

Inscrutable - Dead Simple Fantasy RPG Rules for Nippon – 4th Edition

0.0 Introduction

This variant of the Dead Simple RPG Rules places the players in medieval Nippon. A land of honour, mystery and intrigue.

I believe that roleplaying is more important than rules-playing. This is why I have condensed these rules into just a few pages.

The cardinal rule is: if there isn't a rule for it then make it up as you go along. Have fun!

The rules are divided into three sections:

1. Hero creation
2. Playing the game
3. Ichiba (the marketplace)

This gives the player all they need to create a character and play.

1.0 Hero Creation

1.1 Attributes

New Heroes have twelve points to divide between the five attributes below.

Each attribute must be given between one and four points.

Agility [AGI]

Dexterity [DEX]

Intellect [INT]

Ki [KI]

Strength [STR]

1.2 Skills

I have boiled down the skill choices to just eleven broad skills. If you want to do something outside this range of skills just tell your GM and they will work out a suitable bonus.

Each skill has a level which is the modifier the players adds to their roll when making a skill check (see 2.1).

Skill Level = Aptitude + Training + any Professional Modifier.

Skill	Aptitude*	Examples
Craft	DEX	Make, Repair, Invent
Defence	AGI	Avoid attacks
Fighting	[STR + INT]/2	Kill, Maim
Knowledge	INT	Lore, Magic
Manhandle	STR	Lift, Push, Drag
Mobility	[STR + AGI]/2	Climb, Leap, Run, Swim
Perception	[INT + KI]/2	Spot, Hear, Smell
Persuasion	KI	Charm, Con, Haggle, Preach
Shooting	[DEX + INT]/2	Throwing, Firing
Stealth	[DEX + KI]/2	Sneak, Hide, Stalk
Toughness	[STR + KI]/2	Grit, Courage

* Round down any fractions

1.3 Training

New heroes are Competent in one skill, Trained in two skills & Familiar with three others of their choice.

The remainder are Untrained.

Training level	Bonus
Untrained	-1
Familiar	+0
Trained	+1
Competent	+2
Experienced	+3
Mastered	+5

1.4 Social class [choose one]

Generally heroes are outside the classic class system in Nippon, but their origins may have an effect on how they are treated by others. It may help them when dealing with people of their own class or lower.

Generally everyone will treat a Samurai with respect, but most of this is due to fear.

Note; In this game gender is unimportant as these are heroes. So you can have female members of every profession and class.

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1.4.1 Samurai

The ruling class of Nippon. All Samurai are loyal to a single Daimyo (lord) and, if they are a hero, may be given missions for themselves and their comrades by that Daimyo.

All Samurai, even women, are permitted to carry the Daishō, the famous matched pair of swords. For men this is always a Katana and Wakizashi. Women tend to carry a Wakizashi and a Tanto.

1.4.2 Ronin

These are former samurai who, through their own fault or bad fortune, no longer have a master. Some who become ronin commit seppuku to regain their honour, so we must assume the hero who chooses to be ronin did not and wished to regain their honour through heroic acts.

Ronin are also permitted to carry the Daishō.

1.4.3 Heimin

Most of these are farmers, fishermen and merchants.

They are not permitted to carry the Daishō, though they can still become bushi by taking service as a clan ashigaru (soldier).

1.4.4 Eta

These are the untouchables, people so low that their births and deaths are never recorded.

A hero who begins as an Eta can only ever become a Ninja or a Sōhei.

1.5 Profession [choose one]

1.5.1 Bushi: Well armed & armoured the Bushi is often the leader of a party of Heroes. Most are from the Samurai class but a good few are Ronin.

Abilities and restrictions:

Fighting +2, Battle-trained, may use any Armour.

They can spend ON to learn the Shugenja spells Dodge, Enchant Weapon and Terrify.

1.5.2 Shugenja: The master of magic, he starts knowing three spells of his choice.

Abilities and restrictions:

Knowledge +2, Spells, Speak with Spirits, no Armour allowed.

1.5.3 Gakusho: These are Shinto or Buddhist Gakusho and provide the party of heroes with healing and sage advice.

Abilities and restrictions:

Persuasion +2, Holy Light, Healing, may only use Light Armour.

They can spend ON to learn the Shugenja spells Befriend and Demoralize.

1.5.4 Ninja: This is the burglar & scout of the party. He stops his friends getting killed by traps & ambushes.

Abilities and restrictions:

Craft +2, Sneaking, Burglary, may only use Light or Medium Armour.

They can spend ON to learn the Shugenja spells Fade to Black, Dodge and Mask.

1.5.5 Sōhei: A powerful ally against the Undead & the only Hero who can heal their friends wounds.

Abilities and restrictions:

Mobility +2, Heal Self, Light of Foot, may only use Light or Medium Armour.

They can spend ON to learn the Shugenja spells Float, Haste & Illuminate.

1.6 Professional Abilities

Battle-trained; A Bushi can attack twice in a turn if they have not moved, but only against opponents in adjacent squares.

Burglary; Ninja can use their Craft skill to pick locks, or to find & disarm traps.

Healing; A Gakusho's divine touch removes a wound from a person. This takes a successful Knowledge skill check.

Heal Self; A Sōhei can perform the healing ability (as above) upon themselves. This takes a successful Toughness skill check.

Holy Light; The Gakusho stands still & meditates and emanates a holy light that will prevent Undead or Demons approaching closer than 10'. If the undead or demons are attacked by the heroes the effect ceases. This takes a successful Knowledge skill check.

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Light of Foot; A Sōhei can run across unstable or soft surfaces with no penalty (sand, mud, thatch, snow, ice etc.). This takes a successful Mobility skill check.

Sneaking; A Ninja gets +3 to stealthy movement & hiding. Enemies must make successful Perception skill checks to spot the Ninja.

Speak with Spirits; Shugenja know the language of the Kami and can speak to spirits. This takes a successful Knowledge skill check.

1.7 Improving Heroes

During an adventure the DM may award points of Honour (ON) to the players for successful or 'right' actions. They begin with two ON each, except the Sōhei who has three.

ON can be spent to get a reroll of a die. No more than one reroll is allowed for an action. The results of the second roll must be taken. Or it can be saved up and used to improve skills and attributes through training. The cost in ON is shown in the table below.

Training takes one full day per five ON spent. While training, a hero cannot go adventuring.

ON	Improvement
20	Improve an Attribute by one
10	Improve a Skill by one training level
5	Learn a new Magic Spell (Shugenja)
10	Learn a new Magic Spell (other heroes)
10	Choose an advanced professional ability

1.8 Advanced Professional Abilities

As they develop a hero may choose to acquire an advanced professional ability from the professional lists below.

1.8.1 Bushi

Disarm; the Bushi can choose to attack his opponent's weapon instead of their body (choose which before attacking).

If they hit the two make opposed STR checks.

If the Bushi wins the opponent loses their weapon.

Face Many Foes; opponents get no bonus to attack the Bushi if they outnumber them (this doesn't include the ninja stealth bonus).

Lunge; the Bushi can reach an opponent who is not adjacent up to one square/inch away to attack them.

This takes both actions in a turn to perform.

1.8.2 Gakusho

Exorcise; the Gakusho can make an opposed KI check against a spirit possessing a victim.

If the Gakusho succeeds the spirit must depart.

If the Gakusho fails they cannot try again until the next day.

This takes an entire turn to perform and the Gakusho must be in physical contact with the victim.

Holy Ward; the Gakusho can imbue himself with a holy ward. This adds 2 to their armour value against the attacks of evil beings for three turns. It takes one action to set the ward.

Speak to the Dead; the Gakusho can ask three short questions of a corpse, which shall answer truthfully 'yes', 'no' or 'do not know' to each.

The corpse will never answer another question again for anyone. This takes an entire turn to perform.

Note: by 'corpse' we mean the mortal remains of a sentient humanoid.

1.8.3 Shugenja

Magic Circle; the Shugenja takes a turn to mark a circle around themselves. As long as they do not step out of the circle all skill checks to use spells gain a +3 bonus.

Meditation; if the Shugenja loses the use of a spell by rolling an unmodified 1 on their skill check they may recover it by meditating for ten minutes in a quiet, unthreatened area.

Spell Ward; the Shugenja chooses one spell they know and makes themselves immune to its effects for a day.

It takes one turn to set the ward and only one such ward can be in place at any one time.

1.8.4 Ninja

Acrobat; the Ninja can climb at full speed and safely drop to the ground from heights of up to 15'.

Evasion; if the Ninja has moved at least half their maximum distance this turn enemies shooting at them are at -3 to hit him.

Shadow; the Ninja can move at full speed while still being stealthy.

1.8.5 Sōhei

Beast Speaker; the Sōhei can ask three short questions of a beast (mammal, reptile or bird only), who shall answer truthfully 'yes', 'no' or 'do not know' to each.

The beast will never answer that Sōhei again.

This takes an entire round to perform.

Other people observing this cannot understand what the beast means.

This ability cannot be used on a beast that is attacking the Sōhei or being attacked by him.

Focus; the Sōhei temporarily doubles either their strength or agility, but must reduce all of their other attributes to 1.

It takes an action to focus and lasts for three turns. At the end of it all attributes return to normal.

Whirlwind attack; if a Sōhei wounds an opponent then they may make a second attack at another adjacent opponent.

They can then carry onto a third and a fourth until they run out of adjacent opponents or they miss one.

The extra attacks are resolved in the same action as the first.

1.9 Basic Kit

All new Heroes begin with a set of suitable clothes. In addition a new Hero will have other equipment based upon both their profession:

Prof.	Equipment
Bushi	Light Armour, Daishō (Samurai or Ronin) or a Yari
Gakusho	Light Armour, Jo (club)
Ninja	Ninja-to (short sword), Burglary Tools
Shugenja	Bo (Staff)
Sōhei	Light Armour, Yari (spear)

New Heroes also get 50 mon to spend in the Ichiba (see 3.0).

If they are from the Samurai class this amount is doubled to 100 mon.

1.10 Shugenja Spells

A new Shugenja can choose to learn three of the spells below. They may later learn new spells to add to it (see 1.7).

As they advance other heroes can choose to spend their ON to learn a spell or two.

Befriend; One person likes the caster for 5 minutes.

They will help & defend the caster, but not do anything suicidal.

They will remember afterwards what the caster did.

If the caster attacks them it breaks the spell.

Berserk; The caster touches a friend to give them +2 to Fighting, but the friend cannot cast spells or use other skills. Lasts 2 turns.

Blind; One chosen enemy is blinded for 3 turns. Range 30'

Blunt; One chosen enemy's weapon is at -2 on Fighting or Shooting checks for 3 turns. Range 30'.

Countermagic; This disrupts a spell targeted at the caster and nullifies it.

This is the only spell that can be cast as an immediate reaction and not on the caster's turn.

It can only be cast once per turn.

Cover of Night; The caster touches a friend to give them a +1 bonus on all Stealth checks for 5 turns.

Daze; A chosen enemy cannot attack for 3 turns. He can still move & defend himself. Range 30'.

Demoralize; One chosen enemy will retreat from the caster for 2 turns. If attacked it will stop and defend itself. Range 30'.

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Detect Enemy: Gives the location of the nearest creature who intends to harm the caster within 60'. Instant.

Detect Magic: Gives the location of the nearest magical item/creature or active spell within 60'. Instant.

Detect Silver or Gold: Gives the location of the nearest silver or gold, not on the caster, within 60'. Instant.

Dodge: Increase the caster's Defence skill by +3 for 3 turns.

Enchant Weapon: Touch a Weapon to give it +2 to Fighting/Shooting skill for 3 turns.

The weapon can only have one such enchantment.

Extinguish: This spell puts out a single, non-magical fire of no more than 6' in any dimension. Instant. Range 30'.

Fire Bolt: A magical shooting attack that ignores the target's armour, but not their defence. It may also be used to set inflammable objects alight. Instant. Range 30'

Float: The caster touches a friend to let them float up or down 30' per turn. Lasts 1d6 turns (GM rolls this die in secret).

Hasten: The caster touches a friend or themselves to increase their speed by +2 for 5 turns.

Identify: Reveals any magical properties of an object, enchantment or creature. Touch. Instant.

Ignite: This sets fire to a single flammable object that is touched by the caster. Instant.

Invisibility: The caster cannot be seen for 3 turns unless they attack an enemy or cast another spell. They can still be heard.

Light: The caster touches an object to make it to illuminate a 20' diameter area for 10 turns.

Lock & Bar: The caster touches which holds it shut against anything except an *Open Says I* spell. Lasts for 3 turns.

Mist: This surrounds the caster with a 10' radius, 10' high mist. This lasts for 3 turns and moves with the caster. It conceals anyone in the mist from outside and visibility inside it is just 5'.

Open Says I: The caster's touch opens a locked door or lid. Instant.

Silence: The caster touches an object. Everything within 10' of the object is in a zone of utter silence for 3 turns. Note you cannot cast spells inside this zone as you need to speak to do so.

Summon Demon: This small demonic creature shall serve the caster for an hour during which time it will scout, spy and carry small loads. It can fly and turn invisible. It will not do anything suicidal. It can talk the common tongue. This may only be cast once per day.

Teleport: The caster disappears & reappears at any point he can see within 60'. Instant.

Terrify: Any enemy must pass a Toughness skill check to attack Shugenja. Lasts 3 turns.

Twelve words: Sends a short message of up to twelve words to up to six other people the caster knows within a mile. Instant.

2.0 Rules of Play

Because of the simplicity of these rules there are not abilities for every situation. It is intended that the GM shall allow the players to actually roleplay through many situations and tasks without ever needing to make a die roll.

2.1 Skill checks

Like many of my games this one is based on a single, very simple task resolution mechanic:

- You roll 1d20 and try to score 15 or more.
- You add the appropriate skill bonus plus those from relevant professional abilities, spells and equipment to the roll.
- The GM may also add positive or negative modifiers dependent upon the situation and the enemies the character may be facing.
- A natural roll of 1 is always a failure and a natural roll of 20 is always a success.

2.2 Action Turns

When things become hazardous, and especially if an enemy gets actively involved, then play is organised into action turns during which all the heroes get an opportunity to act (if they survive that long).

2.2.1 Initiative

At the beginning of an encounter we need to determine who goes when and in what order.

- Each character rolls 1d20. Alternatively you can deal out playing cards (Ace high. Suit order Spades-Hearts-Diamonds-Clubs).
- Action proceeds from highest to lowest (reroll any ties against each other).
- The initiative order stays the same until the end of the current engagement.
- A character can choose to hold their action to a point lower in the initiative order. If they then act this becomes their new place in the order. If they do not act at all then their place remains where it is was for subsequent turns.

2.2.3 Actions

Upon their turn each character can take up to two actions from the list below and use them in any order:

- Move.
- Hit someone in an adjacent square or base contact.
- Shoot at someone in range and line of sight).
- Cast a spell.
- Use a non-combat skill.
- Draw or change weapon.
- Reload a shooting weapon.
- Take a potion or activate a magic device.

A character can speak a short sentence for free. If they choose to give long-winded information, or detailed tactical advice, the GM may decide this takes an action to achieve.

2.2.4 Movement

Ordinary characters may move five squares (or inches if you are not using a gridded surface), plus their Mobility bonus.

During a move a character can cross any obstacle no higher than the character's waist with no penalty. For example, tables, chairs, chests, low walls or fences etc.

An obstacle no taller than the character can be crossed but costs 2 squares/inches of movement.

Anything taller than that must be climbed. Determine the vertical distance and double it for the purposes of movement rate. Each action spent climbing requires a skill check. Failure means the character falls and sustains one hit for each 2", or part thereof, fallen. So if a character falls 3" that is two hits. Toughness skill checks must be taken for each hit. Armour has no effect.

Wading through water or swimming is carried out at normal speed less the character's base armour rating. So a character in medium armour will move at $5'' - 2'' = 3''$.

2.2.5 Attacks & Damage

Attacking another character requires the appropriate skill check, modified by their weapon of choice and any appropriate abilities.

To engage someone in close combat the character must be in base contact or the adjacent square.

To shoot at someone they must be in range and there must be a clear line of sight to the target. The target may benefit from poor visibility or cover. The GM shall determine how this affects the shooter's skill check.

If a character is hit they immediately make a Toughness skill check modified by their armour & shield bonus.

If they succeed it was a mere scratch and they can ignore it.

If they fail then they take a wound. Most characters can only take three wounds and on the fourth they become incapacitated. Note that some characters, especially monsters, may have more wounds than this, and some even have less.

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Each wound applies a cumulative -2 modifier to all future task rolls. So a character that has taken three wounds is at -6. Upon receiving their third or penultimate wound the character is reduced to a single action per turn.

An incapacitated character falls to the ground, drops anything they are holding and can no longer carry out any actions.

2.3 Saving Throws

Sometimes a hero faces danger that is not a combat attack. For example; stepping in quicksand, being under a rock or roof fall, falling off a log, touching a poisonous plant, trying not to breath bad air or gas, running through a burning building etc.

In such circumstances, and because they are heroes, the GM may allow the player to make a suitable skill check for their hero. Typically if you're trying to avoid a physical calamity you could dodge this might be a Mobility skill check. If it's something that might damage you anyway a Toughness skill check might be more in order.

The GM will apply such modifiers as they see fit.

2.4 Natural healing

Should magical healing not be available wounds take days to recover.

If they are in a safe environment with someone tending to them an incapacitated or wounded person makes a Toughness check at the end of each full day of rest.

If they make it then they get one level better. Note that it takes one success to make an incapacitated person just wounded and conscious again.

If they should roll an unmodified 1 then they get one level worse which could mean an incapacitated person dying.

2.5 Reincarnation

A hero that dies passes into their next life. The GM may actually award a hero that died well more ON points, which may seem odd. However, when the player rolls up a replacement character for the one that died, they can transfer any ON points their previous dead character still had when they died to the new character.

This helps them keep up with their fellow players' and encourages heroic play.

A hero that is put in the position where their only option is to commit Seppuku earns 10 ON automatically, and may earn more if others know that they are not doing it to restore their own honour, but instead that of another such as their Daimyo.

3.0 Ichiba (the Marketplace)

3.1 The Horse Trader

A reliable steed can be the difference between life & death out in the wilderness.

Mount	Cost
Donkey; <i>small & slow pack animal. Very obedient & will even go underground.</i>	25
Pony; <i>small, but tough riding animal. Has limited carrying capacity. Might go underground.</i>	75
Horse; <i>a swift riding horse, much favoured by Bushi. Will not go underground.</i>	250

Any steed will also need equipment:

Riding Equipment	Cost
Saddle*	25
Bushi Saddle	50
Pack Saddle	15
Bit & Bridle*	1
Saddle Blanket*	3
Saddlebags	10
Quilted Barding (light armour)*	100
Caparison (decorated horse coat)	30

* Any riding animal must have all of these.

** Barding is armour for horses.

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3.2 The Armourer

The Armourer is a craftsman and one of the few traders who does not haggle. You might be able to get a better price if you can find a Merchant handling second-hand goods.

Weapon	Bonus	Cost
Jo [Club or Cudgel]	+1	Free
Tanto - [dagger]	+1	5
Wakizashi or Ninja-to [short sword]	+2	25
Katana [long sword]	+3	100
Tachi [long sword]	+2	50
Masakari [battleaxe]	+2	20
Yari [Spear]	+2	15
Bo [quarterstaff]	+2	Free
Tetsubo [Iron club]	+3	50
Nodachi [two handed sword]	+4	200
Ono [two handed axe]	+3	175
Naginata [pole sword]	+3	25
Yari-nage [javelin]	+1	8
Shuriken [darts] 30' range	+0	3
Han-kyu [short bow] / 12 Arrows, 75' range	+1	30/5
Dai-kyu [longbow] / 12 arrows, 100' range	+2	250/10

Free weapons can be made by the Hero's themselves.

Armour	Rating	Cost
Light armour	1	30
Medium armour	2	200
Heavy armour [o-yoroi]	3	500
Jingasa [conical war hat]	+1 to above	10
Kabuto [helmet]	+2 to above	50

3.3 The Merchant

These are general merchants who sell a range of useful tools and equipment for travellers and heroes.

General Equipment	Cost	General Equipment	Cost
Backpack	5	Lantern	10
Bedroll	5	Mirror	25
Belt pouch	1	Oilcloth (10' square)	3
Blanket	2	Oilstone	2
Burglary toolkit	25	Parchment (6 sheets)	3
Calligraphy set	5	Pick	4
Candles (per dozen)	1	Rations (dried - 1 wk)	7
Chisel (masonry)	2	Rations (fresh - 1 wk)	3
Cord (hemp - per 10')	1	Rope (Hemp - per 10')	2
Cord (silk - per 10')	5	Rope (Silk - per 10')	10
Crowbar	3	Scroll case	2
Fish-hooks & line	1	Spade	4
Flint & Steel	1	Spikes (Iron per 6)	1
Grapnel	5	Tent (2 man)	10
Hammer (masonry)	2	Torch, Pitch	1
Hammer (sledge)	4	Trivet	2
Knife	3	Water-flask (2 pints)	3
Ladder 10'	5	Wineskin (1 gallon)	5
Lamp oil (1 pint flask)	1	Writing set	10

There is plenty more equipment that can be found or made for the heroes in the towns and cities. If there is something you want which is not here talk to your GM.

Note: all costs are in mon, the standard currency of Nippon.

3.4 Encumbrance

There are no weights for the equipment above. This is because:

- this is heroic fantasy, and
- the GM will apply common sense to your load-out and modify your abilities accordingly.

So if you stand up and the GM says you collapse in a heap you may well have overdone it.