast. Thus, casting a spell requires a number of Actions equal to the Mastery Level of the spell. A skillful shugenja can overcome this limitation; the shugenja can call Raises on his spell-casting Skill Roll (before making the roll) to reduce the number of Actions he needs to cast the spell, at the rate of 1 Raise per Action. However, this is risky – by rushing the incantation, the spell may fail completely due to the shugenja failing to meet the Raised TN. Also, a spell always takes at least one Action to cast no matter how many Raises are made.
- The Skill Roll to cast a spell is made on the Round when the spell would be completed. Thus, if the shugenja is injured during the time he takes to cast the spell, the die-penalties for those Wounds will apply to the Skill Roll.
- Other shugenja can potentially interfere with a spell which is being cast within Short Range, reciting their own prayers to interfere with and subvert the prayers of the casting shugenja. This “counterspelling” is described in the *Chapter of Water*.

Full details on spells and spell-casting, as well as a specific list of spells and their effects, may be found in the *Chapter of Water*.

## **Words Cut Like Steel: Social Conflict**

Samurai are warriors first and foremost, but they are also educated citizens of a highly refined and sophisticated Empire. Politics and diplomacy can be as important to a clan's fortunes as war, and no self-respecting samurai will allow himself to be embarrassed by an inability to speak properly in his own defense or on behalf of his lord.

In general, L5R handles social interaction between samurai primarily with role-play. However, not all players (or GMs) have the skill and the knowledge of L5R's culture to depict their social activities entirely through role-playing. Also, handling social conflict entirely with role-play can result in an inappropriate advantage for a Player who is a good role-player but whose Character is not socially skilled... or an inappropriate penalty for a Player who lacks role-playing experience but whose Character has high social Skills. By using the game's Social Skills to mechanically represent social conflict,

Players can depict brilliant diplomats without having to be brilliant themselves – which is the point of playing an RPG, after all.

### **Role-Play in Social Conflict**

The Social Conflict rules are designed to allow Players to run socially-adept Characters without the need to be socially adept themselves. Nonetheless, this is a role-playing game and one which places an emphasis on authentically playing samurai. GMs are strongly encouraged to make role-play a key part of any Social Conflict scene.

In general, the GM should encourage the Players to rely first on their role-playing to handle such situations, switching to the Social Conflict rules only if their role-playing is insufficient to the scene or, more specifically, if they are wanting to use a Skill or Technique to inflict game-mechanic consequences (Stress, loss of Honor/Glory, etc) on their opponents.

A good policy is to expect the Players to “earn” their Skill rolls with suitable role-play. Even if they are not highly proficient role-players, they should at least make a good-faith effort to play the scene before rolling the dice. Also, this will encourage them to improve their role-play over time. The GM can even award mechanical bonuses such as extra dice to Players who make the effort to role-play well, although we recommend you keep such awards relatively modest (e.g. a +1k0 or so).

One thing to be wary of is Players who try to use role-play to get around their Character’s game-mechanic limitations. “I’ll just role-play it” can be a tempting way to avoid spending Experience Points on those pesky Social Skills. Therefore, it is recommended that a Player running a Character with little to no Ranks in Social Skills should always be required to roll Social Conflicts no matter how much role-play talent they display.

Social conflict can involve a huge variety of situations – anything from a samurai trying to emotionally manipulate a rival to a complex negotiation between senior diplomats. Since it is impossible to define every possible situation, the Social Conflict rules are presented as a set of basic systems which the GM and Players can modify as necessary for different types of conflict, applying “tweaks” for unusual circumstances.

Most social conflicts are depicted using Contested Rolls of Social Skills, and there are three Social Skills which are used for the vast majority of such situations: Courtier, Etiquette, and Sincerity.

**Courtier** is used for situations where a Character is “attacking” – such as when he is trying to manipulate an opponent or attain better terms in a diplomatic negotiation. It will usually be paired with the Awareness Trait, although the GM can always choose a different Trait if the situation requires it. **Etiquette**, by contrast, is used in situations where a Character is “defending” – for instance, trying to avoid being tricked or manipulated, or trying not to inadvertently make concessions in negotiations. Etiquette is likewise paired with Awareness unless there is an unusual situation that calls for a different Trait. In both cases, the samurai can use Raises on their rolls to increase the impact of a success.

- In general, if both Characters are “attacking” – actively trying to outmaneuver or defeat each other in their argument or negotiation – their conflict is resolved as a Contested Courtier Roll. However, if only one Character is “attacking” and the other is merely trying to deflect or defeat those attacks, the conflict is resolved as a Contested Roll of Courtier against Etiquette. Each of these approaches has its own merits.
- Winning a Contested Social Roll as an “attacker” (that is, with the Courtier Skill) means the loser has been outmaneuvered. The loser is forced to make some sort of public concession to the winner’s position and suffers a loss of Glory. Successful Raises will result in a larger concession with higher Glory loss and also gaining a Rank of Stress (1 Rank per Raise). See “Glory” for more details of Glory and the effects of its loss.
- A Character who loses a Social Conflict can choose to defy expectations and refuse to make the expected concession. However, this shows the Character to be an uncivilized fool who fails to respect social convention. Accordingly, such a Character is considered to be committing a Major Breach of Etiquette, with the appropriate Honor and Glory losses; if they lost the Contested Roll by 1 or more Raises they still gain a Rank of Stress. See the rules for Honor and Glory later in this chapter for details on these effects.
- A Character can use the Courtier Skill to attack another Character’s reputation, potentially inflicting an increase in Infamy on the losing Character instead of a loss of Glory. Damaging a samurai’s reputation this way is difficult, and should generally require at least one Raise on the Contested Roll.
- A Character can also use the Courtier Skill simply to emotionally damage and manipulate an opponent, trying to provoke them into losing face rather than pursuing any larger political or diplomatic goal. This use of Courtier is resisted with Etiquette. A success causes the target to gain a Rank of Stress, plus more Ranks for any Raises.
- Winning a Contested Social Roll while staying on the defensive (using Etiquette) allows the defender to turn the attacker’s aggression against him, making him look boorish and ill-mannered in front of others. This can result in a loss of Glory to the attacker, and if the defender succeeds on at least one Raise, the attacker will also gain a Rank of Stress and lose some Honor (as a default, the GM may impose a loss equivalent to a Minor Breach of Etiquette) due to being perceived as having violating the Virtue of Courtesy.

**Sincerity** is used in situations where the opponents are trying to succeed by making eloquent speeches and emotional appeals to their audience – a “public debate” – rather than directly arguing with each other. This is most commonly done when samurai are trying to gain the support of a higher authority (such as a daimyo or even the Emperor). Such struggles are represented by Contested Sincerity Rolls using the

Awareness Trait. In these sorts of contests, the winner's position is endorsed by the audience, while the loser suffers a loss of Glory due to the public defeat, but usually does not gain Stress unless the stakes of the argument were extremely high (e.g. trying to save your family from execution, for example). Again, the opponents can Raise on their rolls to increase the Glory loss.

### **Using Other Skills in Social Conflict**

Although the three Skills of Courtier, Etiquette, and Sincerity are the primary Skills used in Rokugani social conflicts, there are also two other Skills which can potentially come into use in the courts: Intimidation and Temptation.

**Intimidation** is the Skill of bullying, of imposing one's will on another person through physical threats or psychological domination. It typically uses the Willpower Trait rather than the Awareness Trait, and those trying to resist Intimidation likewise must rely on Willpower. A character in a Social Conflict can attempt to use Intimidation in place of either Courtier or Etiquette, role-playing his Character as bullying his way to success rather than relying on manipulation or skill. However, doing so is not considered socially or ethically acceptable in Rokugan – the character will lose Honor for committing a Minor Breach of Etiquette, and will most likely lose the appropriate amount of Glory as well (at the GM's discretion).

**Temptation** is the Skill of luring other persons into compliance by appealing to their base desires – whatever those desires might be. Like Intimidation, Temptation may potentially be used in place of Courtier or Etiquette, deflecting an opponent's efforts by manipulating his weaknesses. This is not necessarily an obvious ploy, depending on how the Player chooses to role-play the scene, but if it is apparent to others that Temptation is being used (GM's discretion) there will be a loss of Glory or perhaps even a gain of Infamy. Regardless, engaging in this sort of appeal to an opponent's worst flaws is a dishonorable act and should result in the appropriate loss of Honor for using a Low Skill.

## **Stress**

Stress may be thought of as “mental Wounds” – it represents the cumulative emotional and psychological toll of Rokugan's unforgiving social and cultural traditions. Characters will most commonly acquire Stress as a result of being defeated in social conflict. Mechanically, Fear effects can also impose Stress, as can spells that cause emotional or spiritual disruption to their targets.

The GM can also inflict Stress at his discretion to represent the effects of traumatic, horrifying, or emotionally debilitating experiences. For example, a Character might gain Stress from experiencing the loss of a loved one or the betrayal of a close friend, or from learning that he has inadvertently eaten human flesh, or from voluntarily doing something he finds intensely dishonorable. The GM has the final say but, in general, most such incidents will inflict 1 Rank of Stress, while severely shocking or personally devastating events can inflict 2 or even 3 Ranks.

### **Effects of Stress**

Stress functions mechanically in a manner similar to Wounds. Characters with Stress suffer a 1-die penalty for each Rank of Stress they have. However, Stress die-penalties

apply to Skill rolls with mental Traits and to rolls to resist Fear, in contrast to Wounds which apply to Skill rolls with physical Traits and to spell-casting rolls.

If a Character's total Ranks in Stress exceed his Rank in Willpower, he becomes vulnerable to a **Loss of Face**. Each time he gains Stress while in this condition (including the first time) he must roll Honor/Willpower at a TN equal to 10 +5x his current Stress Rank. If he succeeds at the roll, he maintains control of himself. If he fails, he suffers a Loss of Face but, in return, he loses a number of Stress Ranks equal to his Willpower.

## Loss of Face

A Character who suffers a Loss of Face succumbs to his churning emotions and engages in some sort of outburst or spectacle. The Player can decide the exact nature of the eruption but it must be open and obvious – the Character has lost control and is publicly expressing the intense emotions which Rokugani etiquette considers shameful. Yelling, hurling crude insults, confessing private feelings or hidden secrets, cowering or fleeing in abject cowardice, brandishing weapons in a courtly environment, smashing artwork or flipping the table at a feast – these are all examples of what a Loss of Face could entail.

A Character who suffers a Loss of Face will lose Glory and Honor (and possibly gain Infamy at the GM's discretion) for either a Major or a Blasphemous Breach of Etiquette, depending on where and how the Loss of Face was role-played out.

## Reducing Stress

The one side-benefit of a Loss of Face is that the shameful eruption releases the Character's pent-up emotions, reducing his Stress Rank by an amount equal to his Willpower. However, there are also less dangerous ways for a Character to reduce Stress.

- **Passage of Time.** Ordinary life is less stressful than adventures, and allows a Character to relax and lose some of their Stress. Any time the Characters experience a significant amount of “down time” – either within a playing session that occurs across a period of weeks or months, or in between playing sessions – the Characters lose 1 Rank of Stress.
- **Meditation.** A Character may use the Meditation Skill to seek inner harmony and shed Stress. By meditating for at least an hour, the Character may roll Meditation/Void at a TN of 10+ 5x his current Ranks of Stress. With a success, he loses 1 Rank of Stress, plus 1 Rank for each Raise. However, Meditation alone cannot reduce a Character's Stress Rank below 1.
- **Role-Play/Special Game Events.** The GM may choose to reduce a Character's Stress as a reward for any in-game event or role-play that seems worthy and appropriate. For example, a Character who role-plays a quest for harmony in his personal life could be rewarded with a reduction in Stress.

## Favors

In the courts of Rokugan, the “currency” is not money (which samurai are generally expected to ignore as beneath their concern) but Favors. The more Favors a samurai

accumulates, the more influential he becomes. In L5R, Favors can be acquired by helping out other samurai, such as by performing an important task, supplying some item or service which is hard to find, providing an alliance in a vital court struggle, averting a disaster, covering for someone else's failing, and so forth. Favors can also be used to "pay" for help which would otherwise not be available – promising future support in return for aid with a current problem, for instance.

For simplicity, Favors are usually associated with the clan of the samurai who was helped – for example, if a Player Character helped Doji Akito, a Crane diplomat, to suppress a troublesome rumor, he would gain a Favor with the Crane Clan. If the GM and Players wish to add more depth (and complexity) to the Favor system, they can opt to tie Favors to smaller groups such as specific families (thus in the above case, the Player Character would gain a Favor with the Doji family) or even to the particular Character who owes the Favor.

The basic rules for Favors outlined here apply to all Characters in L5R. However, Characters who are specifically trained in the ways of politics and diplomacy – those enrolled in the various Courtier Schools – have other ways to both gain and use Favors. GMs and Players should review the Courtier Schools in the *Chapter of Fire* to see examples of these other options for Favors.

## **Gaining Favors**

The GM may opt to simply award a Favor if the situation clearly calls for it. However, if the GM does not choose to award a Favor, a Player Character who performed an act which could potentially earn a Favor may attempt to (diplomatically) inform the beneficiary that his help was not without cost. This is represented in the game by a Contested Etiquette roll. If the PC wins the roll, he gains a Favor with the other Character's clan/faction. If the "defender" wins the roll, no Favor is awarded... but if the defender makes a Raise, he turns the situation around and causes the Character seeking the Favor to commit a Minor Breach of Etiquette, with an associated loss of Glory and Honor.

## **Using Favors**

A Character may opt to "cash in" (use and expend) a Favor any time he is making a Social Skill Roll against another samurai. A Favor can only be used once – after it is used, it is gone. A Favor awards a +2k2 bonus to the roll on which it is used. At the GM's option, a Favor may award a larger bonus (+3k3) if it is used on a samurai from the faction which owed the Favor. Likewise, the GM may rule that a Favor is weaker (a mere +1k1) when used against a faction that is opposed to the one which owed the Favor.

## **Blackmail**

Blackmail is the dark counterpoint to a Favor. Any time a Character becomes aware of a samurai's dark secrets – a failure of honor, a personal indiscretion, a violation of law, a hidden shame – he may opt to keep the secret and subtly notify the samurai that he is now being blackmailed.

Forcing the samurai to accept the Blackmail requires a Contested Roll of the blackmailing Character's Courtier/Willpower against the target's Etiquette/Willpower. If the blackmailing Character wins the roll, he gains Blackmail against the target's faction

(typically his clan). However, he also loses Honor for engaging in such a sordid activity as blackmailing another samurai. If the target wins the roll, the threat is ineffective and no Blackmail is awarded... but the blackmailing samurai still loses Honor for his sinister behavior. The target may also decide to treat the would-be blackmailer as an enemy thereafter.

Much as with Favors, the GM may choose to keep Blackmail as a relatively abstract mechanic tied to clans or families, or link it more specifically to the samurai who is being blackmailed (such as by only awarding the bonus on a roll where the blackmailed samurai could realistically intervene in the situation). Also much like Favors, Blackmail can be created and used more effectively by samurai trained in certain Schools.

## **Using Blackmail**

Blackmail may be used once per game-session to gain a +1k1 bonus on a Social Roll against the faction of the blackmailed samurai. Unlike Favors, Blackmail does not go away... unless the blackmailer chooses to end it, or the blackmailed Character takes steps to end the blackmail (such as by erasing the evidence of his mis-deeds or arranging the death of the blackmailing Character).

At the GM's option, a Character may opt to "expend" his Blackmail in a manner similar to expending a Favor, giving it up in exchange for a single +3k3 bonus. This represents the Character agreeing to cease blackmailing his target in exchange for a final extra-large amount of help.

## **Honor, Glory, Infamy, and Status**

Although a Character is defined at the most basic level by Rings, Traits, and Skills, there are also a number of other mechanics which represent different aspects of the Character's history, personality, and abilities. Those qualities are represented by Honor, Glory, Infamy, and Status.

**Honor** represents how well a Character believes he adheres to the Code of Bushido. It is ranked from 0 to 5, and an honorable Character can tap into his Honor to enhance his Skill rolls – reflecting the Rokugani belief that Honor is a force stronger than steel.

**Glory** represents the Character's fame within the Empire, fame which is attained by performing actions which Rokugani culture considers to be honorable and admirable – winning duels and battles, accomplishing goals for the clan, creating great works of art, and so forth. **Infamy** is the opposite of Glory – it represents notoriety gained for grotesque or frightening actions. Both of these traits are Ranked from 0 to 10, and both can be tapped for dice to enhance rolls – specifically, certain Social Skill Rolls.

**Status** represents a Character's position within the Empire's strict social order. Unlike the other three stats, it does not go up or down regularly or frequently – it only changes when the Character undergoes a significant social promotion or demotion. Status is ranked from 0 to 10. Unlike the other stats, Status cannot normally be tapped for bonus dice, but instead impacts the game through role-play.

Unlike Rings and Traits, these stats – Honor, Glory, Infamy, and Status – do not "jump" directly from one Rank to the next. Instead, each Rank is divided into ten pips, and a character must accumulate 10 pips in order to advance to the next Rank. This is



especially important for Honor and Glory, which are apt to be constantly fluctuating depending on a Character's role-play and choices. Note, however, that a Character's ability to call on bonus dice from these Traits is based solely on their Rank, not on fractional pips.

**EXAMPLE #1:** A character with an Honor Rank of 3.8 is awarded 3 pips of Honor for his actions. His Honor Rank is now 4.1, and he can now spend 4 Honor Points per session instead of 3.

**EXAMPLE #2:** A character with a Glory Rank of 6.3 loses 4 pips of Glory for a failed political gambit. His Glory Rank is now 5.9, and he can now only call on 5 Glory Points per session instead of 6.

## Awards and Penalties

When a Character does something resulting in a potential gain or loss of Honor, the GM should make the adjustment immediately, based on the guidelines listed below under Honor. This is because Honor is the Character's internal measure of how well he lives up to Bushido – if the Character upholds or violates Bushido, he will know it and will immediately feel the corresponding sense of success or failure.

When a Character does something that could result in a gain or loss of Glory or Infamy, however, the change is not automatic. Since these Traits represent how the rest of the Empire sees the Character, others must be aware of the Character's actions – either directly by witnessing them, or indirectly by hearing about them – in order for the Character's Glory or Infamy to change. If a Character does something great or terrible but no one ever hears about it, the Character's Glory or Infamy will not change.

Status only increases when a higher authority awards a Character a new posting within the Rokugani social order. Such rewards are usually the result of the Character serving his lord, clan, or Emperor loyally and well, though they can also happen due to political manipulations or even blackmail. Likewise, a decrease in Status occurs when a Character suffers a reduction in social rank – an event usually imposed as punishment for failure of duty, and often accompanied by corresponding losses of Glory and Honor. Indeed, one of the worst possible punishments for a samurai in Rokugan is to be made ronin – having his Status Rank reduced to 0. Most samurai would far rather commit seppuku than be made ronin.

## Honor

Honor reflects how a samurai views his own adherence to the Code of Bushido. There is some external effect from Honor, since a samurai's perception of his own honor also affects how he behaves and thus how he is perceived by others; however, when it comes to Honor a samurai is ultimately his own judge.

***Honor Rank 0: Honorless Dog!*** This person does not follow Bushido and probably looks down on those who do. Such low-Honor samurai cannot be trusted, for they generally care only about their own selfish interests. Neither tradition nor law mean much to them beyond the practical reality of avoiding punishment. (There may occasionally be exceptions in the form of extremely pragmatic samurai who are nonetheless loyal to their lord and clan... but even these samurai will find it hard to retain such loyalty once they have fallen so low.) Very few Clan samurai have 0 Honor, but many ronin who become bandits or thieves are found in this group.

**Honor Rank 1: Untrustworthy.** At this level of Honor, a samurai will at least pay lip-service to Bushido, but is unlikely to follow it when the “chips are down.” Dishonorable and overly-pragmatic Clan samurai fall into this category, since their upbringing and vestigial loyalty to their Clan prevents them from falling all the way to Rank 0. Most Scorpion samurai – who despise the Code of Bushido as a whole, but place great value on Duty and loyalty – also reside at Honor Rank 1.

**Honor Rank 2: What Is Expected.** This is the “average” Honor Rank of the typical Rokugani samurai. Such samurai usually try to uphold Bushido and serve their lord and Clan, but their human flaws make it difficult for them to truly embody the demanding Code.

**Honor Rank 3: Exceptional.** At this rank, a samurai may still feel the temptations of human weakness but is increasingly able to overcome those weaknesses through his intense convictions. Although a samurai at this Honor Rank may still sometimes follow the path of pragmatism, he does so rarely – far more often, he embraces the rigid demands of Bushido.

**Honor Rank 4: A Soul Above Question.** At this level, a samurai has all but completely put aside his personal feelings and needs in favor of duty and honor. These men and women are widely admired in Rokugan, although they are also known as extremely rigid and inflexible individuals.

**Honor Rank 5: Strength of A Thousand Ancestors.** Only the rarest and most exceptional individuals attain Honor Rank 5, and fewer still manage to remain at that rarified level for any length of time. Such virtuous individuals are truly beyond reproach, completely selfless, and are said to exhibit their virtue in every action. Ironically, since they are so serene in their own sense of Honor they actually have slightly more flexibility in their actions and choices than a samurai at Honor Rank 3 or 4.

### **Sensing Another Samurai’s Honor**

Samurai who have a high Honor Rank behave in a noticeably different manner than those with a low Honor Rank. Outside observers can pick up on these cues and try to gain a measure of a samurai’s Honor. This is a Skill Roll of Lore: Bushido/Awareness at a TN of 30. A success allows the Character to recognize the samurai’s Honor Rank. However, it is important to note that a skilled deceiver can put on the outward appearance of being more honorable than he really is – this is represented by the Apparent Honor Advantage (see the *Chapter of Fire* for details).

### **Gaining & Losing Honor**

Characters gain or lose Honor pips based on their actions. Committing dishonorable actions causes the Character’s Honor to decline, while performing honorable deeds strengthens the Character’s spirit and thus increases his Honor. Over time, a Character’s Honor Rank will come to reflect his true nature.

Changes to Honor are usually awarded by the GM, based on the Character’s actions and his current Honor Rank. However, the GM should be open to advocacy from the Players about whether an action truly deserves an Honor reward (or penalty). The Rokugani themselves constantly debate the true nature of Bushido, and there is nothing wrong with letting that debate extend into your own games.

In general, the more honorable the Character is, the more he will damage his own Honor with shameful actions, and the less he will benefit from doing what Bushido expects. Correspondingly, a low-Honor character who manages to set aside his selfishness and make the hard but correct choice will gain more Honor for his actions. A full listing of all the possible honorable/dishonorable actions and consequences is impossible, but the following chart provides a list of the more prominent and well-known examples, along with suggested Honor gains/losses based on the Character's current Honor Rank. All awards/penalties are listed in pips (tenths of a Rank).

Act	Gains/Losses by Honor Rank					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Accepting a bribe	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5
Accepting responsibility for a superior's shameful action	5	4	3	2	1	0
Acknowledging a superior opponent	3	2	1	1	1	0
Aiding a wounded enemy	5	4	3	2	1	0
Being an accomplice to a heinous crime	-2	-2	-4	-6	-8	-10
Being an accomplice to a minor crime	0	0	-2	-3	-5	-6
Blasphemous breach of etiquette	-2	-3	-10	-10	-16	-20
Disloyalty to lord, spouse, or superior	0	-1	-3	-5	-7	-9
Disobeying a lord's command	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-4
Duped into performing a criminal act	0	-2	-4	-6	-8	-10
Duped into performing a disloyal act	-1	-1	-3	-4	-5	-6
Duped into performing a foolish act	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5
Enduring an insult to your ancestors	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5
Enduring an insult to yourself	1	1	2	1	1	0
Enduring an insult to your family or clan	0	0	-1	-1	-2	-2
Facing a superior foe in the name of your family	5	4	3	2	1	1
Fleeing from battle	0	-1	-2	-3	-5	-5
Following orders despite personal misgivings	3	2	0	0	-1	-1
Fulfilling a promise despite great personal cost	5	4	3	2	1	0
Giving a truthful report at your own expense	4	3	2	1	0	0
Lying for personal reasons	0	0	-1	-2	-3	-5
Lying to advance your clan/family/lord's interests	0	0	0	-1	-3	-2
Manipulating another into dishonorable behavior	0	0	-1	-2	-3	-2
Major breach of etiquette	0	-2	-3	-4	-6	-6
Minor breach of etiquette	0	-1	-1	-2	-3	-3
Politely ignoring another's dishonorable behavior	2	1	0	0	-1	-1
Protecting your clan/family/lord's interest despite great risk	5	4	3	2	1	1
Showing kindness to one beneath your station	4	3	2	1	0	0
Showing sincere courtesy to enemies or rivals	6	4	2	1	0	0
Using a Low Skill	0	0	-1	-2	-4	-6
Using false courtesy to gain advantage over an enemy	0	0	-1	-3	-5	-4

## Honor Points

At the start of a game session, a Character has a number of Honor Points equal to his current Honor Rank. Honor Points may be spent during play to gain +1k1 bonuses to Skill Rolls and to rolls made to resist Fear (see "Fear" earlier in this chapter).

Since Honor is constantly being changed by a character's choices and actions, it is possible for a character's Honor Rank – and hence his total number of Honor Points – to change during a play session. In this case, the GM has two choices:

- **Option #1:** Update the available Honor Points immediately. This has the advantage of reinforcing the impact of the Character's actions, but is also a bit more complicated.
- **Option #2:** Leave the Character's available Honor Points unchanged during this session, but use the new total for the next play session. This is simpler, but does result in a "delayed effect" from honorable and dishonorable actions.

## Glory

Glory measures a samurai's fame in the Empire. It tends to change more frequently than Honor (and much more frequently than Status), since all manner of actions can produce increases or decreases in Glory. In general, prominent or sensational acts will produce significant changes in Glory, while a scholarly or reclusive life will not. Also, note that Glory and Status are often divergent – a low-ranking samurai may be widely known due to his many glorious duels, while the Emperor is seldom seen outside the Imperial Palace and thus has a relatively low Glory.

When a Character does things in public which the Rokugani consider admirable, such as winning duels, fighting courageously in battle, or saving a superior from death, he will gain Glory. Conversely, when he does things which are considered embarrassing or shameful, his Glory will drop – Rokugani society reacts to shame by refusing to speak about the person involved.

Glory measures fame, not social rank. A high-Glory Character cannot demand obedience from lower-Glory samurai. However, they are expected to show him the proper respect for one of his reputation, and failure to do so can be a legitimate reason for a duel. Also, his fame may lend strength to his words if he is trying to persuade them to see things his way.

### Recognizing a Famous Person

The higher a samurai's Glory Rank, the more well-known he is. Any time a Character encounters a strange samurai, he can roll Lore: Heraldry/Intelligence to see if he recognizes the samurai. The TN for this roll is 50, reduced by 5 for each Rank of Glory (and Infamy) the samurai possesses. With a successful roll, the Character recognizes the samurai and recalls his most notable (and notorious) deeds.

## Gaining and Losing Glory

Much like Honor, Glory can increase or decrease any time a Character does something the Rokugani consider either admirable or shameful – however, unlike Honor, changes in Glory only happen if the actions are known to others. Secret activities never produce changes in Glory.

Just as with Honor, there are a great many different circumstances which can result in changes to a Character's Glory. The following section lists the most prominent

examples of Glory changes, providing a “base” for the GM to adjudicate more unusual situations.

- **Acknowledgment:** If a samurai’s reputation and honor are publicly acknowledged by a samurai of Status Rank 7 or higher, he gains 1 full Rank of Glory.
- **Blood Feud:** Avenging a blood-feud gains the samurai a number of Glory pips equal to his opponent’s Status or Glory Rank (GM’s choice, but generally the lower of two).
- **Caught in a Lie:** A samurai who is publicly caught lying about his own actions loses a number of Glory pips equal to double the amount of Glory pips he would otherwise have gained for the deed.
- **Completing a Quest:** A samurai who completes a long/difficult task assigned by a superior gains a number of Glory pips equal to half the Status or Glory Rank (GM’s choice) of the individual who issued the quest.
- **Craftsmanship:** A samurai who creates a notable item such as a sword, a painting, or similar gains Glory – suggested award is one Glory pip, plus one additional pip for each successful Raise made when creating the item.
- **Defeat:** An officer who loses a battle, or a samurai who loses a duel, suffers a loss of Glory pips equal to the opponent’s Glory Rank.
- **Duels:** A samurai who wins a duel gains a number of Glory pips equal to half his opponent’s Status or Glory Rank (GM’s choice).
- **Family Dishonor:** If a close relative commits an act worthy of seppuku, the character loses a full Rank of Glory.
- **Gifts:** A Character who receives a notable gift from a higher-Status samurai also gains a number of Glory pips equal to either the Status or Glory Rank of the gift-giver.
- **Idleness:** A Character who does nothing worthy of attention for a sustained period of time will gradually lose Glory as the rest of the Empire stops talking about him. A suggested metric is the loss of one Glory pip for every week the Character goes without any Glory gain.
- **Indifference:** If a samurai is being deliberately ignored by those of higher station – perhaps due to enmity or prior shame – all his Glory gains are reduced by 1 pip and all Glory losses are increased by 2 pips.
- **Immortality:** If a Character’s actions cause him to be made the subject for a flattering work of art (play, painting, sculpture, etc), he gains a number of Glory pips equal to the Glory Rank of the artist.
- **Learning:** Whenever a Character gains an Insight Rank (see the *Chapter of Fire* for details on Insight), the character also gains at least 5 pips of Glory.
- **Marriage:** If a samurai marries someone of higher Status Rank or Glory Rank, he or she gains a number of Glory pips equal to the more prominent spouse’s Status or Glory Rank (GM’s choice).
- **Personal Dishonor:** A samurai who commits a public act which results in a loss of Honor will also lose half that many pips of Glory (rounded up).
- **Public Bragging:** Samurai are expected to boast of honorable achievements. After gaining Glory, a samurai can brag to gain an additional pip of Glory. The GM may require a Skill Roll (most likely Perform: Storytelling) for a character to brag successfully.
- **Public Embarrassment/Breach of Etiquette:** A samurai who does something shameful or disgraceful – such as being drunk in public, making a fool of himself in court, and so forth – or who is humiliated in court loses 1-2 pips of Glory for a minor breach, a number

of Glory pips equal to his current Glory Rank for a major breach, and twice that for a blasphemous breach.

- **Romance:** Although the Rokugani frown on love as a distraction from duty, they also acknowledge its power. A samurai who manages to make a public proclamation of a romance without actually openly admitting to it (a rather subtle trick but one greatly admired in the Rokugani courts), he gains a number of Glory pips equal to the Glory Rank of the beloved.
- **Skirmishes:** Defeating enemy samurai in an honorable skirmish generally awards between 1 and 3 pips of Glory, depending on the difficulty of the fight. Defeating non-samurai opponents is more complex. Defeating bandits or peasant rebels is generally worth only 1 pip of Glory. Defeating Shadowlands creatures – foes which most of the Empire consider unworthy even to discuss in polite company – is worth Glory only within the Crab Clan, but earns full Glory there.
- **Status:** If a Character is awarded an increase in Status, he gains a number of Glory pips equal to the new Status Rank.
- **Stealing Credit:** If a samurai manages to usurp the credit for another samurai's deeds, he gains the Glory the other samurai would have been awarded.
- **Warfare:** A samurai who fights in a major battle and survives (without dishonoring himself) gains at least 3 pips of Glory. If he was on the winning side, he gains twice as much.

## Glory Points

Much like Honor, a Character's Glory grants him access to a number of Glory Points each play-session equal to his Glory Rank. These points may be spent on Social Skill Rolls, each point awarding a +1k1 bonus to the roll.

Also like Honor, a Character's changing Glory can result in changes to his available Glory Points, which the GM may opt to impose immediately or at the start of the next game session.

GMs who wish to add some additional depth to the Glory rules may opt to rule that Characters can only spend Glory Points on rolls against people who know who they are. After all, Glory Points represent a Character calling on his reputation to overawe his opponents – he can hardly do so if his opponent is unaware of that reputation!

## Infamy

A close reading of the Glory rules (above) will reveal that a samurai who does shameful things is typically punished by a loss of Glory, making him or her less famous. This is because the Rokugani respond to embarrassing incidents by ignoring them, turning their eyes away from the spectacle and refusing to speak about the person who committed such disgrace. So a Character who dishonors or shames himself will suffer a reduction in Glory.

However, sometimes a samurai will do things which result in his acquiring a different sort of reputation – a dire and fearsome one. Infamy represents this sort of effect. Anything a Character does which would be frightening, disgusting, or intimidating to other samurai can earn him Infamy – although such actions are likely to also result in the loss of Glory and Honor, or even the loss of Status. (Many ronin are Infamous, for instance.) Also, in contrast to Glory, Infamy is not just awarded for things a samurai does in public; it can also sometimes be awarded for things he or she is publicly rumored to have done in private.

**EXAMPLE #1:** A duelist who frequently inflicts horrible scars or permanent injuries on his opponents in duels to first blood will probably lose Glory and Honor for his actions, but will also gain Infamy.

**EXAMPLE #2:** A courtly samurai whose political opponents always seem to wind up dead will be very likely to gain Infamy, even though there is no concrete proof of his responsibility for the deaths.

Like Glory and Honor, Infamy is expressed in Ranks and pips, and the GM awards Infamy based on the Character's actions and reputation. Once Infamy is in place, it seldom goes away – a bad reputation sticks to a samurai's name – but a Character who expends significant and sustained effort to improve his repute can perhaps be allowed to make a Sincerity Skill Roll (at a TN chosen by the GM) to reduce his Infamy by a few pips. The flip side of this is that because Infamy can be gained from rumors and gossip, it is possible for a samurai to deliberately increase his own Infamy by spreading dangerous rumors about himself, or to inflict Infamy on another Character by spreading malicious gossip about that person – this is typically a Courtier Skill Roll, with a success awarding (or inflicting) 1 or more pips of Infamy.

Infamy awards Infamy Points which can be spent in the same manner as Glory Points. However, Infamy Points can normally only be spent on Skill Rolls with the Skills of Intimidation or Temptation.

### **The Price of Infamy**

Infamy is awarded for actions which violate Rokugan's social or cultural norms. In some cases, such violations will be so severe that the Character will immediately be made ronin, ordered to commit seppuku, or simply executed – e.g. outright criminal acts, for instance. More often, the individual actions will not be severe enough to result in such punishments; however, over time a samurai's repute for disgraceful actions can catch up to him. If nothing else, an extremely Infamous samurai may become an embarrassment to his Clan.

The GM may depict this in the game by imposing increasing social penalties on the Infamous Character – for example, raising the TNs of Social Skill rolls by 5x or even 10x his Infamy Rank. The GM may also wish to impose an upper limit on how much Infamy a Character can accumulate before his superiors take action against him. (Of course, if the Character is himself a person of high Status, it will be easier for him to get away with Infamous behavior.)

As a guideline, the GM may consider imposing serious sanctions (such as expulsion from the clan) if a Character's Infamy Rank exceeds the combined total of his Glory and Status Ranks. Note also that some clans are more tolerant of inappropriate behavior – a Scorpion will probably have considerably more leeway on Infamy than a Lion or a Crane.

## **Status**

A Character's Status Rank depicts his position in Rokugan's social order, and hence the amount of authority he possesses. Characters with higher Status can call upon more resources, both material assets and the service of lower-ranking samurai. Those at the bottom of the Status ladder, on the other hand, have few resources at their command and little option other than to honorably obey those above them. In contrast to Glory and Honor, Status tends to be static, changing only in response to noteworthy promotions (or demotions) of a samurai's position in society. In game terms, since the GM controls the high-Status NPCs who can bestow promotions on the Player Characters, the GM controls everyone's Status Rank.

Status does not have a direct mechanical effect, but it has a powerful role-playing impact. Higher Status grants a samurai authority over those of lower Status who fall within the same "chain of command." Generally speaking, lines of authority within Rokugan are confined within Clans, and often specifically within a particular family or a particular region. The higher a character's Status, the broader his authority is likely to

reach. A family daimyo has Status 7 and can command anyone from his family, but a samurai of only Status 3 probably cannot command anyone from outside his own castle.

However, even if a high-Status samurai cannot exercise direct command over lower-ranking samurai, his position still entitles him to great respect and deference, and he can ignore or dismiss samurai of lower Status with ease. A samurai confronting or disagreeing with someone of higher Status must do so with great caution lest he dishonor himself through insolence or disrespect; conversely, a samurai of high Status can insult or belittle a lower-Ranking samurai with little to no consequence.

A samurai who fails to accept the limitations of his position or who abuses his authority will lose both Glory and Honor for his behavior. In general, the penalties are much harsher on low-Status samurai who overstep their bounds than on high-Status samurai who abuse their underlings.

### Sample Status Ranks

The Emperor	10
The Voice of the Emperor	9.5
Daimyo of the Miya, Otomo, & Seppun	9.3
Emerald Champion, Jade Champion	9
Imperial Chancellor, Imperial Advisor	9
Great Clan Champion	8
Minor Clan Champion	7.5
The Imperial Herald	7
Great Clan family daimyo	7
Rikugunshokan (commander of a Clan's army)	7
Hatamoto of a Champion/family daimyo	6
Provincial daimyo	6
Shireikan (deputy of a Rikugunshokan)	6
Vassal Family daimyo	5.5
City governor	5
Local (minor castle) daimyo	5
Taisa (captain; commander of a legion)	5
Karo (chief advisor to a lord)	4.5
Emerald or Jade Magistrate	4.5
Chui (lieutenant; commander of a company)	4
Clan magistrate	4
Gunso (sergeant; commander of a squadron)	3
Average Imperial Family samurai	3
Diplomat	2
Gokenin (estate manager)	2
Shisha (Imperial messenger)	2
Nikutai (corporal; second-in-command of a gunso)	1.5
Ordinary clan samurai	1
Hohei (military private)	1
Vassal family clan samurai	0.5
Ronin	0
Monk	0
Peasant soldier or Budoka	-0.5
Peasant, merchant, craftsman, geisha	-1
Eta (torturer)	-4
Eta (leatherworker, mortician)	-5