

Shogun

PLAYERS' GUIDE

A 'Muse of Fire' Production

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1. INTRODUCTION

'Shogun' is a freeform or 'theatre-style' role-playing game. A freeform is an interactive role-playing game in which each of the players takes on the role of a character in an unfolding story. Each character has a separate personality, goals, motivations, secrets and abilities.

Each player has complete free will, subject only to the rules of the game as set out in this booklet, and the player's interpretation of what his or her character would do in such circumstances. Each player chooses how the character will interact with other characters and with the Game Masters (hereafter referred to as 'GMs'), who will take on the part of any non-player characters (hereafter referred to as 'NPCs') who are required.

Thus, in a freeform, from their perspective, each character is the protagonist of the story (be they hero or villain). It's like being a lead character in a film or a book, but in a story with no script – in a freeform, each player has complete autonomy.

This booklet is intended to help set, in advance, the expectations that you should have for the game. There is no need for you to memorise its contents or to carry the booklet around with you. Indeed, you will not even receive a copy of this booklet in your pack at the game. It is purely intended to help establish the mindset you should adopt as a player going into the game.

2. THE AIM OF THE GAME

Freeform role-playing games, unlike many other types of games, have neither winners nor losers, at least in the conventional sense. No-one is going to assess your performance over the course of the weekend with a view to ascertaining how many of your objectives you have accomplished and/or how well you have acted out your character. The focus is on roleplaying to create enjoyable collaborative interactions (often referred to as 'scenes').

Overall, your aims going into the game (and indeed the aims of all of the players in the game) should be threefold:

- **Be your character.** That is, act in a manner consistent with your character's personality and goals, and the game's setting. Bear in mind, though, that your character sheet provides a starting point and guidelines, but should not be seen as a constraint. You choose what to do and how you approach your goals – there is no 'correct' way to play any given character. Each player's interpretation is as valid as any other viewpoint. You should feel free to adapt your goals to meet the changing circumstances – character development is encouraged.
- **Have fun!** What constitutes fun differs from player to player. You know best what you would enjoy doing most over the course of the weekend. If your idea of fun is trying to collect the most loot or solving the cryptic riddles of the Zen monks, then go right ahead. Equally, if your idea of fun is roleplaying the mental disintegration of your character's mind because of a doomed love affair, your spouse running off with your arch-rival and your accidental slaying of your child in a fit of grief, then feel free to chew the scenery and 'ham it up' to your heart's content.
- **Help others to have fun.** Whilst all players are encouraged to follow their own fun, we ask you to consider the fun of the other players around you when doing so. Acting with a mind to what is dramatically appropriate (as if you were in a film) makes for more satisfying scenes for everyone. We ask that you keep this in mind when making choices.

Whatever you decide to do, we hope you and your fellow players will all have a weekend to remember!

3. CREATIVE INFLUENCES

'Shogun' is loosely set in the late 16th century in Japan. However, the game is not a 'pure' historical re-enactment:

- The society and culture that underpin the game are a fusion of concepts from Japan, China and other eastern cultures, which have been selected for their dramatic roleplaying potential and transplanted into the game setting.
- The game has been modified to permit the female characters more active roles in society, and greater political power and licence than would historically have been the case.
- The game incorporates elements from novels, cinema and roleplaying games, in order to include the more dynamic approach of the fantasy action genre.
- Liberties have been taken with the timing of certain events, principally the dates of the introduction into Japan of firearms, and the arrival of Spanish, Portuguese, English and Dutch missionaries and traders, in order to enhance the capacity for conflict between the principal factions vying for power.
- Limited elements of the supernatural and/or magic have been incorporated into the game, subject to ensuring that an appropriate game balance is maintained.

To the extent that any jarring inconsistencies appear to be present in the game, you are encouraged to suspend your disbelief so as to ensure that both you and the other players around you benefit from the maximum enjoyment of the game.

4. GAME MATERIALS

Prior to arriving at the game, you will have been issued with your character sheet, which should contain the following:

- **A detailed background**, describing who and what your character knows and/or has done in the past.
- **A list of goals**, which are the objectives that, at the start of the game, your character wishes to accomplish.
- **A list of personality traits**, which you may wish to use as a guideline on how to play your character.
- **A summary of your views**, describing your opinion on the key political themes of the game.
- **A list of skills that your character knows**, each rated with a numerical score between 1 (the lowest) and 10 (the highest). If no skill is listed, then the character's ability level should normally be considered as zero.
- **A list of special abilities**, which (if used) will allow you to ignore the rules of the game in a specific manner. Each special ability may only be used the specified number of times and, once used up, cannot be used again.

You may also have been provided with, depending on whether the character you are playing has spent some time in Japan, a guide to Japanese culture and society in the era when the game is set.

You are provided this information in order to aid with costuming and preparing yourself for getting into character. **Please do not 'pre-game'** (e.g., talk with other players and work on plot or goals ahead of the game) – such activity can unbalance the game and reduce the amount of fun for you and others.

5. WHAT TO DO PRIOR TO THE GAME

Prior to the game, you should have read the game materials through thoroughly in order to familiarise yourself with your character's goals, motivations and secrets, and thereby help you to minimise the amount of time you have to spend in game thumbing through the documentation to check your facts. However, no-one expects you to memorise your character sheet, and you will always have access to it if you can't remember the details.

In some cases, the GMs may have notified you of the person (whether real or fictional) on whom your character is based. In this event, you may wish to read some background literature about your character, to help you better understand the character and/or draw inspiration on how to speak and act during the game. Likewise, you may wish to read up about the game setting, to gain a better understanding of the social mores and constraints of the game setting.

The decision to do so, in both cases, is entirely up to you, and such information is not required in any way in order to play the game. In cases where information from such primary sources conflicts with the game materials, the game materials take precedence, since we have taken liberties to make the game more enjoyable for the players and to fit with our vision.



6. COSTUMING

You will need to procure an appropriate costume to wear during the game. Costuming is very much a matter of personal choice. Some players will have several elaborate and historically authentic costumes to wear over the weekend, since they feel that wearing an appropriate costume (or costumes, in fact) helps them get into the mind-set of their characters, allowing them to participate more fully in a visually spectacular event. For them, costuming is a fundamental part of their enjoyment of a game.

Other players adopt a much more relaxed approach, believing that the game is essentially about suspending disbelief and relying on one's imagination and roleplaying. Thus, they see no reason why players cannot simply imagine that their counterparts are dressed in a costume appropriate for their character.

While your choice of costume is up to you, the GMs do request that you make a reasonable effort to wear an appropriate costume that at least attempts to blend in well. Please do not simply turn up in jeans and a t-shirt.

If you are part of a group or couple within the game, you may wish to coordinate costuming with those other players. This is one of the reasons character information is released prior to the game.

Suitable costume for almost any character can either be obtained cheaply and easily over eBay and/or in many charity shops, or can be improvised from existing wardrobe items.

One thing is for certain – you cannot possibly be overdressed for the game! Many players will bring multiple outfits of an extremely high standard to wear!

7. HOW TO PLAY

When you arrive at the game, you will receive a complete character packet, which will include your final character sheet, items, abilities, and a copy of this Players' Guide and other information sheets. Read the contents of the character packet carefully, in case there have been any last-minute changes or additions.

At the start of the game, the GMs will introduce themselves and hold an initial rules briefing. After that, the GMs will declare 'time in', and you are free to interact with any or all of the other players and/or GMs, subject to the social conventions of the game setting, which may be quite different from modern times.

You should then talk to the other characters and endeavour to fulfil your goals whilst remaining true to the essential spirit of your character. The best strategy is to talk to as many people as you can on the first evening, ensuring you connect with significant people from your background and goals. (Those people are noted in bold in your character sheet).

Of course, events may occur over the course of the weekend that dramatically alter your character's perception of the world around you and the other characters. In this event, you may decide to re-think your character's approach to life and alter your overall objectives, attitudes and/or social constraints. Do not worry if some of your initial goals fall away, or if you find yourself pursuing new completely different ones. Remember, one of the main aims is to have fun, so just go for it!

8. PLOT THEMES

'Shogun' is a game which embraces a number of different plot themes, so as to ensure that the game is able to offer a different experience to all players and to try to accommodate their desires for the type of game which they will enjoy the most. These plot themes will vary between being highly prominent and the subject of significant interest to many other players to being uniquely personal and relevant only to your character.

Some of these plot themes are 'adult' in nature. The GMs have, as far as is reasonably possible, cast you in your character role on the basis of the information you submitted on your character sheet. However, if for any reason, you perceive that there is some element of the character which you are not comfortable with playing then please alert the GMs as soon as possible and well in advance of the game. The GMs may be able to do something about your concerns before the game but it is unlikely that the GMs will be able to take significant steps to fix your problem after the game has started.

You should be conscious that, as this game reflects the historical setting of the time, the subject of religion is a major plot theme in the game. Your character will therefore potentially be the subject of or exposed to incidents of racial or religious discrimination and/or conflict during the game.

You should also be aware that the game does involve some (but not many) supernatural elements. These supernatural elements should not dominate or overshadow other plots to such an extent that your more 'personal' plots become insignificant. They are strictly limited in nature and have been designed deliberately in such a way that, even if ostensibly they threaten to result in the end of the world, you can still ignore such plots in order to concentrate on doing whatever you enjoy doing the most.

9. PACING

The game is scheduled to take place over the course of a weekend. For this reason, you should take into account the need for 'pacing' your game for dramatic purposes and for the benefit of the enjoyment of others.

So what does this mean in practice? Well, as a character, if one of your objectives is to identify, expose and confront your arch-nemesis, you should not expect a climactic showdown to take place early in the game. Such activity is usually only expected to occur in the final or the penultimate game session at the earliest. To do so any earlier would likely deprive your arch-nemesis of the full development of their story arc and their enjoyment of their secret identity over the course of the game. The climactic conclusion of your mutual game experience will be less satisfying for you both if it takes place prematurely.

You can take comfort from the fact that the game includes various contingencies which are timed to occur at specific moments over the course of the weekend in order to ensure that the secret identity of your arch-nemesis will be exposed before the end of the game and you will not be deprived of the opportunity for a final showdown.

Players who have been cast as characters who have a secret identity or a dark secret are also encouraged to find a way of ensuring that, at the appropriate juncture, such information is released into the game for other players to follow up on and respond accordingly, if it otherwise looks like the information has not got out into the game and/or the plot has stalled. After all, it is a far more satisfying experience, even if you are ultimately defeated, to be denounced and to face your opponent in a final cinematic climax rather than to finish the game without anyone ever knowing who you were or what you had done and thus such a tactic will enhance the overall game experience of both players.

10. THE BURDEN OF PROOF

You should also recognise that the game takes place in a historical setting at a time when forensic science does not exist. DNA testing, fingerprinting and even basic medical techniques for determining the cause of death are yet to be developed. As a consequence, you should not expect to find definitive 'proof' that the character you believe is your arch-nemesis actually committed the crime of which you suspect them. It is therefore likely that any determination of the guilt of a character for committing a crime will have to be founded on a confession, witness testimony or (if the investigator is fortunate) the suspect being caught in the act or found to be in the possession of incriminating evidence.

The simple fact that you can only find a single witness to testify or limited evidence to the illegal conduct of a suspect should not be a barrier to the Imperial Police and/or the Imperial Magistrate arresting and interrogating a suspect and/or convening a trial. Moreover, at the time of the game setting, there is no presumption of innocence or any requirement to prove the guilt of the accused to be beyond all reasonable doubt. The majority of those arrested in this period were convicted and sentenced accordingly, especially if they had no-one in authority to vouch for them.

Most of the sanctions which are imposed for being found guilty of a crime should either be (for minor offences) the imposition of a fine or (for major offences) a sentence of execution, the implementation of which will be delayed until the end of the game pending confirmation by the new Shogun. As a consequence, securing a conviction against another character should not ruin their game. In fact, if a terrible miscarriage of justice occurs, this should prove a useful stimulus to their gameplay, as the affected character will presumably seek to clear their name!

11. DROPPING OUT OF GAME

When actively involved in the game, players should wear a 'Shogun' name badge. If the name of your character is visible, then you are deemed to be 'in-game' and may be approached 'in character'.

Sometimes you will need to drop 'out of character' in order to check the rules of the game, to check with other players about coordinating a fight scene or deciding boundaries in romantic interactions, or perhaps just to make sure the player is roleplaying in not in actual distress. In this event, you can either make a 'time-out' sign with your hands or temporarily cover your badge with your hand, and say you are 'out of character', have your meta discussion and then go back 'in character' and continue as normal. If you need to drop out of character for a longer period for any reason (for example, to eat) then please remove your badge. By doing so, you are effectively saying that you do not wish to be involved in the game at that moment, and you should be deemed to be taking some 'down-time'.

If you really need to talk to another player who is 'out of character', then by all means ask the person if they are willing to re-enter the game for a moment. But if the person does not wish to do so, please respect that person's wishes. You can always catch up with them later.

The GMs do ask that players minimise the amount of 'down-time' they take, since the game is more enjoyable the more characters there are in play to interact with. But the GMs do understand that longer breaks can be needed. If you need to leave the hotel or drop out of the game for any reason, either permanently or for an extended period of time, then please remove your badge and notify the GMs accordingly, so that they can make alternative arrangements if your absence would significantly impair the enjoyment of the game of any of the other players.

12. GETTING HELP DURING THE GAME

If you run out of ideas or goals to pursue during the course of the game, there are several things you can do to re-invigorate your game:

- Find a friend or two and get them to involve you in their plots and intrigues. Whilst this may be artificial, most players will not mind and will be keen to help ensure that you have a good time.
- Put a paperclip on your name badge (available at the main GM table). The paperclip is a widely-recognised message to the other players that means that you are at a loose-end, and are keen for other players to involve you in the game in some way.
- Talk to a GM, and see if the GM can either give you a new piece of information that you can pursue with your existing character, or suggest methods to get 'unstuck'. The GMs want you to have a fun game, and will work with you to adjust your character so that it works for you. Do not be shy about asking for help. The GMs are there to help you. If all else fails, the GMs may be able to give you another character with new goals to pursue.

Likewise, if another player approaches you seeking your help in involving their character in the game, or you spot a player with a paperclip on their name badge, then please try hard to involve them in some way, so they have a more enjoyable experience. The GMs would request that players keep an eye out, if they can, for less experienced or new players and help them if they appear to be lost or uncertain. A simple 'out of character' check in will do - sometimes player may appear bored or upset or isolated, but may just be roleplaying. Checking is the best way to know for certain.

13. THE GAMERS' CHARTER

If you wish to participate in the game, you need to recognise that your conduct must be subject to certain overriding considerations:

- Do not bring any form of replica weaponry of any sort to the game. If a weapon is required for the game, then the GMs will provide a safe and suitable prop.
- Do not touch anyone else without that person's express permission, regardless of whether your character is supposed to be romancing or in combat with them.
- Act in accordance with the spirit of the game. Players may lie to each other when "in character", but any player not crossing-off abilities when used or hiding item cards, on their person or in their hotel room, is cheating.
- Don't seek to bend or break the rules or mechanics. If in doubt, ask a GM.
- Do not do anything that might alarm or inconvenience a member of the public, except in a genuine emergency.
- Comply with all of the laws of the land and the rules of polite and civil behaviour.

14. GM SANCTIONS

The GMs reserve the right to exclude any player from the game without warning who, in the view of the GMs, either does not comply with the Gamers' Charter and/or acts inappropriately and/or is a risk to themselves or others, whether as a result of excessive consumption of alcohol or otherwise. In this event, no refunds will be given.

