



Qin

Bestiary



Bestiary

Credits

For 7th Circle (French Credits)

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Contents

| | |
|-----|---|
| 5 | <i>Introduction</i> |
| 6 | <i>Fabulous Creatures and Terrifying Monsters</i> |
| 6 | <i>Ghosts, Revenants and the Living Dead</i> |
| 14 | <i>All Kinds of Demons</i> |
| 20 | <i>Monsters and Marvels</i> |
| 37 | <i>Celestial and Fabulous Beings</i> |
| 46 | <i>The Yao</i> |
| 76 | <i>Those Who Stare Into the Abyss</i> |
| 80 | <i>Adventures at the Edge of Reality</i> |
| 80 | <i>The Sins of the Father</i> |
| 86 | <i>The Eternal Lover</i> |
| 94 | <i>Ceramic Guardians</i> |
| 105 | <i>Funeral Rites and Tombs</i> |
| 109 | <i>Index</i> |



"I hate sorcery!" exclaimed Xian, as he wiped down the blade of his sword. A disgusted grimace flickered across a face still covered with the sweat of recent combat. "Each time, it brings nothing but bad luck and damnation!"

Three Truths glanced at Jade Heart, who was walking alone at the end of the great hall. She once again appeared to be lost in an incomprehensible monologue. Then, he stepped towards the young wu xia.

"It is more complicated than that, my friend. In fact, the forces of the Tao are not themselves good or evil. Only the goals of the men who call on it may be judged in such a way."

Having replaced his weapon into its finely wrought scabbard, Xian began to search through the debris of the alchemical laboratory. He crouched beside three clay urns, which had rolled to the ground. One of them had cracked during the battle and a revolting viscous liquid was trickling from it, spotting the flagstone with greenish drops. Picking up a stick, Xian attempted to collect a bit of the substance, but the moment he touched the bit of wood to a drop, sparks flew, and the stick quickly caught alight, sticking fast and throwing out more sparks.

"Sorcery!" cried the young wu xia, throwing the stick as far away as he could.

"Not really, I would say alchemy," corrected Three Truths. "This Brother of Chaos was a great fangshi! A pity he was so utterly mad."

"Yes, completely!" Xian held still, not daring to touch anything. Heart of Jade silently approached him from behind, making him jump.

"Once you two have finished amusing yourselves... Come take a look over here." The ordinarily soft voice of the young girl was now imperious and almost commanding. Her two companions followed her, troubled by an authoritative tone they did not recognise.

In a dark alcove, a little opening led into total obscurity. Three Truths tasted the air. A light wind blew from it, carrying the acrid and persistent smell of burning flesh. The opening was partially blocked but the clay wall barring access had been partly demolished. Very recently, no doubt, as the tools used were still lying in the middle of the rubble.

"Pass me the torch," demanded Heart of Jade. She raised her arm through the opening and lit up a small arched corridor sloping away into the darkness. Then, without hesitation, she strode over the obstacle and, hunching under the low ceiling, advanced carefully. Her two companions glanced resignedly at each other and followed.

"A tomb, an ancient one in my opinion," murmured Three Truths, "and still untouched, if the rich decoration is any indication."

They found themselves in front of a large coffin of black and red lacquer, covered in incomprehensible symbols. The same symbols covered the walls of the small circular crypt. However, the oddest sight was that of hundreds of little gold snakes spread across the floor. Another snake, larger and carved from black jade glistened on the coffin.

"Very odd style, I cannot say when this tomb dates from. Or, for that matter, who rests within."

Heart of Jade leant over the imposing cover, over a golden glyph. "Pao Jung Hi, the Snake-Eyed Lady," she read, as though not quite sure where the knowledge came from.

No sooner had Heart of Jade spoken than they heard a sinister sound. Stirring their metal bellies against the stone, the multitude of serpents animated, their slit eyes glowing with alien and unholy life.

Xian frowned and drew his sword. "I hate sorcery," he groaned.



Introduction

You hold in your hands the ***Qin Bestiary***, a supplement for the fantastical side of the universe of Qin. Waiting within are supernatural creatures, tragic ghosts, terrifying demons, corpses hungry for human flesh, animals wiser than most men, and, of course, dragons – in other words, all the beings whose very existence defies human imagination...

The aim of Qin has always been to be a game that allows players adapt their style to a world balanced between historical, epic, spectacular and supernatural. Therefore, each feature of the game is adjustable to focus on what the players prefer most.

To highlight the spectacular side, the Games Master can easily use the *wu xia pian* as inspiration, augment the number of points in Taos in character creation, set the adventures in the *jiang hu* and populate it with colourful characters. Alternatively, the Core Rulebook and the context of the game have everything necessary to turn a game more to the epic and/or historical side.

However, when the game came out, many Games Masters and players were asking for advice for setting a more supernatural game, while still respecting the differences in Chinese culture, using myths far more unfamiliar than most Western myths.

In response, this supplement is written as a toolkit enabling you to use supernatural elements in the world of Qin.

All the creatures in this supplement are presented in the same format: a paragraph to set the scene, a tale, with some ideas for the GM on how to set up an encounter with the creature; various superstitions, traditions and beliefs relating to the creature; and, finally, its statistics to be used in the course of play.

This way, all GMs should find, within, enough to satisfy their wishes, whether they want give the legends flesh and pit the characters against the monsters that inhabit the *Zhongguo*, or if they prefer to use their existence solely as a background for various superstitions and beliefs.

In the same fashion, the creatures are presented in such a way that GMs are encouraged to create monsters of their own.

If a *nian* or a *peng* can remind the players that they live in a resolutely fantastic world (or, at least, if the characters believe they exist), demons and the living dead can be used to create an ambiance worthy of the best horror films. Certain ghosts, a *you nu* or a *jingwei* bird can also be used to set your campaigns in a world where the characters do not know where the supernatural ends or begins, where every sign can be interpreted as such or as mundane, according to the beliefs of the characters and your ability to set it up as ambiguous. This may well be where the true magic begins.

Throughout the chapters are scattered various related elements: new spells, different supernatural powers, martial techniques and legendary weapons. In addition, the myths, tales and superstitions presented in boxed text highlights a society so deeply steeped into the laws and existence of the supernatural, despite advancing towards a realistic modernity, which rejects the beliefs and ancient traditions.

The characters portrayed in the short stories ending each chapter have their own biographies and characteristics, so that GMs can use them into their games if they wish.

Finally, this supplement concludes with three scenarios – independent of the *Tian Xia* campaign started in the Core Rulebook and ***Qin Legends*** – providing adventures based on the supernatural background presented in this book. These will allow the players to quickly enter this world and provide examples of the kind of adventures they may have based on this vital part of Qin.

Happy gaming.

The Qin team.



Fabulous Creatures and Terrifying Monsters

The *Zhongguo* is a vast region, of which many places remain unexplored: the deep jungles of Chu, the desert steppes of northern Yan, the ragged coasts of Qi and the inaccessible peaks of Wei still retain their mysteries, incomprehensible to the majority of mortals. It is often here, far from mortal eyes, where fabulous creatures populating the Warring States live, hidden or forgotten. They are often supernatural predators that only appear in the human world to terrify or devour them. Monsters and immortals, magical animals and fabulous hybrids live in the heart of this ancient China and often serve as opportunities for heroes to gain fame in fighting them – or perhaps even aiding them, for they are not all enemies.

Ghosts, Revenants and the Living Dead

Beings that transcend death as immortals respect the law of the universe and the Tao, and thus have their place within the cosmos. However, sometimes the divine decrees are broken and into the world come beings that no longer have their place here. Whether ghosts, souls in agony or emaciated corpses animated by sorcery, they break the laws of balance and must be sent back.

Ghosts

This young woman was utterly striking. A willow sword at her side, she could have passed as an exorcist but her bearing and her attitude seemed to contradict that. Her manners were elegant and refined, contrasting markedly with her huge threadbare chang pao on which was embroidered a representation of Gui Xian, the Black Turtle of the North. Even her skin, sunburnt and weathered, showed that despite her young age, she was very different from all those other featherbrained girls. Her gaze was clear and piercing, and seemed to draw, if not men, then at least attention. In any case, she drew me.

Nonetheless, she matched to the description the magistrate had given me and I waited for her to finish her story and leave the inn before arresting her. For the moment, the other clients in the inn were massed around her and listening to her story. It would have been stupid to try to stop her here. Stupid and dangerous. I contented myself by doing the same.

Like all inn-told stories, her recital took place in the jiang hu. It recalled the exploits of a group of valiant heroes defending their village from a group of terrifying bandits. However, where most speakers would focus on the prowess of one or two wu xia with at least some fame, she seemed more interested in the tragic fates of half a dozen anonymous individuals. Not particularly strong or courageous but who had the bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and the good luck that someone recalled their actions.

To the disappointment of most of the young boys in the audience, it was on the story of the love between two of them that the storyteller had chosen to base her story.

The woman, Chenxi, was not quite fifteen. An orphan raised by a recently dissolved Taoist sect, she had only managed to save an ancient relic from her old home, a bronze mirror of sorts. The bandits had posed an ultimatum to the village, hand over the young woman or they would raze everything. Unexpectedly, many voices, those of heroes, had risen to protect her and the village.

The man, Seng, was much older. A wandering surgeon with no money, he had once been a soldier of the Zhao. When he was barely an adult, he was visiting close to Chanping and he fell madly in love with a young diviner, who gave blessings of prosperity but whose powers depended on her virginity. The story is not that uncommon; the young woman soon lost her powers and became pregnant. At that time, the terrible general Bai Qi of Qin was leading his troops against the Zhao and the region soon knew war and desolation. During the dreadful battle of Changping, Seng was defending the town while his lover, close to giving birth, was stoned to death by the very villagers he was trying to protect. Unlike the four hundred and fifty thousand others on the field of battle that day, Seng survived. He had received a minor wound that nevertheless made him appear dead to the Qin soldiers. When he came to himself, he learnt of the fate of his lover, and seeing that he had been incapable of protecting the one he loved, he swore to never again serve anyone before heading towards jiang hu.

The young woman in the threadbare chang pao continued her tale to the pleasure of the captivated audience. She told how Seng saw Chenxi for the first time and saw in her his old love reincarnated, and how Chenxi fell in love with a man much older, but kind and gentle. She told how the two heroes had decided to sacrifice themselves to save the village, by going to the bandit camp in secret so that their friends would not know to stop them.

Seng said that he had never known why he had survived the battle of Changping and that he only felt he knew life again thanks to her. His life had seemed dead and without feeling until the last few days in her company. Chenxi was sitting and staring at the ground, thinking, trying to find a way of saving the village while still giving their love a chance, then, a ray of moonlight, the symbol of Chang-E, brought her a revelation: in the light, Seng had no shadow.

Tears in her eyes, Chenxi had realised what he was. She took Seng in her arms and he flinched in pain. She knew it now: he was a ghost and had probably no conscience at all; the talisman around her neck burnt him to protect her. Too much in love to accept wounding him, or even to tell him the truth, she seized her talisman and threw it into a ravine. Everything he had told her of his past came together in her mind... Seng had probably died in Changping with so many others, although he had not accepted this, but she still did not understand why he had tied himself to her, nor why she reminded him of his old lover. Then, like the rest, it came to her. It was obvious. The dates corresponded, the battle for Changping had happened a little less than sixteen years ago. Seng's child had not died in the womb of his first wife; it had been born and then abandoned. She was that child. Not only had she fallen in love with a ghost but that ghost was also her own father and still he knew none of this. Lost in emotion, she threw herself into his arms. No pain touched him this time. Instead, he seemed finally calm and relaxed, appeased. He did not even notice his chi slowly dissolve as he finally began his journey to Feng Du...

In the inn, the majority of the clients were moved by this strange and unheard-of tale. Women wept like children and the children, who had previously complained about not hearing of the prowess of a few wu xia, were utterly silent. Without a sound, as the crowd regained its breath, the young woman gathered her belongings and left. I have to admit it also took me a while to react and I very nearly let her slip away.

I caught up with her in an alleyway and told her of her arrest and that she had to follow me to a magistrate. She drew her ridiculous willow sword with her left hand, apparently determined not to let herself be taken in. I decided to teach her a lesson, but she knocked my sword aside with a single blow of her wooden blade, and, in a single movement, drew a dagger from its sheath into her right hand and slit my throat before retreating. Although it must only have lasted a moment, it seemed to last an eternity, in the light of the moon, her face splattered with my still-warm blood held a determination which froze me. The next moment, shocked and collapsing onto the ground, I held my throat trying to stop the blood and managed to ask her name. I shall always remember her reply: Chenxi - the last thing I heard as a living man.

Since then, I wander, not dead, to find this young exorcist vagabond who wanders the Zhongguo, choosing the lost souls she wants to aid and those she wants to destroy, chased by an implacable hatred: ours, those of the deaths she has caused. I will hunt her forever.

— Anonymous

Description

Ghosts, or *you ling*, are legion, and it is hard to distinguish common traits among them.

A soul becomes a ghost for many reasons but all have in common a refusal of death: perhaps the victim died in agonising suffering and wishes to have those responsible pay; it had not finished a task in life; it wishes to stay and protect those it loves beyond death; or even it does not know of its own death! There are many reasons but the result is always the same: instead of joining *Feng Du* and reincarnating, these souls stay in the living world where they no longer have their place.

Generally, ghosts are tied to a specific place – where they died or a place that held a certain importance to them in life – but some are free of this attachment, usually when the ghost was in life a wanderer (vagabonds, *wu xia*, etc.).

Ghosts only manifest at night as sunlight can burn and destroyed them. By moonlight, they cast no shadow and seem to float above the ground. They have no breath and the air is colder where they are close. These are some of the most common ways to recognise a ghost, because as they have a physical presence and can interact with the material world, it is sometimes hard to realise that one is not dealing with a living being...

The majority of ghosts are capable of becoming invisible or immaterial and creating powerful illusions to trick a man's senses. The most malevolent use their powers to torment their victims and absorb their Chi: as these creatures are purely Yin, they need Yang living energy to not dissolve into nothing. While some manage to do this discretely and without hurting the mortals, whose Chi they steal, others drain their victims completely, leaving them for dead.

When a ghost uses its powers to torture and kill humans, there is a great chance that this foul behaviour will transform it into a wandering demon, forbidding it any hope of reincarnating as a mortal and dooming it to dwell in Hell for all eternity.

An ancient belief describes a strange behaviour in ghosts: throwing a handful of grain at one forces it to stop and not move again until it has counted all the grains spread out on the soil.



Characteristics

Ghosts are tangible opponents and thus have physical Aspects (Metal, Water) and can usually be wounded by normal weapons. However, they have no reserves of Chi and, for the most part, must steal the energy of living beings. Since they do feel pain, they do not suffer penalties from wounds.

The most common supernatural powers among ghosts are Natural Weapon (teeth, nails or hair), Terror, Illusion, Formlessness, Invisibility, Possession and Vampirism.

Ghosts fear sunlight, which burns them terribly and forces them to lose five points of Breath of Life for every turn they are exposed to it. The techniques of Exorcism are equally useful against ghosts.

Once a ghost loses all its Breath of Life, its soul is irrevocably destroyed and it can never reincarnate. This is the most terrible fate and one which Exorcists reserve only for the most malevolent of spectres, preferring to allow the other souls to leave this condition and travel to the afterlife in peace (for example, by helping them complete the task which would put their soul to rest).

New Supernatural Powers

Illusion

With this power, a creature can create a facsimile of reality, copying its appearance or turning the area into something completely different. A human confronted by such an illusion, must make an opposed Test of Earth + Perception against the creature's power. If this succeeds, the victim realises that it is not real and allows them to see through the illusion. If it fails, the character treats the illusion as reality and reacts accordingly (the illusion works on all five senses). Certain Exorcism Techniques, such as Mirror of Truth or Beyond the Veil, allow them to break this power.

Flight

A creature possess the power to fly at a speed equal to that of its movement (Water x yards per action). Certain creatures can defy the laws of gravity due to wings, while others float due to their spectral nature.

A Few Ghosts

Bei Jiao-Lin

When alive, Bei Jiao-Lin was a great scholar who lived in the State of Chu, near the philosopher Xun Zi. In his huge manor close to Chengyang, he had a huge library, the envy of many of his university colleagues. His spent his nights reading the thousands of books and writing commentaries on the best-known works. He built his home far from the frontiers of the Warring States to keep his libraries safe from the many wars.

Knowledge was his only passion and it was his undoing. Jiao-Lin worked so much that he often forgot to feed himself and rest. One night, as he worked on the last chapter of his novel, to which he meant to give his name, the Bei Jing, he collapsed dead across the writing desk...

However, Jiao-Lin did not even know that he was dead! His soul remained in his library, constantly trying to finish his book but never quite succeeded. Inspiration fled from him and his fingers did not seem capable of grasping the writing brushes (long since rotted and even his ink is now hard and unusable). He wanders between the shelves, reading and weeping over his inability to finish his life's work.

Bei Jiao-Lin is not a dangerous ghost. He does not know he is dead and wishes no one any harm: he only wants to finish his book. To allow his soul to move on, someone has to agree to finish writing the last few pages of the Bei Jing by allowing him to possess them but no one dares to approach the Bei manor, as local superstition says (correctly, for once) that it is haunted...

Metal 3 Water 2 Earth 1
Wood 2 Fire 2

Skills: Calligraphy 4, Learning (various) 4,
Literature 5, History 3, Eloquence 2

Powers: Illusion 6 (he can give his library its former gleaming appearance, Formlessness (uncontrolled, he cannot touch his writing brushes or bamboo board to finish his work), Possession 6 (only if the victim consents to it and is willing to finish the Bei Jing).

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 19/0

Passive Defence: 9

Mei Sing-Li

Mei Sing-Li was, in her time, the most famed courtesan of the Han capital. She had among her clients the most eminent members of the royal court, who showered her with gifts and made her a wealthy woman.

Unfortunately, her vanity, centring on her incomparable beauty, finally caused her end. Several of her competitors were brutally jealous of her and finally decided to get rid of her once and for all. They hired several thugs, who kidnapped Sing-Li as she was heading to one of her many customers. They took her outside the town to a miserable cabin beside a lonely road, raped her for several hours, tortured her and finally abandoned her bleeding corpse in the middle of nowhere.

Since then, the furious soul of Mei Sing-Li is tied to this isolated cabin, whose powers make it appear as a cosy and welcoming pavilion surrounded by a charming garden. Her melodious song draws voyagers passing close to her and she offers them refreshment before engaging them for sex. If the traveller accepts, Sing-Li becomes a sort of drug to them and those who have tasted it cannot help but return again and again, until she has finished draining them of all their energy...

Mei Sing-Li is a form of succubus, feeding on the Yang energy of the men she takes to her bed, drawing out their Chi and gorging on it until her victims are no more than ravaged corpses. Her soul seems to be damned, as it appears that nothing can free her from her ghostly state; quite the contrary, she seems happy with her powers and delights in using them to exact revenge upon men.

Metal 3 Water 3 Earth 3
Wood 2 Fire 5

Skills: Acting 3, Calligraphy 2, Dance 3, Eloquence 3, Music 3, Seduction 5, Attack (hair) 3

Powers: Natural Weapon 3 (she can control her long hair, each strand of which can become as sharp as a bronze knife), Illusion 8 (she can transform her miserable hut into a beautiful pavilion), Formlessness, Vampirism 4, Flight

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 25/0

Passive Defence: 7

Celestial Lance

Around the end of the Zhou Dynasty, the young Gu Kun-He was a member of a noble family in the territory that would later become the Hegemony of Jin. Though a talented swordsman, he was an expert with the lance, from which he took his name.

As time went on, he became famous for his martial prowess and many saw him as the greatest warrior in the Empire. He wished to prove this reputation and journeyed great distances, trying to find an opponent that could match him. One day, he challenged No Rival, a swordsman known as the most powerful fighter in his province but No Rival was fearful and decided to set a trap for his adversary in the place chosen for the duel.

Taken by surprise, Kun-He had to face No Rival and several other men. Despite his combat genius, he fell under the sheer weight of numbers and his soul, revolted by this treachery, knew no rest and became a ghost.

Since then the spirit of Celestial Lance wanders the Warring States, challenging *wu xia* that he meets along his way in the hopes of finally meeting a warrior worthy, both in martial and ethical terms, of defeating him. The day Celestial Lance finally meets an adversary who accepts the duel according to the ancient customs, and proves themselves his equal during combat, shall be the day soul shall finally be free to reincarnate.

Metal 3 Water 2 Earth 1
Wood 2 Fire 2

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Etiquette 4, Jianshu 3, Qiangshu 5, Dodging 3

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Total Block, Feint), Qiangshu (Repel, Charge, Double Blow, Mystification, Total Block),

Powers: Vampirism 5 (he only steals Chi once from a vanquished foe, to mark his victory)

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 30/0

Passive Defence: 9



The Jiang Shi

General,

I send you this message to tell you of my defeat — and my great shame. A week ago, the tenth day of the Month of the Tiger, the group I was leading were preparing to launch an assault on Wei's frontier fort. I had established a camp close by and our scouts were surveying the area. Our soldiers were sharpening their blades before resting as I was planning to order the assault at dawn. I, myself, was checking one final time the maps of the area and the information relayed by our spies, who had allowed us to prepare our tactics accordingly.

Then, a terrible cry chilled me: that of a man coming face-to-face with a horrifying death. Rushing out of my tent, I saw the camp was in chaos: everywhere my soldiers were seizing their weapons and trying to find the source of the danger. Following further and closer cries, the horror leaped into the circle of tents.

Leaped is the best term I could find for this: a man seemed to fall from the sky and landed in the middle of my infantry, on which he threw himself, arms outstretched, moving in small bounds. The situation would have been ridiculous if it were not so terrible: the being tore the flesh of the men it attacked, drinking their blood as it erupted in great spurts. In the light of a torch I could see it clearly, a rotting man, dressed in rags, with rigid limbs and bluish skin. It wore a sort of wooden plaque nailed to its forehead and its blank gaze seemed devoid of life. It was a monster from Hell attacking my army!

I quickly assembled several men and attempted to encircle the creature but its leaps allowed it to escape easily. Pierced by arrows and shredded by blades, this seemed to have no effect! Fire seemed to repulse it but no man wanted to get close to it while it continued its massacre.

With the breaking of a new cry, my soul froze as I saw two more such demons arrive, seeming to glide through the air before dropping towards the encampment and my men. I do not remember the rest, but I woke far from the camp, without my weapons, my soul filled with horrific memories. The legend was true: incomprehensible mystical forces protect the Wei; the Hells themselves seem to protect this damned country.

I have failed my mission and I prepare to cut my throat to remove this dishonour. I hope that my family will not have to suffer the results of my incompetence.

— Missive from Captain Li Sung to General Wang Jian

Description

A man possesses in him three celestial *Hun* souls that descend into the Hells after his death, and seven *Po* souls, which dissolve into the earth. If the *Hun* souls are his conscience, his personality and his humanity, the seven *Po* souls represent his instinct, his savagery, the animal part of his self.

A *Po* soul can sometimes take possession of a body, and not necessarily that from which it originated. A starved spirit, without conscience or intelligence, then inhabits the body becoming a *jiang shi*, a terrible living-dead which devours human flesh and whose bite is damnation.

In fact, a living being, simply bitten by this creature, can become a *jiang shi*; it acts as a virus spreading through the blood, irrevocably transforming them into a member of the living dead.

A *jiang shi* is a rigid corpse, which can only move by bounding, feet together. These leaps can give the impression that the creature is flying as its strength allows it to cover impressive distances. The skin putrefies and turns a bluish colour, its teeth elongate and the nails grow blue and sharp.

A *jiang shi* is blind and locates its victims by their breath. If one holds their breath, they become invisible to the senses of this zombie.

The stiffness of the living dead also gives it a greater resistance to blows and a *jiang shi* obviously does not feel pain. However, sunlight causes it terrible burns and thus it only emerges at night.

Characteristics

As corpses, the *jiang shi* do not have Chi and as they do not feel pain, they gain no penalties from wounds.

They usually have the following supernatural powers: Natural Weapons (teeth, claws), Natural Armour (rigidity), Terror, and treat their ability to contaminate others and perform mighty jumps as powers.

A *jiang shi* exposed to sunlight loses five Breath of Life points per turn. A *jiang shi* that loses all its Breath of Life becomes a simple corpse, the *Po* soul expelled and forever dissolved.



A person bitten by a *jiang shi* has contracted a disease with the following description:

Jiang Shi Infection: When a living being is bitten by this undead they risk becoming one too.

Contagiousness: 9

Virulence: 9

Interval: One day

Effects: Lose four boxes of Breath of Life for every failed Resistance Test. The victim watches his body slowly turn into a corpse: the skin turns blue, the teeth and nails lengthen and a hunger for human flesh consumes them. Once all the Breath of Life is lost, the victim becomes a *jiang shi* completely. Medicine can do nothing against this infection but a Taoist can perform a curing ritual, using plants and formulas. He must succeed a Test of Earth + Exorcism against an ST of 9 to grant her Success Margin as a bonus to the patient's Resistance Test. This ritual must be performed every day until the victim is cured.

Certain Taoists know a technique that creates *jiang shi*, invoking a *Po* soul to place into a corpse. They then use a Talisman of Control of Lost Spirits to command it, creating a docile and formidable servant...

New Exorcism Technique: Defy the Verdict of Death

Skill: Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time: One Day

Duration: Until the destruction of the *jiang shi*

Area of effect: A corpse

Chi cost: 20

Improvements: N/A

The exorcist must spend an entire day meditating in an appropriate place (cemetery, ruins, battlefield, etc) in order to invoke a *Po* soul that has not yet dissolved. He inhales it into himself and keeps it until he can inject it into the mouth of a corpse, which then becomes a *jiang shi*. Succeeding in this operation requires that the exorcist spend 20 points of Chi and succeed in a Test of Earth + Exorcism against an ST of 9. A failure means that the *Po* soul cannot find its way into the corpse and escapes.

The newborn monster does not immediately obey the orders of its creator without a talisman to control it.



Newly born Jiang Shi

Metal 4 Water 2 (4 when jumping) Earth 2

Wood 1 Fire 0

Skills: Claw and Bite 3, Jumping 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapon 3 (claws and teeth), Natural Armour 3, Terror 9, Contamination (see above)

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 40/0

Passive Defence: 5

Powerful Jiang Shi

Metal 5 Water 3 (5 when jumping) Earth 3

Wood 1 Fire 0

Skills: Claw and Bite 4, Jumping 5, Dodging 3

Powers: Natural Weapon 4 (claws and teeth), Natural Armour 5, Terror 13, Contamination (see above)

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 60/0

Passive Defence: 6

Diverse Spirits

It was a lovely spring day and I had decided to walk through the local woods near the family mansion. I hoped to find inspiration there as I had not written a good word for months and my patrons were starting to become impatient...

The sun was burning strong in the sky and I wandered here and there through a peaceful forest, contemplating the simple beauty of nature and thanking the gods for having given me life so that I could appreciate these simple moments.

Having eaten lunch and drunk a bit of good wine, I decided to return home, to get to work and see if my little walk had woken my muse. After several minutes of walking, I had to confront the evidence: I was lost. I no longer recognised where I was and the further I walked, the more the forest seemed to thicken and seem to become like a long corridor in front of me. Straightening, I decided to walk down and meet whatever fate was waiting for me at the end, and arrived in a clearing I had never seen before.

It was magnificent. My spirit lost itself in the contemplation of every tree, each flower and blade of grass, and wondered at the vision of a little waterfall falling not far from where I stood. Walking to the centre of the clearing, I span around, filling my senses with all this beauty, enhanced by the glow of the sun. Even the song of the birds seemed more melodious, more pure. I went to drink from the little stream and then noticed a little being, staring at me in fascination. He was in the shadows of a majestic tree and seemed to spring directly from its roots, a small wood imp with the face of a child. Fearful of breaking the charm of the moment, I saluted him politely and he plunged at once into the leaves covering the soil, disappearing from my sight; undoubtedly, one of those spirits that populate nature, and keep places such as this...

Reciting a prayer to the nature deities, I decided not to abuse my privilege and left this enchanted realm. Following the path that had brought me there, I easily found my way home and knew that my night would be rich in poetry.

— Memoires of the Poet Zhu Li-Kuan

Description

Across the *Zhongguo* there exist many other kinds of spirit, not ghosts or undead, but no more demonic than they are mortal.

Often these spirits, known variously as *xing ling*, *sui*, *jing ling* or even *shen*, are the remains of souls that remained on earth. Perhaps a *Po* soul that evolved a form of consciousness, a spectre that has lost its identity, a settled demon or a pure form risen from the thwarted experience of a Taoist, these spirits are all linked to an area, usually a rock, a tree, a river and so on. They are present in the heart of nature and can aid lost humans, or instead get them only more lost and play tricks on them. They appreciate offerings of loose change or food, or even art objects. The fusion of their being into nature allows them to find a place in the universe and not harm the balance of Tao.

They are usually incorporeal but can manifest physically, taking on the appearance of their attached place (a river spirit would seem to be made of water; that of a stone would appear to be animated rock; etc.). Destroying this manifestation does not harm the spirit: only attacking the place to which it is attached can do that.

Characteristics

A spirit in its natural form does not possess physical Aspects but gains them if manifested.

The more frequent powers attributed to these spirits are Natural Weapon (once it has manifested physically), Terror, Illusion, Formlessness and Invisibility.

Various Divination and Exorcism Techniques permit their casters to see the spirits and communicate with them, or even wound them.

A spirit that loses all its Breath of Life is destroyed but it suffers no ill effects from the destruction of its physical manifestation.

A Few Spirits

Mei

The mei are forest spirits, usually tied to a tree or a clearing. Mischievous, but not cruel, they enjoy playing tricks on humans, making them lose their way for a while before setting them on the right path again. When they manifest, it is in the form of a small creature whose body appears to be made of wood and leaves.

Metal 2* Water 2* Earth 3
Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Empathy 4, Perception 4

Chi: 10 **Passive Defence:** 7*

Breath of Life: 50/0 (spirit); 12/0 (physical manifestation)

* when physically manifest

Xiao

The xiao are mountain spirits, generally attached to a rock. Malignant and aggressive, they readily create terror and death among mortals. Any intrusion into their domain enrages them. They manifest as hideous goblins sculpted from mud and with shining, brilliant eyes.

Metal 3* Water 3* Earth 3
Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Empathy 2, Perception 4, Hand-to-Hand 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapon 2 (stone nails), Natural Armour 2 (muddy skin), Terror 9, Formlessness, Invisibility 7, Capacity for physical manifestation

Chi: 12 **Passive Defence:** 8*

Breath of Life: 40/0 (spirit); 15/0 (physical manifestation)

* when physically manifest

Yu Nu

These spirits take on the appearance of translucent women shining with a greenish aura and sleep inside jade statues representing them. If invoked, they accept becoming the lovers and councillors of those who called them, in exchange for a wide variety of gifts: jewels, clothes, knowledge, etc. If badly treated, they return to their statues but not before having cursed their invoker.

Metal 2 Water 4 Earth 4
Wood 5 Fire 5

Skills: Learning (many subjects) 4, Empathy 3, Seduction 4, Eloquence 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Formlessness, Invisibility 5, Flight

Chi: 28 **Breath of Life:** 30/0

Passive Defence: 11

Local Gods

Although Shen Nong is the god of agriculture, he represents a distant imperial figure and so the people tend to reserve their worship for local gods, the *ben-di shen*, who are venerated everywhere. Often represented by an ancient tree or a large stone, always in the heart of a village on which offerings are left and from which the god is prayed to for all sorts of reasons: for rain to fall, to frighten away wolves, to bring good fortune. In a way, it is the god of the village.

It is thus quite common for the local god to be a notable person canonised by tradition: classically, the village founder is often considered the local god. Sometimes, however, it could be a passing hero; a *wu xia* who gave his life to kill a man-eating tiger, or a chief peasant who gathered his fellows to rout local bandits, or even a skilled and beloved poet may find themselves honoured by becoming a local god.

The *ben-di shen* is linked to the community, which it protects by way of a pact, usually renewed every year at New Year. Usually, the village chief performs the necessary rites to assure them the blessings of their god. These rites involve many offerings (incense, food, etc) and prayers to remind the god of the deference of the villagers. If the community is well respected and prosperous, the god may have a small temple or shrine built for it. This is where the offerings are given and prayers made, as well as the renewing of the pact. The New Year is not the only time to thank the *ben-di shen* for its blessings. The Festival of Autumn, held after the harvest, is also an ideal moment to celebrate the god, which has given them such an abundant harvest.



Characteristics

The local gods are powerful spirits whose influence reaches throughout the village, or a group of hamlets, and to the surrounding lands. The spirit does more than reign over the land; it is the land, the spiritual and conscious manifestation of the earth itself.

In this way, such a spirit possesses a power admittedly limited by the local geography, but nevertheless, very palpable. It is thus within its power to control the weather (make rainfall, provoke drought, a landslide, or even a small earthquake). If the local god does not consider itself sufficiently venerated, it may manifest its anger to put the village in order; once appeased, it dispenses its blessings as usual. Communicating with the local god is possible to a diviner who knows the Commune with the Gods of the World spell.

All Kinds of Demons

Demons, or *emo*, are beings utterly devoted to evil. Whether this comes from their very nature (such as demons from the Hells) or a conscious choice (when a ghost becomes a demon), demons like nothing more than to make men suffer in torturing and devouring them, as well as killing them as cruelly as possible. Demons have their place in the universe but this is certainly not in the realm of men. The presence of such beings on the Earth creates an imbalance which many exorcists spend their lives trying to correct.

From the Hells

The village seemed peaceful in the light of the moon. In reality, the inhabitants had cloistered themselves inside, fearing the menace wandering through the night, which had already killed many of their number. According to the description which they had given me, the creature was definitely neither a ghost nor a living-dead, but most likely a demon. I still had to determine what sort.

*My spirit compass guided me across the moonlit countryside, pointing clearly towards a small building in the middle of a wild wood, many li from the closest habitations. I approached prudently, even though the building seemed deserted. Leaving my pouch behind, I tucked my compass away and pulled out several talismans. Readjusting my wooden sword, I resolutely approached the modest pavilion, its door hanging open. Once inside, an infernal stench seized my throat. A quick glance around and I understood what had happened to the villagers: limbs and pieces of flesh flecked the dusty floor. I quickly left a few charms around the door and began to explore the house. I managed to find a place on the ground where a taiji had been traced, while a useless talisman lay rotting beside it. In a corner, a gutted corpse seemed to contemplate the scene with an incredulous eye. This is what apprentice sorcerers risked when they attempted to invoke the infernal forces. At least I now knew what I was dealing with: an *emo*, come straight from the Feng Du! Suddenly, an inhuman howl broke the sepulchral silence: the demon had doubtlessly found my glyphs of protection. Taking a small mirror from my sleeve, I came to meet it: the beast was immense, with the head of a snake, its jaws dripping with poison and a body seemingly made of stone. Before it could take two steps, I held up my mirror and sunlight burst from it, blocking the creature's charge. Gathering my energy, I murmured the prayers that allowed me to call on the Judgement of the Ten Kings of the Hells. Just in time: my mirror had barely lost its charge when the power of the Feng Du Wang filled the room, freezing my blood. In a blink of an eye, the oppressiveness vanished and the demon with it: the hells had reclaimed their monster.*

I now only have to meet with the chief of the village, for the burial of the dead according to the correct rites.

- Professional journal of Terror of Ghosts, exorcist

Description

The demons are the natural inhabitants of the Hells. Thus, they are the subjects of the Ten Kings of Hell, who reign over death.

Their role within *Feng Du* is clear: they are there to torture the souls of the dead to punish them for the crime they committed in life. In this, demons are entirely evil creatures because this is what their place in the universe demands of them. Only the authority and the powers of the *Feng Du Wang*, the Ten Kings of Hell, stop them from spreading their terror over the Earth.

The *emo* are from the Hells and are each of unique appearance but almost always terrifying: hideous giants, monsters with animal heads, deformed humanoids, etc. They have traits that make them look utterly unnatural: such as several heads, tentacles, too many limbs, etc.

Demons from the Hells that end up on Earth have often tricked their masters in order to escape. Certain others, however, are consciously invoked by the *fangshi*. In either case, the demon does in the human world what it does best: torturing and devouring humans. It needs no motivation for this; it is in its very nature, its role in the cosmos.

Probable areas for demons to appear are places of great suffering, where death and suffering hold sway. Battlefields, torture chambers, places of execution are examples of places where a demon may appear, thanks to a portal created by Yin energy.

When a *fangshi* invokes a demon, he often creates the necessary conditions by kidnapping and torturing for as long as possible men and beasts. Any exorcist worthy of the name considers these Taoists little better than the demons they summon, and hunts them down.

An old superstition mentions that demons can only advance in a straight line and are incapable of avoiding an obstacle. This is why a large stone may be found a few paces from the door of most homes, in order to prevent a demon from entering by blocking their advance.



Characteristics

As with all creatures with their place in the universe, demons possess Chi and can use it to improve Tests. Their bodies are made of flesh and blood, and the loss of Breath of Life imposes penalties on them.

The supernatural powers most common to demons from *Feng Du* are Natural Weapon, Natural Armour, Terror. A few among the most powerful benefit from Invulnerability, although they are vulnerable to certain materials (most often jade) or to Exorcism Techniques.

A Ferv Demons

Ogre

The ogre is a giant with a powerful body and with teeth like blades. Standing more than ten feet tall, it is fond of human flesh and enjoys eating its victims alive... Wearing a simple fur loincloth, ogres often wear necklaces made from the bones of their victims.

Metal 6 Water 4 Earth 2

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Chuishu 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Intimidation 4, Survival 2

Techniques: Chuishu (Knock-Out, Charge, Hold at Bay)

Powers: Natural Weapon 2 (teeth), Natural Armour 4, Terror 13

Chi: 12

Passive Defence: 8

Breath of Life: 50/0 (20/0, 13/0, 8/-1, 6/-3, 3/-5)



Dongwushou Emo

These demons have a roughly human shape (although often malformed) but have animal faces instead of heads. The most common are demons with the heads of cattle or pigs but some have those of snakes, vultures or spiders.

More evolved than ogres, these demons cook their victims before eating them: they are, in fact, highly accomplished chefs.

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Martial Skill 3 (Technique of the Game Master's choice according to the Skill), Craft 3 (cooking), Hand-to-Hand 2

Powers: Natural Weapon 2 – 4 (teeth, claws, horns, hooves: according to the animal head which the demon has), Natural Armour 2, Terror 11

Chi: 16

Passive Defence: 9

Breath of Life: 36/0 (13/0, 9/0, 7/-1, 5/-3, 2/-5)

Chou yanjing

These strange creatures, known as stinking demons, take the appearance of clouds of greenish gas in which can be seen one or more eyes. Though not dangerous in this form (although their foul stench can repulse even the most hardened of tanners), they are capable of taking possession of corpses to accomplish their vile tasks.

Cloud Form

Metal - Water 2 Earth 2
Wood 1 Fire 0

Skills: Dodging 3

Powers: Invulnerability (in their natural form, these demons fear only the powers of exorcists), Possess Corpse, Flight

Chi: 6

Breath of Life: 12/0

Passive Defence: 8

Possessed Corpse

Metal 3 Water 2 Earth 2
Wood 1 Fire 0

Skills: Martial Skill 2, Hand-to-Hand 2, Dodging 2

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 15/0

Passive Defence: 5

New Exorcism Technique: Spiritual Fist

Skill: Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time: Instantaneous

Duration: A number of turns equal to the Metal score of the exorcist

Area of effect: A creature

Chi cost: 7+

Improvements: For every 3 additional points of Chi spent, the duration is extended by one turn.

In focussing his Yang energy, the exorcist can shape his Chi to create a powerful hand capable of seizing supernatural beings. This takes the form of a white light surrounding the creature he wishes to catch.

He must succeed in an Opposition Test of Earth + Exorcism against the creature's Resistance. If this succeeds, it becomes paralysed, incapable of acting or doing anything apart from trying to free itself, which requires a successful Opposition Test as above. Once the duration has run its course, the exorcist may choose to prolong it by simply spending the necessary points of Chi.

Spiritual Fist even affects creatures with the Formlessness power.

Damned Souls

In a small village in the countryside, there was a farmer, famed for his abundant harvests. To those who asked him what he had done to obtain such fortune, he smiled and said, "Familial loyalty is the best motivation there is: my children help me and I, in turn, help my parents in their old age". All praised him for his virtues and practical knowledge.

The reality, however, was something else altogether: the farmer exploited his children, making them work from dawn to dusk without rest; he barely fed his parents, leaving them weak and feeble; finally, he prostituted his wife. Thanks to this, he lived a rich life and looked forward to reaching a great age.

One day, however, his family had enough of his tyranny. Profiting from his absence to a gambling den, parents, wife and children united and determined to get rid of him. The children wove a net, which they suspended above the door, and when night had fallen, the parents announced the arrival of the unworthy father. His wife hid in the shadows with a cudgel and blew out the candle. The farmer, utterly drunk, entered his house and the net fell on him, entangling him as he tried to fight free. Suddenly helpless, he couldn't defend himself when his wife crushed his skull. Finally, his corpse was taken to the river and buried in the mud.



For several months, the family lived well and to those who came to ask about the farmer, parents, wife and children answered that he had undertaken a pilgrimage. Then one night, a terrible storm tore down on them. The little family huddled inside the house, barricading their doors and windows to protect themselves from the bad weather. Suddenly, they heard a groaning and scratching sounds at the door. Terrified, they huddled together. The door opened with a bang, revealing a nightmarish sight: a being with burning red eyes, bared teeth, with rotting skin and stiff limbs stood outside. All the family recognised the murdered father: living he had seemed a demon, but dead he had become one in truth.

The night rang with screams and cries of agony and when morning came, the house was empty.

— Popular tale

Description

Although most demons are born, evil in their very nature, it is possible for a human to become one in several ways. Those who befool the most sacred laws, laugh at heaven and mock the gods, are one day punished and transformed into demons. Such a mutation is immediate: the punished sees his body deform and his soul fill with hatred and madness. Gods do not forgive those who do not give them due respect.

It is rare to become a demon while alive; even the most immoral criminal is generally given a chance in the Hells, paying for his crimes in ten million tortures before being allowed to reincarnate. If a soul becomes a ghost and if it adopts a deliberately malevolent temperament, it risks losing its chance to return to its natural place in the universe and, instead, becoming a demon. This transformation is slow but irreversible. Equally, plants or animals who have bathed in blood and evil may find themselves gaining demonic characteristics.

Characteristics

Demons caused by such damnations have few differences from the *emo* of the *Feng Du*. They possess the same global characteristics, the same powers, but due to their mortal origins, some are capable of assuming human form thanks to the Shape-Shift power while those who were once ghosts sometimes retain their powers of Formlessness, Possession or Vampirism.



Example Damned Soul

Pao Lian-Mi

Pao Lian-Mi was a very handsome man. Initiated into Internal Alchemy and the arts of love by an enlightened Taoist, he used what he had learnt to his own ends. Acting like the worst incubus, he seduced women to gorge himself on their Yin energy to reinforce his vigour, and abused their bodies. He left many corpses in his wake, becoming more and more powerful and closer to immortality thanks to the theft of these innocent lives.

This warping of the nature of the Tao drew the attentions of not one but two divinities: Change-E and Nü Wa decided to punish this impudent mortal who thought he could reach Perfection by trampling the bodies of abused women. One day, when Lian-Mi went to a pleasure house intending to choose a new prey, the damnation fell on him: his body deformed horribly, horns grew from his head and his skin turned green. His handsome face melted like snow in the sun to reveal the grimacing skull beneath. His penis, of which he was so proud, grew and covered with spikes and pustules. Horrified, the population of the town fled and the militia chased him away.

Since then Pao Lian-Mi lives his demonic life hating women and goddesses, and he sometimes comes to a town to kidnap a young girl and rape her, gorging himself on her Chi.

Metal 3 Water 4 Earth 3
Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Perception 2, Eloquence 2, Internal Alchemy 4, Hand-to-Hand 3, Dodging 2

Chi: 18 **Passive Defence:** 9

Breath of Life: 25 (10/0, 7/0, 5/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (horns, spikes), Natural Armour 2, Terror 11, Vampirism 5

Shu-Emo

The demonic tree is a menace often encountered in forests that lie in proximity to places where terrible massacres have taken place; blood, pain, hate, fear and resentment have permeated the ground. With its roots gorged on foul emotion, the tree begins to develop a form of consciousness, malevolent and hungry to create its own suffering.

Using its branches and roots to catch its prey, the demonic tree kills and lets the bodies decay on the

ground, feeding on the nutrients that seep into the soil. Its sap turns to blood while deformed faces slowly trace themselves along its trunk. The influence of such demons is felt from several hundred yards away: the forest seems darker and more menacing, birdsong sounds choked, a foul smell pervades the air, etc.

Killing such a demon means completely destroying its arboreal body, from leaves to roots. Fire remains the most effective way.

Metal 5 Water 0 Earth 4
Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Hand-to-Hand 3

Techniques: Hand to Hand (Total Block, Strangle: with roots and branches)

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (branches and roots), Natural Armour 4 (bark), Terror 11, Vampirism 3

Chi: 25

Breath of Life: 80/0

Passive Defence: 5

New Divination Spell: Call on Suffering

Skill: Divination – Legendary (5)

Preparation time: One full hour

Chi cost: 18

The Diviner, if he knows the right name, knows how to draw a demon from its normal world and turn it into a docile servant. He must first chose a summoning area whose atmosphere still resonates with the purest suffering (the diviner can create this himself) then trace on the ground, in blood, a taiji and finally place within the symbol a talisman with the name of the demon written on it.

He must succeed a Test of Earth + Divination against an ST depending on the area he has chosen to stage his invocation (9 for a Qin torture chamber, 11 for the execution ground of a small town, 13 for neutral ground and 15 for a place of happiness). If successful, the demon materialises around the talisman (which becomes its heart), and it must obey all the orders the invoker demands of it, until its destruction or liberation. If the test fails, the invocation does not work. If the Test results in a double zero, the demon does appear, only beside the talisman, and thus is free to act as it wishes, woe unto the mortal who dared call it by name...

The Taotie

In the time of the August Ones, the Yellow Emperor became the First Sovereign and organised the empire in his great wisdom.

When he had pacified the frontiers and expanded the empire, he returned to his palace to rest but did not have long to enjoy the peace he had built: in the distant southern lands, Chiyou, the demon of war, drew ready to defy him.

Chiyou, sometimes also known as Tao Tie 'the bloodied', was a giant with a body of bronze, with four eyes, six arms, horns of steel on his forehead and the hooves of an ox. He was powerful and respected, and claimed the status of a god, refusing the authority of Huang Di. It surrounded itself with an army composed of eighty-one of his brother demons and all the humans who had agreed to join him – and there were many, cruel and with neither law nor reason, who refused the good government of the beloved Yellow Emperor. Joined by the demons Wang Liang and Chi Mei, the two armies battled on the Great Plain of Zhuolu, north of the Yellow River, and the forces of Chiyou seemed to have the advantage. The Yellow Emperor had no choice: he needed to defeat the demon of war himself to sow chaos among the partisans. Carving a path towards his adversary, he brandished his magic sword in challenge. The bronzed demon charged towards him and the epic battle began.

It is said that the duel lasted three days and three nights without either of the adversaries gaining the advantage but finally, helped by a young girl, who used her powers to sear the flesh of the demon, Huang Di began to gain the advantage. Finding an opening, he struck a blow that sliced off his opponent's head below the jaw. The demon's skull was lost in the army's retreat and his body disappeared.

Chiyou's army dispersed but the gods allowed the Yellow Emperor to curse those who had refused his authority and sided with his enemy. So it was that the men who had stood against Huang Di turned into monsters, half-heads floating in the air; and those who had managed to escape that spell nevertheless saw their bodies deform until they themselves were demons. These beings would thence be known as the Taotie, the starving jaws, after their master.

— Legend of the ancient sages

The Men Shen

*The gods of doors, the gods of doors
Carry great halberds,
Demons, large or small, cannot enter.*

—Ancient chant

Shen To and Yulu, two brothers sent by the Yellow Emperor to control the Spirit World, are the guardians of the doors. They are on the Mountains of the Peach City, in the Eastern Sea. They see to it that the ghosts and demons that wander the Earth at night do not cause harm to humans. If they do, they tie them to a peach tree with ropes of grass and a tiger then devours them.

For this reason, the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo* often place wooden statues of the two divinities beside the doors of houses and tombs, the last resting place for humans. It is possible to replace these with a branch from a peach tree. This practise is supposed to make sure that no demons or spectres can enter doors guarded in this way.

Description

The *taotie* were originally humans who made a bad choice: that of standing against the first of the Five Sovereigns and the most venerated in the whole of the *Zhongguo*, the Yellow Emperor.

The majority were transformed by the gods into floating heads, without jawbones and whose ears, like bat wings, allow them to fly. Very quickly, these pathetic creatures made their mark in folkloric artistic tradition: the *taotie* became ornaments decorating vases, gargoyles meant to keep malevolent forces at bay and sometimes gaining the name of hungry dragons.

The other *taotie*, those who were able to keep their bodies, became demons: their smooth black skin reflected the light of the sun, their oversized claws and teeth could tear through stone as if it were flesh and their laughter sounded like that of a hyena.

No matter their appearance, the *taotie* are cursed beings, rendered mad by their condition and massacring any who cross their path. Wherever they go, they leave a trail of destruction and death.



Chi Mei and Wang Liang

The story does not tell what happened to the demons Chi Mei and Wang Liang, the generals of Chiyou's army.

Chi Mei was a humanoid demon with the body of an animal. He could produce terrible screams that could be heard for many *li* around, terrifying all who heard them. Wang Liang was a dwarf with long ears, burning eyes, long hair and red and black skin, a horror to behold. These two monsters led the war demon's army and disappeared after the battle of the Zhuolu Plain.

It is rumoured among those who wander the Hells that Chi Mei and Wang Liang are still searching for the lost skull of their master, an artefact of terrible power which would allow them to spread their reign across the world and avenge themselves upon the gods.

Characteristics

The *taotie*, as they are very close to demons, possess a reserve of Chi, which they can use to improve the results of their Tests. Being flesh and blood, they suffer wound penalties when they lose Breath of Life.

They also possess the following supernatural powers: Natural Weapons (claws and teeth) and Terror. The oldest amongst them sometimes also possesses Natural Armour. Like demons, all *taotie* are vulnerable to Exorcism, for they suffer the punishments of Heaven.

Taotie Flying Head

Metal 3 Water 4 Earth 3

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Bite 3, Dodging 2, Stealth 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (teeth), Terror 11, Flight

Chi: 12 **Passive Defence:** 8

Breath of Life: 12 (3/0, 3/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Whole Taotie

Metal 4 Water 3 Earth 3

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Bite and Claw 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (claws and teeth), Terror 9

Chi: 16 **Passive Defence:** 7

Breath of Life: 20 (8/0, 6/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Monsters and Marvels

Coming from neither the heavens nor the bowels of the earth, there exists in the world an almost infinite number of creatures at once marvellous, savage, strange and puzzling to the eyes of mortals, for they are neither human nor animal.

These monsters and fabulous beings live in the mountains, the forests, the lakes and the rivers, and all the places that remain pure within the *Zhongguo*. Sometimes wandering amongst humans, they create suspicion, fear or wonder, but never leave anyone unmoved.

Studied or hunted, these creatures are vestiges of a time when gods and immortals walked the Earth and filled it with their celestial magic.

Among the creatures listed in this chapter, certain ones are noted as being unaffected by Exorcism which usually works on ghosts, the undead or demons (creatures marked by their Yin nature).

However, some of the techniques used by exorcists are useful even against non-demonic monsters such as those listed further on. These techniques are:

The Mirror of Truth: If a creature has powers of Shape-Shift or Illusion, this technique allows the character to see through them.

Beyond the Veil: In the same way, this technique allows a character to see any creatures using the power of Invisibility, or hiding reality behind an Illusion.

Vengeance of the Gods: Using this technique, the exorcist can render himself immune to the Terror inspired by any kind of creature and even inspire fear in them.

Amulet of Protection: Such an amulet protects its wearer from the attacks of any kind of creature.

The Trap of Heaven and Earth: This trap works in the same fashion against all creatures.

Dazzling Light of Ultimate Yang and Cloak of the Moon: These two techniques work in the same manner, no matter what creature they are used against.

Ba She

It had already been several days since we had left Chengyeng to adventure in the most distant and wild parts of Chu, covered in dense jungles and almost completely unexplored. After going up the river Xiang for several dozen li, we came ashore in order to finally penetrate the thick vegetation, which almost completely obscured the light of the sun. The porters never wandered far, despite the reassuring presence of several highly reputable wu xia beside us.

Never mind the superstitious fears of our servants, the map I had found at the tiny market in Zhao led me to think that somewhere in this suffocating forest were the ruins of an ancient city, probably dating from the Xia Dynasty and constructed by the subjects of the August Shen Nong. Such a discovery was well worth braving a few dangers, whether real or imaginary. After several days, the atmosphere within the group improved: we had not encountered any problems so far and the bounty of nature around us meant that we did not lack in provisions; our guide knew the best foods found here. Admittedly, we had not yet found the ruins for which I had mounted the expedition, but optimism was high.

The evening of the twelfth night, the camp was set up as the sun sank below the horizon. We had settled beside a small river, giving us a little space between the walls of trees. My assistants and I debated the probable origins of the city we hoped to find while the servants worked to pitch the tents and prepare supper. Our bodyguards explored the area around us and returned to report no danger. The evening passed in good humour and the excellent meal helped to relax us after the long march. Everyone retired early as fatigue hung heavy on our bodies and spirits.

A strange sensation woke me in the middle of the night. The moon was high and its clarity threw the camp in a pale light. As I stood, I could distinguish a movement in the corner of my eye, as though the earth itself was slowly moving. I saw the scene that followed as if in a dream, slowed down: a monstrous snake advancing slowly towards one of the sleeping servants. Its huge jaws had no trouble in swallowing the poor man whose cries awoke the entire camp. My mind seemed to wake up and I cried out as well. The animal that had entered the camp was huge: the thick-scaled body was more than five fathoms in length and its jaws seemed capable of swallowing a whole ox! Its slit eyes shone with cruel intelligence and its fangs seemed as deadly as blades.

Thankfully, the wu xia who accompanied us acted immediately: while Scorpion struggled to free his two sabres to beat off the monster and distance it from the

terrified servants, Falcon retrieved his bow and fitted arrow after arrow to the string. Apparently confused to find itself opposed with such ferocity, the serpent seemed to hesitate between continuing to feed and retreating. Cowardice won, it disappeared into the undergrowth at a speed that belied its size, and in a few seconds, it was out of sight.

As surreal as the scene seemed the next morning by the light of day, sorrowfully, it had truly happened, and one of our men had lost his life. Things seemed to augur badly for the rest of the expedition...

— Report of Su Chi-Min, scribe of Wen Chang

Description

Ancient legends speak of the *ba she*, the giant snakes that haunt the forests and jungles of the *Zhongguo*, the results of the couplings between a serpent and a dragon. Although serpentine in appearance, they have the size of the dragon: they usually surpass thirty yards in length, although as hatchlings they are rarely larger than fifteen yards. However, ancient tales speak of much larger *ba she*, capable of swallowing elephants.

The *ba she* are not poisonous, killing their prey by suffocation, or sometimes by simply swallowing them whole.

Characteristics

From their celestial blood, the *ba she* retain a far superior intelligence compared to their smaller brethren. As they are monstrous animals rather than true monsters, they are immune to Exorcism Techniques and have no powers beyond their fangs and their bronze-hard scales, along with the fear they inspire.

Young Ba She (fifteen to twenty yards)

Metal 5 Water 5 Earth 2
Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Constriction 3, Bite 2, Stealth 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (fangs), Natural Armour 3 (scales), Terror 9

Chi: 12

Passive Defence: 9

Breath of Life: 35 (15/0, 10/0, 6/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)

Adult Ba She (thirty yards or more)

Metal 6 Water 6 Earth 3
Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Constriction 5, Bite 3, Stealth 3, Dodging 3

Powers: Natural Weapons 4 (fangs), Natural Armour 4 (scales), Terror 11

Chi: 18

Passive Defence: 11

Breath of Life: 70 (30/0, 20/0, 12/-1, 6/-3, 2/-5)



Eyu Ren

It had already been several days since the incident with the giant serpent and we had not encountered any more of its kind: however, the men had become quite morose and reluctant to continue the adventure. Only Scorpion was valiantly attempting to stay cheerful: he who had been irritated at the start of the adventure at not having anything to do was now enthusiastic at the idea of being able to confront more creatures from the Hells, or so he said. However, day by day, I managed to motivate everyone (by promising to double their pay) and the voyage continued.

We discovered a swampy area and had to stop for several days to construct rafts so that we might continue. I took advantage of the time to allow the men some rest. When, at last, we were ready to set off, we continued on our way. The swamp proved difficult to cross and the rafts' progress took a great deal of effort, slowed by the scum and branches. The ever-present heat, the rancid smell and the mass of mosquitoes did nothing to help the situation. One of the servants pointed at something and despite the mist, I could make out silhouettes on a large canoe. Was there a village close by? However, as the strangers approached us, I started wondering if my eyes were playing tricks on me: by what I could see, these beings had scaly jaws full of sharp teeth, and the furs that covered their bodies did not seem to be clothing... They brandished spears and rudimentary swords. Behind me, I heard Scorpion draw his blades.

Then a cry made us all turn: the raft just behind us was under attack! The creatures rose from the stinking water and hoisted themselves aboard, snapping at the legs of our men! Seemingly at ease in the water as much as on land, monstrous half-men, half-crocodiles attacked us everywhere. Despite the mighty efforts of the wu xia, we had no way of saving the raft and had to abandon it, with all the men and material still on it, if we wanted to have a chance of getting out alive. Scorpion pushed the monsters back when they tried to seize our raft, while Falcon kept those on the canoe at a distance with his arrows. The paddlers redoubled their efforts and we, at last, left the mist and the nightmare behind; we abandoned the raft to flee into the relative safety of the jungle.

I shall never forget the terrified cries of those we deserted...

— Report of Su Chi-Min, scribe of Wen Chang

Description

The *eyu ren* are a people almost as ancient as the world itself. It is said that Yu the Great, tamer of waters, was the first to meet with them while he mastered the flux of a river. Also called crocodile-men, the *eyu ren* have a mouth filled with sharp teeth and are covered in scales. A thick black fur protects their body but the strangest part of their appearance is that their feet point backwards.

The *eyu ren* live around swamps and rivers, and are relatively civilised. Their villages are composed of crude huts and while their weapons and tools remain primitive, they are not dumb animals.

They detest strangers and cannot stand anyone violating their territory. Fond of meat, they hunt men and eat them whenever they have the opportunity.

Characteristics

Although their origins are uncertain, the *eyu ren* are not demons, so many exorcists report, having found their Techniques useless against them.

However, they have no powers beyond their teeth, their fur and their ability to move as quickly through water as on land.

Eyu Ren

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 2

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Martial Skill 3, Bite 3, Swimming 5 Stealth 2, Various Arts 1

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (teeth), Natural Armour 1 (fur), Terror 11

Chi: 10

Passive Defence: 8

Breath of Life: 18 (6/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Jiao Ren

The Dragon-Kings, who hold their courts in the deepest of oceans, rule over an innumerable people. It is said that every being, every animal that lives beneath the waters is their subject. However, there exists a specific creature that represents the majority of the Dragon-Kings' vassals: the *jiao ren*, the women who haunt the reefs.

According to the oldest texts I have been able to decipher, the *jiao ren* are girls born to the Dragon-Kings at the dawn of time, when they were establishing the boundaries of their respective kingdoms, and sent to guard the walls protecting their parents' kingdoms, to keep them secure. Swimming among the reefs, their role was to set traps against undesirables, killing them without pity.

I have managed to gain several testimonies from sailors about the *jiao ren*. Although many are but the tales of untrustworthy drunkards, as they connected with what I had learnt from other sources about these aquatic women it seems that in these days, far distant from the times of myth, the *jiao ren* still protect certain places in the sea, notably from human intrusion. A sailor recalled how his ship deviated from its course due to a supernatural fog and ran into a sharp reef. Beings

resembling sharks had risen among the waves to devour members of the crew. My narrator had only escaped by climbing the tallest mast and fled by using a plank of wood as a raft the moment the sea monsters had left.

Later, I had the chance to see for myself what a *jiao ren* looked like. A fisherman heard me speak of my work and claimed to have found the corpse of one of these water nymphs. I suspected he had mutilated a woman's body so to gain a few coins but I followed him to his house nonetheless. To my fortune, the man had spoken the truth: the creature whose corpse was lying on the ground was indeed a *jiao ren*, corresponding exactly to descriptions given in the legends. The feminine corpse was grey and smooth, damp to touch. She had webbed hands and feet, ending in curved talons. Two gill-slits were on either side of her neck. Her face would have been attractive, if not for the mouth filled with shark-like teeth, capable of tearing flesh to shreds. Her black hair had a greenish tinge and the body smelt of the open sea. The sight of the body filled me with respect for the mysteries of the universe and I bought it at a good price from the fisherman.

Then I asked him to return it to the ocean. Surprised, he obeyed and I accompanied him to the beach, praying to the Dragon-Kings to welcome the soul of their servant killed on our land, while the waves took back the body of the shark-woman.

— *Classic Mysteries of Heaven and Earth*,
by Zhan Luo Zi



Description

The *jiao ren* are the servants of the Dragon-Kings and all divinities that rule the seas and oceans. Their appearance is that of disturbingly beautiful women, with the characteristics of sharks: their tapered grey bodies are built for swimming, their teeth and claws can rend flesh, and their gills allow them to breathe underwater. The *jiao ren* can only live underwater or in the kingdoms of their gods; air causes them to suffocate as water would a human.

The *jiao ren* live close to reefs and shallows, which border the domains of the gods they serve. Their role is to protect them, and they attack ships that approach too close by using illusions to run them aground, before devouring the imprudent sailors. However, sometimes they come to the aid of certain people lost at sea, guiding them to land or taking them to the underwater palace of the Dragon-Kings – only heroes whose destiny the gods watch over find themselves so honoured.



However, there have always been those ready to risk their lives and capture one of these creatures. A legend claims that their tears turn into brilliant pearls, a tale many adventurers have died for...

Characteristics

Like all creatures in the service of divinities, the *jiao ren* have nothing to fear from the Exorcism Techniques that harm demons.

They usually possess the following powers: Natural Weapons (teeth, claws), Terror, Illusion (to lead ships astray); and can breathe underwater, but not in the air (in which they suffocate as per the rules on suffocation in the Core Rulebook).

When they cry (because of the death of one of their number, or because they are suffering), their tears become pearls. These are magic and allow the bearer to breathe underwater as if it were air.

Jiao Ren

Metal 4 Water 6 Earth 4

Wood 3 Fire 3

Skills: Perception 3, Bite and Claw 3, Stealth 3, Dodging 3, Swimming 6

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (fangs and claws), Illusion 7, Terror 9

Chi: 25 **Passive Defence:** 11

Breath of Life: 22 (8/0, 6/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)

Special: Their tears transform into magical pearls.

Tears of Jiao Ren

These tears crystallise to take the form of silver pearls of the greatest purity.

As a magical object, such a pearl has a Chi reserve of 5 points.

Its bearer has his Water score raised by 1.

The pearl allows its bearer to breathe underwater and move freely despite the pressure of the depths.

It possesses a Renown of 10.

Jinton Niao

It is often the most isolated villages that endure the greatest persecution by demons and monsters. I had for many years got into the habit of wandering away from the main road networks to visit such communities, often far less wary of my presence than the more refined city dwellers.

It was in a mountainous region of Han that a group of villagers timidly approached me and asked me to help them. They were intimidated, as a fangshi of my sort often had an ambiguous reputation, but when I entered their village with its miserable huts, I realised that, most of all, these poor wretches didn't have a coin between them. I calmed them by saying that two modest meals a day was enough for me and that protecting men like themselves was my sacred duty.

They then explained their troubles: for several weeks, young women of the village and the surrounding area had disappeared. The few men who had gone to find them in the mountains had never come back and all feared that a demon had settled there and threatened their community.

I decided to go see for myself and a guide led me to the various places where the young girls had disappeared. My compass remained disappointingly motionless: this was a monster, or more simply human kidnappers.

Pushing ahead, following the trail of the previous searchers, I came to a line of caves in a cliff face. The tracks I could see on the ground led me to think that I was dealing with a creature of substantial size. As quietly as possible, hiding my presence with a quick ritual, I investigated several caverns until one in particular attracted my attention with human bones strewn about the entrance. Risking a glance inside, I saw an impressive shadow, immobile, which the light allowed me to see was a gigantic bird, like a raptor in appearance save for that it had nine heads, at the end of long and flexible necks. Almost all seemed to be sleeping, except for two, which were standing guard. Deciding not to risk a spell, I slipped away quickly.

I had heard of such creatures, in a work written by one of my brothers. The nine-headed bird, which lived in the mountains and fed on the flesh of the young girls it kidnapped... I also knew its weakness, which was fortunate as my spells and charms risked being of little use against it.

When I explained my plan to the villagers, they remained uncertain: I needed bait to draw the creature from its lair. The silence seemed to last an eternity

before an adolescent rose and said she was ready to try. She couldn't have been more than sixteen and I learnt later that her sister was among those who had disappeared. With this in mind, I was able to explain my tactics and prepare the villagers.

The next day, the young girl left in the direction of the monster's cave. She simply had to stand near it, so that the beast could smell her, then to flee the moment she heard it, guiding it towards a prepared clearing, where I had placed a barrel full of foul alcohol. In the shadows of the trees, the villagers armed with bamboo pikes lay in wait. A wait that was almost unbearable as I started to think I had sent the child to her doom, but then she suddenly arrived, screaming and crying.

I jumped to my feet and motioned to her to come to me: she was out of sight just in time as the monstrous bird entered the clearing. It stopped, hesitating, and began to smell the air with its nine heads. It did not move at first, but then its huge feet with their deadly talons made its way towards the barrel. While several heads searched the surroundings, the others plunged into the alcohol, which they swallowed in great gulps.

Around me, the villagers were impatient and some seemed terrified. They had good reason: the animal was so huge that even standing, I would not reach its shoulder, and its heads topped me by a good half-fathom. Finally, the creature finished the alcohol and lifted all of its heads, on alert. However, some of them seemed sleepy, while its steps now appeared uncertain. The monster began to wander away unsteadily, and that was the signal: I jumped out and ran to the creature, shouting at the villagers to do the same. The nine-headed bird turned to face us and let out a cry of surprise and anger, but its necks began to become entangled. We quickly encircled it and the first blows began to fall, piercing its flesh and drawing out cries of pain. The monster fought back with its claws and beaks but its aim was poor due to the alcohol in its blood. Only a few men were wounded by the time the beast had collapsed at our feet.

For once, it had not been a hard-won victory - something I had not enjoyed for far too long.

— Professional journal of Terror of Ghosts, exorcist.

Description

The bird with nine heads is a creature whose origins are lost in the darkness of time. Many tales tell of the bastard child of a phoenix and a demon, but it is most likely a remnant of ancient times.

The creature possesses the body of a bird of prey, with powerful claws and wings; it has nine falcon heads with sharp beaks, on necks of varying length. The heads seem almost independent from each other, allowing the bird to see everything around it while occupied with other activities. Despite its wings, it is incapable of flight due to its weight.

The nine-headed bird lives most often in caves in mountainous regions but never far from human communities. The creatures are fond of the flesh of young girls, which they kidnap to devour in the shelter of their lairs. Often noted is the one thing these animals like more than meat: alcohol. If in the presence of an alcoholic drink, they consume it until completely drunk.

Many heroic *wu xia* have gained fame by fighting these nine-headed birds, which are also used in folktales as warning for young girls too enamoured with the idea of liberty.

Characteristics

The nine-headed birds are monsters but do not seem to have demonic origins: they are immune to Exorcism Techniques.

The powers they possess represent their physical attributes: Natural Weapons (claws, beaks), Natural Armour (feathers), Terror. Their many heads give them ten actions per turn.

Their weakness is alcohol: in drinking it, they grow confused and insensible, imposing a penalty to all their actions.

Jiutou Niao

Metal 6 Water 5 Earth 2

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Perception 5, Bite and Claw 4, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (beaks and claws), Natural Armour 2 (feathers), Terror 11

Chi: 10

Passive Defence: 9

Breath of Life: 40 (16/0, 12/0, 6/-1, 4/-3, 2/-5)

Special: The nine-headed bird has 10 actions per turn. If it imbibes alcohol, it suffers from a penalty ranging from -1 to -5 to all its actions (corresponding to the amount of alcohol consumed).

Adventure Seed

In an isolated region, bandits kidnap young girls to sell them to pleasure houses or *xiongnu* tribes. To mask their activities, they use the legend of the nine-headed bird, using many tricks to convince the locals that they are



dealing with this carnivorous creature. With pieces of wood, they make the footprints of a giant bird close to where the girls disappeared, and the less beautiful are killed and their bodies abandoned at cave entrances.

The villagers, terrified at the thought that a nine-headed bird lives close to them, ask those passing by for help killing the beast. Those investigating soon

find that their leads take them nowhere and that the caves where the bodies were found have clearly been deserted for years. Besides, the nine-headed birds are well known for devouring their prey and do not bother simply mutilating the corpses. Finally, if they find the kidnappers' tracks, they can put an end to this sad story and set the authorities on the trail of the bandits.

Mao Jingyu

It was at the Hour of the Serpent, the thirteenth day of the fourth month, that our lookout caught sight of a wrecked ship, no doubt on rocks. It was a pavilion ship of Qi, most likely a merchant vessel, perhaps going towards Chu when it had been intercepted by the damned Yan pirates. I ordered a change of course to close and check for survivors.

As we approached, I was able to see men on the wreck, waving their arms frantically for help, but as we drew close enough to hear, we realised they were not shouting "Help" but rather "Beware!" Worried, I ordered my men to arm themselves; perhaps this was a trap and the pirates were waiting for us within the ruined ship.

A heavy blow rocked our war galley, almost throwing me overboard, and I saw one of my men fall into the sea. Running towards the impact, I saw that several men were already there and fighting with their lances. As I arrived at their side, I saw they were trying to fend off a sort of huge shark, which was nudging the ship towards the rocks. Before I could wonder how a simple shark could possibly be strong enough to push a war galley with its full contingent of fifteen soldiers, the creature leaped out of the water, roaring. One man had the top half of his body bitten off, the corpse dropping to the ground and the blood mixing with the salt water. The other sailors, driven back, counted several deeply wounded, retreating, paralysed with fear. I could hardly blame them; all of this had lasted barely a moment, but the beast's leap made it clear that this was no shark. It was a monster with the body of a fish and the head of a tiger! Its whole body was covered in sharp spines.

Before I could regain control of myself, I heard a crunching sound as we hit a reef and were in danger of ending up in the same situation as the merchant vessel. Its crew was still howling in terror and begging us to help them... I turned my soul to steel and began giving orders. The archers posted themselves as high as they could and tried to force the monster back under the force of their arrows. Meanwhile, I tried to regain

control of our ship to turn it from the deadly course it was on; thanks to a colossal effort and the deaths of several sailors, torn apart by the demon, I managed to change our course.

As the rowers began to put some distance between us and that nightmarish place, I caught sight of a new horror: the marine monster, which now seemed to have lost interest in us, was swimming towards the wreck of the merchant ship, and I saw it change into a tiger with drenched fur and raised spines. It slowly moved towards the crew I had been forced to abandon, and the cries that ensued forced me to turn away and take refuge in my cabin.

— Report of Captain Chang Lo-Pai, mariner of Qi

Description

The *mao jingyu* is a marine monster which has haunted the seas surrounding the *Zhongguo* for centuries. It is one of the last creatures from a time before there was no clear separation between the oceans and land; it is a hybrid possessing both marine and terrestrial characteristics.

The *mao jingyu* has the body of an orca whale and the face of a tiger. Its body is covered with razor-sharp spikes, which it uses to harpoon its prey and wound its aggressors. When it wants to move about on land, it is capable of taking the shape of a tiger with damp fur, still armed with its spikes.

The *mao jingyu* often attacks ships that pass close to it. Its usual tactic is to spear the ship and force it to wreck, to then devour the crew at its leisure in its terrestrial form. It has also been known to attack small coastal villages, usually at night.

According to certain legends, the *mao jingyu* is not a unique creature, though no one has ever seen two together. This belief comes from the fact that that it can swim at incredible speed and varies its attacks along the length of the *Zhongguo* coast...

Characteristics

A relic from ancient days, the *mao jingyu* is immune to Exorcism techniques. It is an amphibious creature, as comfortable underwater as it is on land thanks to its two forms.

Its supernatural powers are: Natural Weapons (teeth, claws, spines), Shape-Shift and Terror.

Mao Jingyu

Metal 6 Water 6 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Bite and Claw 4, Dodging 2, Swimming 6

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (fangs, claws, spines), Shape-Shift (it can take on the appearance of a tiger), Terror 11

Chi: 24 **Passive Defence:** 11

Breath of Life: 55 (18/0, 16/0, 14/-1, 5/-3, 2/-5)

Special: Amphibious (it can breathe and move as easily through water as it does on land)

Nian

Very long ago, there existed a monster named Nian. It was hideous and very fierce. It lived in the mountains, but also underwater, and slept most of the year, waking only to devour men the night before spring. Citizens and villagers alike could only barricade their doors until the dawn, hoping not to become the next victims of the monster.

One day, in a small village, an old wise man had the idea of organising the citizens to fight against the Nian, thinking rightly that it was the fear of the monster that allowed it to be so fierce and audacious. At once, he had the villagers prepare drums, bells and gongs, as well as torches and long rolls of red cloth: the old man hoped that this would be enough to scare off the creature.

The following night was a cold one, lit only by a pale moon, and the Nian came to the village. The moment it opened its mouth to let out a terrible roar, the villagers burst from their homes beating their instruments, striking their gongs, rattling their bells, lighting their torches and waving their scarlet banners. The Nian was terrified and tried to run, but everywhere it found villagers dancing and shouting.

Running in all directions and finding at each turn a dead end, it finally collapsed in exhaustion. Man's cooperation had been its doom.

Since that day, the inhabitants of the Kingdoms have retained the tradition of celebrating the new year by beating on the drums and dressing in red, to frighten off the Nian and celebrate their victory over the creature.

— Popular tale

Description

The *nian* is an ancient monster which incarnates the death of the year which has passed. In this way, it is reborn on the first day of spring, and is capable of being everywhere at once, in every town and village of the *Zhongguo* at the same time.

Thus, a *nian* only wakes when the year is about to end and a new one about to begin. It goes to the closest human communities to kill and devour. It is usually active for only a month before going back to sleep. If killed during this time, it is reborn at the dawn of the New Year.

The *nian* is a sort of giant wild cat, with the body of an ox and the head of a lion. It has a single horn in the centre of its forehead and its fur is long and thick. It is said to have its lair beneath the mountains but also under the seas. Many adventures have attempted to find where the New Year Monster hides when it sleeps, but no one has yet succeeded. Some believe that this is impossible, that the monster only materialises when the year ends, and that its ferocity comes from the jealousy of the old year towards the one yet to come: this is why it can only be seen just before spring.

Since ancient times, the festival of the New Year is the occasion to perform important festivities, noisy and brightly-coloured, in order to frighten away the beast, which fears noise and the colour red. The blessing “Guo Nian” means as much “Happy New Year” as it does “Beware of the Nian”.

Characteristics

The *nian* is a creature subject to certain rules, which govern its appearance as much as how it may be combatted. It is also vulnerable to Exorcism techniques. However, it is impossible to completely destroy the *nian*; it always returns each New Year and can be in multiple places at once.

Its supernatural powers are: Natural Weapon (teeth, claws, horn), Natural Armour and Terror, not to mention its powers of reincarnation and ability to be in several places at once. If confronted by a loud din and the colour red, the *nian* suffers a penalty to all its actions.



Nian

Metal 5 Water 5 Earth 4

Wood 4 Fire 2

Skills: Perception 3, Bite and Claw 4, Stealth 3, Dodging 3

Powers: Natural Weapons 4 (fangs, claws, horn), Natural Armour 3, Terror 13

Chi: 26 **Passive Defence:** 10

Breath of Life: 65 (30/0, 20/0, 8/-1, 5/-3, 2/-5)

Special: Noise and the colour red confuses the *nian*, which then suffers penalties ranging from -1 to -5 to all its actions (varying according to the noise).

The New Year and the God of the Hearth

Zao Jun, Lord of the Earth, is above all known as the Hearth God, and he lives in the oven or chimney of every house.

The night before New Year, it is customary to offer him sugary sweets, such as cakes or rice with fruits, and to anoint his mouth with honey, since the expression 'sugared mouth' is synonymous with praises and eulogies. Thus, when Zao Jun returns to Heaven to report on the conduct of the house to the Jade Emperor whom he serves, he gives a favourable account. At least, that's what the inhabitants hope...

Another custom is to offer him a thick and pasty food so that, with his lips and teeth stuck together, he is unable to speak to the Jade Emperor and tell him of the evil actions of the household...

28

Pi

I have always respected a man ready to take risks. Born to a rich family in Qi, the land of knowledge and respect, the intelligence I had inherited from my father allowed me to undertake some brilliant studies and earn an important post in the capital of the military, Jiaodong. My career seemed promising, and already a number of families were attempting to arrange marriages with their young daughters; however, I thought it was yet too early to think about such things.

One day, when I was walking through a wood bordering my manor, I ended up face-to-face with a fox whose paw appeared trapped in a stump. Carefully, I approached it and managed to get it to trust me enough to let me feel its paw and check nothing was broken. Thankfully, nothing seemed wrong, and I had no trouble in lifting the dead wood and freeing the animal, which quickly ran to hide in the undergrowth.

A few weeks later, I had, amongst my activities in the tribunal, to settle a dispute between a rich and condescending fur merchant, and a young woman who had just arrived in town and wished to open a clothes stall in the commercial district. I was truly fascinated by the woman's beauty, her ease at oratory and the innocence that burned in her eyes. The odious merchant was in the wrong, and after I settled the matter, the woman invited me to visit her at her stall should I wish to share some refreshment.

Allowing several days to pass out of politeness, I went to see her and she received me graciously. We talked well into the night, eating sugared fruits and drinking a very fine wine. The longer I spent with her, the more certain I was that I had fallen in love with this young woman. Without even realising it, I began paying court to her.

A month later and we were married. It was a very simple honeymoon, and while my parents were annoyed at seeing my sentiments take precedence over political sense, my new bride quickly charmed them. She settled in my home but wished to keep her work and stall. Not wishing to deny her anything, I gave her everything she asked for, even her very strange request to not visit her without prior warning in her studio.

However, one day, an emergency forced me to go to her workplace. I heard through the door the familiar sound of her tools and opened the door. Stupefied, I stopped dead: in her studio was a magnificent fox with a rich coat, from the fur of which my wife wove the rich clothes she sold at her stall. In a moment, the fox saw me and fled through a window, just as I realised what it was - who it was...

I had lost my wife, I realised painfully. Breaking an oath with a magical creature means it will never return - even a scholar such as I knew that. Nonetheless, I spent month after month searching for her. I spent hours wandering through the woods where I had seen her for the first time, calling until my voice grew hoarse, wanting only to see her once last time and beg her pardon.

One day, I heard her: her soft voice came to me as if in a dream. She called me, and I was hypnotised, and I ran towards her, crying and laughing all at once.

When I reached the clearing where her voice had come from, I saw a silver fox. It was not my wife, it was far larger and the colours were different. It didn't matter, I was already lost: the animal leaped at me, teeth bared, and when it tore out my throat, I was already gone, far from my memories, to the only place where I could find my beloved wife.

— Anonymous account

Description

The *pi* are giant foxes with silver fur. They are fierce and pitiless creatures, which like nothing more than devouring humans. To lure them, they use their capacity for human speech and surround themselves with illusions: trapped, their victims have little chance of escape.

The *pi* live in woods and forests close to towns and villages. They never venture into human communities, preferring to hunt on their own terrain.

The *pi* detest the *yao*-foxes, for unlike them they cannot transform, and distrust the fascination of their cousins for men.

Characteristics

Due to its hatred of humans and similarity to the *yao*, the *pi* is vulnerable to Exorcism techniques.

Their supernatural powers are often: Natural Weapons (teeth and claws), Illusion and Terror. They can speak the tongues of men.

Pi

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 3

Skills: Languages 2 (it can speak human languages), Bite and Claw 3, Dodging 3

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (fangs and claws), Illusion 7, Terror 9

Chi: 16 **Passive Defence:** 9

Breath of Life: 28 (10/0, 8/0, 5/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)

Pixiu

The many legends concerning the legendary creature known as the pixiu are always the most interesting, even – or especially – when they are contradictory.

At the heart of it, the pixiu is a celestial lion, said to be the ninth son of a dragon, possessing the body of a lion, the head of a dragon, the paws of a kilin and the wings of an eagle. It served the gods in hunting down demons and halting epidemics. Then it made a mistake, breaking one of the laws of the Celestial Realm (in the course of my studies on the subject I have never been able to identify which one) and was punished by the Jade Emperor, who condemned it to only eat gold, to never defecate, and stopped up its anus with a jade cork. The only exception was if it devoured a demon, at which point it retched it up in the form of many riches.

According to an ancient text, the pixiu is condemned to wander forever on the earth, seeking gold to eat and demons of all kinds to destroy. Although the tales speak of the pixiu as a unique being, it is more likely that it is one of a race of celestial creatures, several examples of which live in our world.

I have also heard of exorcists with few scruples, who capture a pixiu and bring it demons every day for it to devour them and vomit forth gold and jewels. It is difficult to tell if these are just tales or stories based on fact; however, it seems strange that a creature of such divine essence as the pixiu could be so easily held prisoner by simple mortals.

All the legends agree on the pixiu's ferocity and warlike bravery, to the extent that in our day the term "pixiu" is used to refer to an army.

— Classic Mysteries of Heaven and Earth,
by Zhan Luo Zi

Description

A chimera with the body of a lion, the head of a dragon and the hooves of a *kilin*, the *pixiu* also has a pair of wings, and is covered in grey and white fur.

Although it once lived in heaven, the Jade Emperor banished the *pixiu*, and it has since suffered a curse which has stopped it from feeding on anything other than gold. However, its hatred for demons did not slumber long, and it has continued hunting them tirelessly to destroy them and absorb their essence, which it transforms into gold, precious stones and many other riches.





真正保證無
定價金壹拾五錢

神

Pixin

The celestial lion lives mostly in the mountains but is drawn to places struck by epidemics, often caused by the demons it loves to devour.

Characteristics

Although a being of celestial origin, the *pixiu* is under a divine curse and as such is vulnerable to the powers of Exorcism. Its supernatural powers are Natural Weapons (teeth and hooves), Terror, Vampirism (only on demons) and Flight. Once it has destroyed a demon, it drains its Chi and regurgitates it in the form of riches equal to 100 times the points of Chi consumed.

Pixiu

Metal 5 Water 6 Earth 4
Wood 4 Fire 4

Skills: Bite 4, Kicking 3 Dodging 4, Perception 5

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (fangs and hooves),
Terror 9, Vampirism 5, Flight

Chi: 26 **Passive Defence:** 12

Breath of Life: 65 (30/0, 20/0, 8/-1, 5/-3, 2/-5)

Special: The *pixiu* can absorb the Chi of demons, which it converts into riches.

Wugong Sui

Fear is probably the most basic of human emotions. It is also the favoured weapon of the creatures I fight: the wugong sui.

The little town of Chunsu, near the military town of Dai in the North-West of Yan, is situated on the edge of the steppes, not far from Zhao. It is the typical example of a town that lives in permanent fear: fear of xiongnu robbers, fear of the militia from the neighbouring state, fear of the spring dust storms, fear of famine, and so on.

However, fear is food for the spirit centipede, a demon that appears to sow chaos and torment men. For several months, I hunted one from Yan as it moved along the frontier, leaving a trail of dead in its wake.

When I arrived in Chunsu, it was already too late: the little town had fallen. The majority of the inhabitants had fled, but a few were lying here and there through the streets, their faces locked in a rictus of absolute terror. The spirit centipede had completed its work: amplifying the fears of the inhabitants, it had made the majority flee and had then showed itself in all its horror to those who had stayed, petrifying their hearts before devouring their fear-filled souls. Considering the time the wugong sui had been committing its atrocities throughout the land, it must now be a terrifying size. No matter, I would put an end to its existence here.

Examining one of the bodies, I estimated that the time of death could not be more than one day ago. After such a feast, the spirit centipede would need to rest and digest. I had to find it before it recovered.

My spirit compass clearly indicated that the creature was hiding in the inn, probably the place where the last survivors had hoped to barricade themselves. I took from my bag a mask representing Er Lang, and covered my face to protect my spirit from wugong sui's aura of terror. Finally, I entered the inn, sword in hand.

The time it took for my eyes to accustom to the darkness almost cost me my life. From the corner of my eye, an inhuman movement on my right alerted me and I ducked just in time to evade the creature's charge. Turning, I could see that the battle would be as difficult as I had expected: the millipede measured nearly a fathom in length. Instantly, it reared to its full height, looking at me with curiously human eyes; it thought to slay me with its terrifying stare. This gave me the time to react. I caught it with my sword and it retreated, letting out an indescribable cry. Without taking my eyes off its hundreds of legs, each sharpened to a point, I delivered several blows, at least half of which were dodged. It began to whirl around me, and multiple cuts quickly covered my skin. Taking a terracotta pot from my sack, I threw it at the demon; it burst on its hide, covering it with water charged with my Yang energy. A terrible burnt odour filled the room while the wugong sui howled in pain and rage. I used the moment to plant my sword into its mouth and held it pinned to the ground until its death throes ceased.

The corpse slowly began to disappear, freeing the souls it had absorbed. As for me, I went to serve myself a little wine from behind the counter, lifting my cup to the souls of the dead, and wishing them better luck in their next life.

— Professional journal of Terror of Ghosts, exorcist



Description

The *wugong sui*, or spirit centipede, is a being that is born of and feeds on mortal fear. It comes to the world in places filled with terror, such as halls of torture, isolated villages, mausoleums, swamps, and so on. An incarnation of the emotion, it only measures a few inches at birth but quickly grows as it eats.

Its actions always follow the same pattern: capable of sensing fear, it moves towards it and amplifies it a hundred times. The people caught in this act more and more fearfully, feeling the effect that robs them of their senses piece by piece. Often the most sensible flee, but others are too terrified to leave their homes. The *wugong sui* then comes out of hiding and massacres the remaining men and women, devouring their terrified souls. If not stopped in time, a spirit centipede can grow to a horrifying size: the more it feeds the more powerful it grows.

The *wugong sui* has the appearance of a centipede, often huge, with a human face, four eyes and a pair of mandibles. It emanates a palpable aura of terror, capable of paralysing the most hardened *wu xia*.

Characteristics

The *wugong sui* is a being created by negative energy, and is thus vulnerable to Exorcism techniques.

Its supernatural powers are as follows: Natural Weapons (mandibles, claws), Natural Armour (chitin), Terror, Invisibility, Vampirism (only on those affected by its aura of terror).

Once the spirit millipede uses its power of Vampirism, it can choose to convert 15 points of absorbed Chi into 1 point to improve its Aspects or other powers. For every 10 points of Chi thus used, it grows another 8 inches.

Medium Wugong Sui

Metal 5 Water 4 Earth 2

Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Bite and Claw 3, Dodging 2, Stealth 3

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (mandibles, claws), Natural Armour 2 (chitin), Terror 15, Vampirism 4

Chi: 18 **Passive Defence:** 9

Breath of Life: 32 (13/0, 9/0, 6/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)

Special: It can only use its Vampirism power on beings who have failed their Resistance Test against its Terror.

Xing Tian

In the distance, the two armies drew closer and closer, and prepared to do battle on the plain. I watched from a good distance, waiting for the right moment to approach the lines, when all attention was on the battle so that I could pass unseen. Finally, I heard the first cries, the fracas of the war chariots hitting the infantry and the cries of battle and agony. Adjusting my armour and tucking in my great sabre, I approached the battle without joining it, hoping to see him.

Him. It, rather; the monster that had massacred my men in a similar battle before this one. It was a skirmish between my state, Chu, and those arrogant Qi. We had superior numbers and were better equipped, and the battle was turning in our favour. However, the Qi were holding strong, and we were losing more soldiers than I thought possible. The reason became clear, in all its horror, during the third assault upon the enemy troops: a giant with no head, a nightmare creature that only I seemed to be able to see. It was huge, wielding an enormous axe and cutting down wildly into the battle, killing as many soldiers from Qi as our own. A trail of carnage allowed us to follow it, and I gathered several of my men to track it down. Strangely, only I seemed to be able to see it, all my men saw was a blurred patch, and even then only when I pointed it out to them. Nevertheless, I ordered the attack and they threw themselves at it. I hurried after them and tried to strike down the giant but it seemed too powerful, invincible. My men fell one after the other, victims to my fault of ordering them to attack something they could barely see. Finally, the creature seemed to disappear, leaving behind a pile of corpses.

Not far from us, the battle was finishing and the troops retreated for the night. My officer found me prostrate over the torn bodies of my men, covered in blood and babbling nonsensically. I was arrested and imprisoned, accused of treachery. The death penalty no doubt awaited me but I refused to die before having found the giant to make it pay. Thanks to what friends I still had amongst my men, and who could not believe I had slaughtered so many of our men, I was easily able to escape.

I spent the following years trying to comprehend what I was facing. Searching through libraries, questioning fangshi, spying on battlefields, I managed to gather enough information to be able to act. The giant was called Xing Tian, it was a monster that appeared in the fury of battles and massacred indiscriminately all those who crossed its path. I found no other information but by then I needed none.

I have spied on several battlefields since then, in the hopes of seeing it reappear; several times only just avoiding capture as a deserter or spy, but without success.

Until today. I have just seen it, exactly as I remembered it, taking part in the blind carnage. Bloodied demon, I will have my revenge... I have in my hand a sabre blessed by the barbarian shamans of the South, my armour is solid and hate burns in my heart. With a sure pace, I enter the battle and advance towards it. I deliver the first blow, backed by a thousand spirits crying vengeance. The chaos of battle swallows me.

— Anonymous recital

Description

During the time of the Yellow Emperor, there lived a terrifying giant, whose name has been lost to history. It was a violent beast, which massacred and terrified the population. Hearing the pleas of his people, Huang Di took up arms and went to slay the monster. Their combat was terrible but the giant was no match for the nobility and martial arts of the mythic king: the Yellow Emperor decapitated it and called down the damnation of the heavens.



Since then, the headless giant has been known as Xing Tian 'cursed by the heavens'. Its curse forces it to haunt battlefields in the world of man and grow drunk on violence and death. In a way, Xing Tian is immortal: if it dies, it reincarnates in the next battle to continue its sinister work.

Xing Tian is a giant nearly thirteen foot tall. It has no head but its face is set in its torso, hideous and malformed. It wields an axe and shield.

Characteristics

Exorcism techniques are capable of wounding Xing Tian, a being punished by the heavens. Its supernatural power are: Natural Armour, Terror, Illusion. The giant is capable of appearing in any battle, as long as it is sufficiently bloody. Massacring everyone with blows from its axe, it uses its power of illusion to mask its presence.

Under the same curse from the gods, Xing Tian cannot die: when killed, it reappears on the site of another battlefield.

Xing Tian

Metal 6 Water 4 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 1

Skills: Art of War 2, Dunshu 3, Qiangshu 4, Stealth 2

Techniques: Dunshu (Total Block, Repel), Qiangshu (Charge, Hold at Bay, Direct Hit, Whirlwind Block)

Powers: Natural Armour 2, Illusion 7, Terror 11

Chi: 14

Passive Defence: 9

Breath of Life: 60 (28/0, 18/0, 7/-1, 5/-3, 2/-5)



A Few More Fabulous Creatures

Jian

The *jian* is a small bird, notable because it has only one wing and one eye. This odd anatomy means they must live as couples in order to fly and see what is around them. In the *Zhongguo*, this bird is the symbol of love and happiness in marriage, since, in moving as a pair, it shows how a man and woman should be to each other: aid, solidarity and eternal presence.

Metal 2 Water 1(5) Earth 2
Wood 1(5) Fire 2

Skills: Stealth 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 1 (beak and claws), Flight

Chi: 6 **Passive Defence:** 4(11)

Breath of Life: 10 (3/0, 3/0, 2/-1, 1/-3, 1/-5)

Numbers in parenthesis are for a pair of *jian*.

Special: Seeing a *jian* couple in flight brings good luck in love. Those who see them benefit from a +3 bonus to Seduction for the following month.

Jingwei

Jingwei was the daughter of the August Shen Nong. She lost her life by drowning in the Eastern Sea. She wished for vengeance and resurrected in the shape of a great bird; for centuries, she has sought to fill the sea with stones so that no more may drown as she did. It is said she will take ten million years to fulfil her destiny.

Jingwei takes the form of a crane with red-flecked feathers. She spends her time coming and going between the mountains and the sea, throwing small boulders and tree branches into the waves.

It is said that those who follow hopeless quests may meet Jingwei if their path takes them to the Eastern Sea. Meeting her is a sign that they should not give up, because despite the hardships, their goal is worth the effort they put in.

Metal 2 Water 5 Earth 6
Wood 4 Fire 4

Skills: History 4, Perception 2, Eloquence 3, Empathy 3
Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 1 (beak and claws), Flight

Chi: 32 **Passive Defence:** 11

Breath of Life: 25 (10/0, 7/0, 5/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Special: Anyone who encounters Jingwei while they pursue a particular goal can decide to redo a Test connected to that goal once per scenario until the end of the quest (he can choose which result to keep).

Kun and Peng

There exists in the Northern Sea a race of whales named *kun*. When a storm breaks out, they have the power to change into giant *peng* birds and fly to the Southern Sea. It is said that the birds can fly for six months without rest.

Certain *peng* birds have settled on islands to the East of the *Zhongguo*. If captured, they promise to bring their captors all kinds of fabulous riches from their islands in exchange for their freedom.

Kun

Metal 6 Water 6 Earth 4
Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Swimming 4, Perception 3

Chi: 34 **Passive Defence:** 11

Breath of Life: 70 (30/0, 20/0, 12/-1, 6/-3, 2/-5)

Special: The *kun* whales can change into *peng* birds.

Peng

Metal 6 Water 6 Earth 4
Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Perception 2, Language 2 (they can speak the tongues of men)

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (beak and claws), Terror 7, Flight

Chi: 36 **Passive Defence:** 11

Breath of Life: 70 (30/0, 20/0, 12/-1, 6/-3, 2/-5)

Special: If captured, a *peng* bird, in exchange for its freedom, brings a man sufficient riches for him to live in comfort for the rest of his life. These riches take the form of precious stones, rare woods, spices, etc.

Ping feng

The *ping feng* is a huge monster (nearly seven foot at the shoulders), resembling a giant pig with two heads, one at each end of its body.

It usually attacks cattle but has no fear of man; if hunted it readily turns on its pursuers to defend itself. Often found living in forests or swamps close to human inhabitations and usually only comes out at night to hunt.

A simple monster, the *ping feng* has no fear of Exorcism techniques. Thanks to its two heads, it can never be surprised.



Metal 5 Water 4 Earth 2
Wood 4 Fire 1
Skills: Bite 3, Kicking 2, Perception 5
Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (teeth), Terror 9
Chi: 12
Breath of Life: 40 (15/0, 12/0, 7/-1, 4/-3, 2/-5)
Passive Defence: 10

Suanni

The *suanni* are a breed of winged lions and tigers, particularly ferocious and much larger than their normal counterparts, their wings allow them to dive at their prey at supernatural speed.

The *suanni* live mostly in the jungles of Chu but they can be found in the north, particularly close to mountains. Although they do not actively hunt humans, the *suanni* attack them if provoked.

Exorcism has no effect on the *suanni*.

Metal 5 Water 6 Earth 3
Wood 2 Fire 2
Skills: Bite and Claw 4, Perception 3, Dodging 3
Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (teeth and claws), Terror 7, Flight
Chi: 14
Breath of Life: 30 (11/0, 9/0, 5/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)
Passive Defence: 10

Taowu

The *taowu* is a monster with the body of a horse, the snout of a pig and the teeth of a tiger. It is a creature both cruel and vicious but also cowardly: it has the ability to see into the future and the troubles awaiting it, and can thus avoid them. Though if a *taowu* is cornered, it can cause a lot of problems to even the most skilled warrior.

Its clairvoyance ability is a twisting of the heavenly laws and consequently the *taowu* is vulnerable to Exorcism techniques.

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 3
Wood 4 Fire 2
Skills: Bite 3, Kicking 2, Divination 4, Dodging 2
Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (teeth and hooves), Terror 7
Chi: 26 **Passive Defence:** 10
Breath of Life: 22 (8/0, 6/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)
Special: It is capable of discerning its future problems and the battles it risks facing, and does everything to avoid them.

You Nu

The *you nu* or long-necked women are among the strangest and most disconcerting creatures.

By day she is a normal woman, capable of having a husband and children and leading a perfectly normal existence. However, once night has fallen, her neck extends to an unnatural length and she has to feed on lamp oil... Completely harmless, the *you nu* want nothing more than to be left to continue their lives in peace and quiet.

Often *you nu* are strikingly beautiful and have no trouble finding a husband, who are sometimes told the true nature of their wives, and the majority easily accept it.

Neither monster nor demon, the *you nu* have no fear of exorcists. If they have daughters, these have a 50% chance of being *you nu* themselves.

Metal 2 Water 3 Earth 4
Wood 3 Fire 5
Skills: According to her daily life
Chi: 15 **Passive Defence:** 8
Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)
Special: At least once a week, the *you nu* needs to feed on oil. On these occasions, her neck extends to around one yard in length.





Adventure Seed

As they are taking a well-deserved rest in a little village, a rich oil merchant hires the characters to investigate a series of thefts that are taking place in his storage depot. He does not trust the local magistrate, who he considers a waste of space.

Almost every month for a year, oil has been disappearing from his stores: several barrels have been discovered almost empty, as though someone had drained them rather than fleeing with their contents (which would be more sensible for a thief).

As their investigation continues, the characters discover that the oil thefts began soon after the marriage of the merchant's son to a young girl of good standing. If they follow this trail, they find that the young girl is a *you nu*, who found in the marriage a useful way of staying alive. Her husband is aware of her nature but he loves his wife dearly despite this and wants to avoid a scandal.

What do the characters do? Denouncing the young girl gets them a goodly sum in thanks, but in doing so they destroy the happiness of the young couple, and the young *you nu* could well lose her life.

Deciding to stay silent ruins their reputation but allows them to leave with their conscience intact...

Yu Ren

The *yu ren* are a race of men with bodies covered in feathers, living on the summits of the highest mountains of the *Zhongguo*. Legends tell that they are immortal.

Barely civilised, they live in crude mountain villages and almost never reveal themselves to men, who they fear. They seem to be related to the immortal crane of the celestial realm (making them immune to Exorcism).

Metal 3 Water 6 Earth 3

Wood 2 Fire 2

Skills: Perception 3, Dodge 3

Powers: Flight

Chi: 18

Breath of Life: 20 (8/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Celestial and Fabulous Beings

Denizens of majestic Heaven sometimes deigning to offer assistance to simple mortals, celestial beings are servants and messengers of the gods, keepers of the laws of the universe and bringers of good fortune.

Often holders of powers incomprehensible to normal mortals, these beings watch over the world of men, guarding it from demons and cruel monsters. Although it is rare to see heavenly beings, one who does so is greatly blessed; it is a sign that something glorious awaits him or his descendants.

As divine creatures, the creatures listed here are of course unaffected by Exorcism techniques.

The majority of them can be called with the Divination spell Invoking the Celestial Creatures.

Certain beings presented here do not have numbered characteristics; these are creatures that live with the gods and whose powers are far beyond anything a mortal can imagine.

Feng Huang

According to my research, the use of the name "feng huang" to describe the Vermilion Bird of the South is not entirely appropriate. The celestial bird can be male (when it is called "feng") or female (when it is called "huang"). For convenience, and no doubt because people are unable to distinguish between male and female phoenixes, the two names are used together to denote the creature in a generic fashion.

Due to this male-female duality, Taoists often remark that the feng huang is a representation of harmony, complementary Ying and Yang uniting in a perfect Tao. It is also true that the Vermilion Bird is a symbol of not only cosmic balance but also of that in love: feng and huang are husband and wife living together in happiness. In certain other texts, the feng huang is seen as feminine, to link with the masculine personified in the dragon, Long. Thus, during ancient dynasties, the feng huang was the blazon of the Empress while the dragon was that of the Emperor. Finally, thanks to many references I was able to find on this fantastic bird, it is a positive symbol, representing virtue and grace, supposed to show itself to mortals during good times and bringing hope.

The feng huang, more than being a kind of celestial bird, is also the guardian of the South, one of the members of the Five Sacred Animals that protect the five points of the compass and the centre, and as such, it is associated with the element of fire and the colour red.

Its appearance is one of the strangest: it has the beak of a cock, the face of a swallow, the neck of a snake, the body of a goose, the back of a turtle and the tail of a fish. Thus, its body represents the Six Celestial Bodies: its head the sky, its eyes the sun, its back the moon, its wings are the wind, its feet the earth and, finally, its tail ties it to the sea. Its feathers are coloured in the five fundamental colours: black, white, red, green and yellow.

In the world of men, legends say that the descendants of the feng huang took the form of a cockerel, proud and powerful as it announces the rising sun.

— Classic Mysteries of Heaven and Earth,
by Zhan Luo Zi

Description

The *feng huang*, also known as the phoenix or the Red or Vermilion Bird, is one of the Five Sacred Animals connected at once to directions, elements, colours, etc.

Both a unique creature and an entirely separate race, it lives in the Celestial Realm and only rarely appears in the world of men. When it shows itself to humans, it is always an important blessing to those who see it, the assurance that destiny is your own and that the gods watch over you.

In appearance, the *feng huang* is a mixture of traits from several different animals. However, its global form remains that of a bird, often surrounded by flames.

In the *Zhongguo*, the image of the Vermilion Bird is often used as decoration for marriages to bring good luck and harmony to the couple. Pendants of jade, statues and banners representing it are common, good luck charms meant to bring celestial blessings. Used to decorate the door to a dwelling, it symbolises the honesty and loyalty of those who live within.



Characteristics

The *feng huang* is a celestial being whose powers are beyond the comprehension of mere humans. Any mortal attempting to harm a phoenix is immediately engulfed in flames, burning to ashes, while his soul is dragged to the Hells to suffer for an eternity for this vile act and his family is cursed for generations.

Gui

During the reign of Yu the Great, one day there appeared in the village a strange being: a large head, protruding eyes, powerful if short legs, and on its back a thick shell. At first terrified, the villagers decided that this apparition was a sign from the heavens and that the creature had to be sacrificed to the gods.

However, Yu the Great, who was passing at the time, begged them not to harm the Turtle – for that was what it was. Approaching it, the Sovereign scrutinised its scales and discovered symbols carved on it, a puzzle to decipher. Determined to solve it, the wise king succeeded in putting together a magic square, composed of nine boxes (as many as there were realms in his kingdom), the squares situated at the four cardinal directions had an odd number in them, while the corner boxes had an even number and the centre held the sacred number five. Thus, the square contained the secret of universal harmony.

Since then, the Turtle is the creature said to know all the secrets of the cosmos. Its shell, round like the sky, is used for divination: if thrown into a fire, it covers itself with symbols and drawings that allow the future to be read. As for its stomach, square and supported by the four solid pillars of its legs, it represents the Earth. Examples of famous Turtles are not lacking in the myths and legends, such as the Great Celestial Turtle, which came to aid Nü Wa to heal the broken world from the wounds the demon Gonggong inflicted, from whose carapace the goddess made the sky and held it up with its legs. Many speak of the Turtles that carry on their back the marvellous islands of Penglai, Yingzhou and Fangzhang, where the fruits of immortality grow in the Eastern Sea. A black Turtle carries with her the Xi Rang, the magical earth, which Yu used to calm to seas at the beginning of his reign. Finally, the wise sage Xuan Gui is the dark Turtle who watches over the North and commands the element of water, and is the symbol of measures and wisdom.

Description

Present in many ancient legends, the turtle represents perfection in the eyes of the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo*; both a terrestrial and aquatic creature, with a round back and a square belly, capable of living a hundred years or more. It is associated with many virtues such as wisdom, reliability, patience and steadiness.

The dark turtle, Xuan Gui, is also one of the Five Sacred Animals. Although turtles are living animals that exist in the mortal world, there exist Celestial Turtles, who live with the gods, whom they serve as councillors, predicting the future for them. Frequently of great size, they often live in the palaces of the Dragon-Kings and sometimes come to the aid of a lost ship, or one endangered by storm. Celestial Turtles are at ease on land, in the seas or in the air, as they can fly to rejoin the heavens.

The jewels associated with turtles are broaches of jade or pendants. Warriors often decorate their shields to resemble turtle shells, hoping to draw the blessings of Xuan Gui in battle.

Characteristics

A Celestial Turtle is a fabulous creature whose intelligence and strength are beyond the ken of mortals. Protected by its carapace, almost invulnerable, the turtle fears nothing. Those who risk attacking it are swallowed by the horned beak, crushed underneath one of its legs, or vaporised by its corrosive breath.

Sacred Carapace

The turtle shells used by the priests of the Zhou Dynasty have been scattered across the *Zhongguo* after the Qin army destroyed the last palace of the doomed imperial line. Certain carapaces have been lost, others are in the hands of antique dealers, but few know the true powers they hold, which mean diviners actively seek them.

Such a carapace gives its possessor a bonus of +2 to Divination Tests.

It allows its owner to benefit from the Gift: Placidity of the Turtle.

A sacred carapace has a Renown of 5.

Bai Hu

A White Celestial Tiger is a being of great courage and wisdom. It is said to be fierce, but only against criminals and demons. To virtuous and hard-working men, it shows only good will, as the following anecdote shows.

One day, as the White Tiger wandered the world, it saw that the men were in poor health, prey to epidemics and demon-borne illnesses of all kinds. Pained at seeing humanity so reduced and at the mercy of the evil forces of nature, it sacrificed its body to create a medicine that would allow humanity to resist sickness.

The hairs from its tail make an ingredient that, if mixed with soup, heals diseases of the skin. The bones of the tail make for talismans to ward off evil spirits.

Its bones, if reduced to powder and mixed with wine, make a tonic giving energy and, it is said, relighting the flame of desire.

A cape cut from its skin heals the fevers caused by certain ghosts. However, a man wearing such a cloak for too long risks turning into a tiger himself.

Its kidney stones, dipped in honey, absorb abscesses.

The smoke created by its burning fur causes infection-carrying centipedes to flee.

Its eyes make a remedy against convulsions and can cure epilepsy.

Mixing its brain with oil creates an unguent capable of curing skin ailments.

Its claws, if worn as pendants, give courage to even the most cowardly of men.

Eating its heart augments one's strength and daring.

Its penis is a powerful aphrodisiac and consuming it frequently means a man will have many sons.

Thus, from all the pieces of its body, the White Tiger gave humanity the power to protect itself and to evolve.

— Medical Paper by Doctor Huan Ji

Description

The White Tiger, *bai hu*, is the Sacred Animal of the West, associated with Metal, and the patron of warriors and soldiers who frequently evoke it to give them courage.

The Celestial Tigers are born white and, as they grow older, their bodies become covered in black stripes, symbolising the wisdom that comes with age. They become adult at a hundred years old and so are one of the wisest and most powerful creatures in the Celestial Realm.

Ferocious hunters of demons, they are only rarely seen on Earth and few mortals can truthfully say they have seen one.

Various armies use the White Tiger on their blazons. Also, *hu fu* or Tiger Tallies, copper insignias in the shape of a tiger cut in half, are used as proof that the orders sent to the battlefield do indeed come from the central commander. One half is in possession of the general and the other half in the royal palace; if the two parts are assembled, then the order is valid.

Characteristics

Even a young White Tiger is a being of colossal power. When it reaches the age of five hundred, it has become a creature whose power and wisdom is incomprehensible to a simple mortal. If sufficiently moved to pity the miseries of man, a White Tiger may sacrifice its body to allow the creation of a celestial medicine.



The Medicine from the Body of a White Tiger

Tail hairs: Drinking a soup containing the hairs from a tiger's tail gives a +2 bonus to Tests against skin diseases.

Tail bones: Wearing a bone from a tiger's tail forces all demons within five yards of the bearer to suffer a -2 penalty to all their actions.

Bones: Drinking wine containing powdered tiger bones restores five Breath of Life boxes and gets rid of fatigue.

Skin: Wrapping oneself in a cloak made from a tiger's skin gives immunity to the powers of Vampirism and Possession from ghosts. However, a character who wears the cape for too long forever gains the Weakness: Impetuosity of the Horse.

Kidney Stones: Applying a tiger's kidney stones as a poultice grants a +2 bonus against abscesses.

Fur: Burning a tiger's fur makes Spirit Centipedes flee and immunises those who inhale the smoke against their Terror.

Eyes: Eating a tiger's eyes grants a +2 bonus against convulsive illnesses such as epilepsy.

Claws: Wearing a tiger claw around one's neck provides the Gift: Courage of the Tiger.

Heart: Eating the heart of a tiger provides the Gift: Strength of the Ox for one day.

Kilin

In the State of Jin lived a young man whose loyalty to his family was beyond compare. His mother had died when he was a child, leaving the father to raise him alone and teach him everything a man has to know, particularly calligraphy, an art prized above all.

When he came of age, the young man desired only that his father should want for nothing and lead a peaceful life in his old age. Hearing that the distant State of Chu was searching for brave men to serve there, he went to settle there, promising his father to send him his salary to give him a comfortable retirement.

The young man left for Chu, taking with him only clothes and writing implements. His voyage took several months, during which he occasionally had to stop and earn some money. Working in a construction site, as a scribe, a mercenary or even sometimes as a bandit, he could continue his route and sent the majority of his meagre assets to his father.

Finally, the young man arrived at Chu after almost a year of travelling and came to the capital to find work. Using the brush with some degree of skill meant he had no trouble finding employment as a scribe in the royal library, a prestigious and well-paid post. As long as he lived carefully, keeping only what he needed, his father could live well for the rest of his days. He did not need much to live on: a modest room and a few books by Kong Fu Zi, which he read every night by the light of an oil lamp. With his salary, he also sent his father letters telling him of his health, his life, and the exotic marvels of Chu...

Five years after the young man became scribe in the Southern State he received an alarming message: his father's neighbours had written to him saying that the old man was weakening every day and would likely die before long. Horror-struck, the young man cried, "Coming here has taken me almost a year, and this message must have voyaged for several weeks before reaching me! My father may already be dead and even if this isn't the case, I shall never reach him in time to hear his final words and see that he rejoins our ancestors!"

The heavens heard him; a kilin passing nearby heard his plea and decided to help him. The young man had to be a virtuous being to have dispensed so much filial piety during his life. The majestic creature appeared to the young man in all its splendour and invited him to climb onto its back, "Come with me, I will take you to your father in less than an hour and you can bid him farewell, faithful son that you are." Stunned by the apparition, the young man obeyed, and he had barely

climbed onto the creature's back when it leaped to the clouds and began to head north. The Earth flew away under the man's eyes, and the kilin was as good as its word: in less than an hour, he was home.

Thus, the young man entered the beautiful house his father had been able to buy thanks to his money and bade him farewell, fulfilling the last duties of a loving son.

— Popular tale



Description

Among the Five Sacred Animals, the *kilin* is the one who protects the centre, that is to say, the *Zhongguo* itself. Associated with the colour yellow and the element of Earth, it remains the protector of the now broken Empire.

It has the most striking appearance: the head of a unicorn stag on the body of a horse, covered in scales, its legs end in the hooves of an ox, its tail is that of a serpent and it bears a pair of flaming wings; the *kilin* is usually surrounded by flames.

The *kilin* is reputed to be the mount of heroes and immortals. Although shy, it is drawn to virtue and heroism, which it judges according to its own criteria (in its eyes, a farmer who works hard to feed his family is as worthy as the brave warrior who fights to protect his country) and is equally quick to punish criminals. Capable of walking on water and stepping on grass without breaking a single stalk, the *kilin* is also able to fly between the worlds.

It symbolises courage and perseverance and is the incarnation of the Middle Empire. Said to appear only in wisely governed countries, or to herald an event of great importance, the *kilin* appeared in the principality of Lu soon after the birth of Kong Fu Zi. Despite this, the *kilin* is not commonly depicted within the *Zhongguo*, no doubt because of its sacred character, which has little bearing in the fractured reality of the Warring States.

Characteristics

A *kilin* is a being of great purity, possessing vast powers that it prefers not to use but which are nonetheless still beyond human measuring.

Along with dragons, the *kilin* are the celestial creatures that appear most often to mortals. A *kilin* is always ready to aid a pure-hearted hero on his quest, capable of transporting him across the world in the blink of an eye.



Long

No other creature of myth appears as often in texts and references as the dragon. It is without a doubt the most venerated and sacred animal in the Zhongguo; and it is not surprising that it has lasted so long as the personal symbol of the emperor himself.

The many descriptions I have read disagree on small details but agree on the basic aspects of the dragon: it has the body of a snake, the scales and tail of a fish, the head of a kilin with the antlers of a stag and the eyes of a tiger and the claws of an eagle. Some descriptions say it has wings but those are rare.

The dragon is associated with numerous elements such as water or air, but he is most commonly associated with wood, as befits the Guardian of the East. The dragons rule over rain and the clouds, and are often linked with the number nine.

There exist nine kinds of dragons, which are as follows:

The Tianlong is the celestial dragon that pulls the chariots of the gods and guards their palace. It lives in the Celestial World.

The Shenlong is the spiritual dragon that rules over the wind and the rain and lives at the heart of clouds.

The Fucanglong is a dragon that lives underground and protects the treasures it is his duty to guard. When it returns to the Celestial World, it creates a volcano in breaking free of the Earth.

The Dilong is a dragon of the earth, which lives in underground caverns.

Yinglong is the loyal companion of the Yellow Emperor. Said to be the oldest of dragons, he bears a pair of wings as sign of his great age.

The Jiaolong is the dragon that lives in swamps; he has no antlers on his head.

The Panlong is the aquatic dragon that sleeps at the bottom of lakes in the Zhongguo.

Huanglong is the hornless dragon that came from the River Luo to teach the secret of writing to the August Fu Xi.

The Dragon-Kings are the most powerful of all the dragons, among them are the four kings of the oceans that border the world, but also Long Wang and

sometimes even the Yellow Emperor. All are capable of taking on human form.

Other myths mention the existence of the Nine Dragon-Children, which are:

Bixi, the giant turtle whose shell can support the greatest of weights.

Chiwen, the wild cat whose eyes can see across the world.

Pulao, the little dragon whose roars can deafen.

Bian, the tiger who terrifies the greatest of men.

Taotie, the glutton that is never satisfied.

Baxia, who enjoys sleeping underwater.

Yazi, the bloodied, who loves to kill.

Suanni, the lion who loves smoke.

Jiaotu, the shellfish that hates being disturbed.

There exist a great many famous dragons, whose exploits are recounted in many adventures. Among them are the Four Dragon-Kings, Long Wang who is associated with the East, the Yellow Emperor who is often represented in this form, Lei Gong the thunder god who is also counted among the dragons, and so on.

— Classic Mysteries of Heaven and Earth,
by Zhan Luo Zi.

Description

Without a doubt the mythical animal the most represented in the Zhongguo, the dragon occupies a choice place in the beliefs of the populace.

The Sacred Animal of the East, it commands Wood and is associated with the colour green under its identity of Long Wang. Kings of the four oceans, the Dragon-Kings Ao Chin, Ao Jun, Ao Shun and Ao Kuang are venerated by fishermen and sailors, as they can command the weather. Dragons are also the object of prayers by farmers and artisans, since the scales of a dragon are said to be the most useful tools possible.

Warriors also favour the dragon for its qualities of pride and bravery, and power; in his tail sleeps a magical sword that all wish to possess. As the guardian of treasures, merchants admire the dragon. Finally, it is the symbol of imperial power, the Heavenly Mandate, which allows the Emperor to govern with the blessings of the gods.



There are a great many dragons and while many remain in the Celestial World, just as many live on Earth, sleep in the lakes, haunt the swamps or protect artifacts abandoned by immortals. Dragons show themselves to mortals relatively frequently although they prefer to reserve this privilege to the most deserving of humans (to bless them) or the most vile (to punish them). Their descendants, known as the Nine Dragon-Children, also wander the human world and certain among them have become dangerous monsters. A common belief maintains that if a carp succeeds in swimming up the Yellow River to its source, then it becomes a dragon.

Jewels, decorations or statues representing dragons are not lacking in the *Zhongguo* and are supposed to draw the blessings of these fabulous beings.

Each farming community possesses their particular local god and tells it the events that are happening, both near and far: agricultural times, the beginning or end of festivals, a recent calamity, etc. It is the protector and spokesperson for the village.

Festivals and Dancing Days

Now the plums are falling!
Only seven remain!
Ask us, young men!
This is the sacred time!
Now the plums are falling!
Only three remain
Ask us, young men!
This is the time, now!
Now the plums are falling!
Fill up your baskets!
Ask us, young men!
This is the time, speak of it!

— Shi Ling, *Book of Odes*

Each village has a 'sacred place', called a Dragon Nest, where festivals and feast days and ceremonies are held. This could be a river, a spring, a grove or a place name. In autumn, there may be marches or orgies and in spring, love games in the shape of poetic exchanges, songs, jokes and various competitions between young men and young women of marrying age coming from various villages. Unions usually follow such days, sealing alliances between different villages.

The Dragon Nests are supposedly found at the intersection of areas of influence of two or more *ben-di shen*. They are, thus, sacred places, supposedly protected from any evil influence and connect to places of good fortune known as dragon lines. This explains why such important moments such as weddings and popular festivals are held there.

Two Examples of Spring Festivals

The Dance of the Dragons: During this festival, groups of boys and girls dance at the peak of the floodwaters, imitating the dance of two male and female dragons in entice them to mate and fertilise the waters, making the water pure and rich with fish. This rite also symbolises the call for rain, source of life and thus homage to birth and reincarnation.

The Festival of the Orchids: The young men and women gather together to pick orchids and throwing them on the waters and calling to the souls of ancestors to reincarnate. The festival ends with the young women receiving an orchid blossom from the young man whom she hopes to marry.

These festivals have ancient roots considered by the legislators as licentious and scandalous, and many have been forbidden. However, they represent a religious celebration of the cycle of life and many rulers of the *jiang hu* encourage and take part in them.



Characteristics

Even the most humble dragon is a creature beyond the ken of mortals, no matter his power. Attacking a dragon is a blasphemy against the Heavens, severely punished by the gods. Sometimes, dragons can offer gifts to mortals: often part of their own body, which they reshape appropriately.

Jianglong, the Dragon-Sword

In the tail of a dragon sleeps the magical sword named Jianglong. It is a precious weapon, harder than diamond and more brilliant than gold. Many *wu xia* have gone in search of a dragon to ask it for the honour of bearing such a weapon.

As a magical weapon, Jianglong possess a reserve of Chi of 16 points.

It blesses its possessor with the following: Tao of the Destructive Breath 4, Tao of Six Directions 2.

It has a Damage of 5.

The sword has a Renown of 50.

Tian Nu

Once there lived in the heavens a nymph called Fang Zhi, who served the gods by sewing for them coats of incomparable beauty. One day, she and her sisters decided to descend to the Earth to bathe in a river. Leaving their crane-feather coats on the bank, they dived naked into the cold waters.

Not far from the river lived a young orphan, a cowherd called Yang Guan. Not quite eighteen, he had not yet taken a wife. Living alone, his only friend was an old ox, who could speak. Together, they shared the joys and pains of existence.

That day, having worked hard, Yang Guan led his ox to the river to let him drink. The spectacle that awaited him there, stupefied him: celestial nymphs playing happily in the water. Though all were beautiful, it was Fang Zhi that caught his attention. Seeing the longing on the face of his friend, the ox breathed in his ear, "Take her feathered coat and she will have to stay here and become your wife". At first hesitant, Yang Guan finally ran to the verge and snatched up the garments of the unknown girl. Surprised by the young man's sudden appearance, the other nymphs took their vestments and flew up to the Heavens; but Fang Zhi, scarlet, could not leave the water because Yang Zhi had her clothes. "Give me back my coat!" She begged him and Yang Zhi accepted on the one condition that she became his wife. Despite her embarrassment, Fang Zhi fell for the charming and audacious young mortal, and she agreed to marry him.

Before long, the cowherd and the nymph grew inseparable. While he guarded his cows and laboured, she wove. She taught her technique to other young

girls and they quickly learnt how to weave the most magnificent clothes. The whole neighbourhood soon grew to like Fang Zhi.

Time passed. A few years later, Yang Guan and Fang Zhi had a son and a daughter, but the gods learnt that a celestial nymph was living on Earth and had married a mortal. Furious at this violation of the laws of the universe, the Jade Emperor sent a messenger to find Fang Zhi and to bring her back to the Heavens. Deeply missing her husband and children, she wept greatly from pain and loss.

After the young nymph had returned to the palace of the Jade Emperor, Yang Guan was inconsolable over the loss of his wife and their children wept for their mother. Carrying his children in two baskets at either end of a branch, he decided to go and find her. He had discovered her tracks after many years of searching but the gods opened a great and deep river to stop him.

Thus, on either side of the wild waters, the cowherd and the nymph watched each other from afar, unable to meet. Yang Guan refused to leave his side of the river, and on the other side, Fang Zhi watched the dangerous water, weeping, refusing to sew for the gods.

Faced with the couple's pain, the Jade Emperor finally conceded and allowed them to meet once a year. Since then, at the seventh day of the seventh month, magpies form a bridge on which Yang Guan and his children can meet Fang Zhi.

It is said that on this day, it always rains: they are the tears of the nymph who, holding her children and the hands of her husband, cries with sadness.

— Popular tale

Description

The *tian nu*, or celestial nymphs, are the servants at the court of the Jade Emperor. Immortal women of incomparable beauty, they can come and go between the Heavens and the Earth thanks to their crane-feathered coats.

Popular legends are full of tales of love between mortals and nymphs. The best known is that of the cowherd and the nymph weaver, who can only meet once a year. Thus, every year on the seventh day of the seventh month, many people stay outside, contemplating the two constellations on either side of the Milky Way, the Cowherd and the Weaver. It is customary to offer them flowers and fruits to commemorate the memory of their impossible love.

These legends have a basis in reality and unions between mortals and nymphs were not uncommon in ancient times. Descendants of such unions usually have a heroic destiny, thanks to the sacred blood that flows through their veins.

Characteristics

The *tian nu*, though only minor deities, are far superior to mortals and are immortal, protected by the gods; they only have one thing to fear when they descend to the Earth – that a man steal their crane feather coats (see *Qin Legends*, p31). Without these they cannot rejoin the Heavens and are bound to marry those who have stripped them naked. Their beauty is such that many men are ready to risk the fury of the gods to marry one...

New Gift

Heir of a Celestial Nymph: The character counts among his ancestors a *tian nu*, inheriting a certain affinity with the Heavens. Once per gaming session, he can immediately reroll a Test using his Earth Aspect and choose the best result.

A Few More Celestial Creatures

He

The immortal cranes are, along with the *kilin*, the favoured mounts of immortals. They are capable of flying between Heaven and the Earth and crossing without fear the immortal domains.

The celestial cranes make their nests at the top of Mount Kulun where the Queen Mother of the West dwells and sometimes on the Immortal Isles in the Eastern Sea.

Sometimes, such birds descend to the Earth and permit a man to climb on their backs. This is generally only a pure-hearted hero who has the honour of receiving such divine favour.

Metal 4 Water 6 Earth 5
Wood 4 Fire 5

Skills: Bite and Claw 3, Perception 6, Dodging 4

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (beak and claws), Flight

Chi: 24

Passive Defence: 12

Breath of Life: 25 (9/0, 7/0, 5/-1, 3/-3, 1/-5)

Special: Capable of passing from one world to another and appearing anywhere in the world in the blink of an eye.

Long Ma

The horse-dragon is the mount of the gods, who train them in the stables of the celestial palace. Possessing the head of a horse and the feet of a dragon, it is more docile than the *kilin*, with which it shares a certain symbolism. It is not unheard of to see a *long ma* on Earth, and sometimes an exceptional mortal may be given such a mount as a gift.

Metal 4 Water 6 Earth 2
Wood 2 Fire 3

Skills: Claw 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (claws), Terror 7

Chi: 14

Breath of Life: 26 (9/0, 7/0, 5/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Tian Yang

The thunder-sheep are rams raised by the Dragon-Kings, capable of flying and creating thunder; they pass through clouds and sometimes provoke storms by fighting in them. Their wool is similar to clouds,



soft and vaporous, and clothing made with such cloth possesses celestial powers. Capturing and eating a thunder-sheep is a grave crime against the Heavens.

Metal 4 Water 5 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 3

Skills: Charge 3, Perception 2, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 5 (lightning), Flight

Chi: 14

Breath of Life: 26 (9/0, 7/0, 5/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Special: Its wool can be used to make magical clothing.

Thunder-Sheep Wool Clothing

Woven by young *tian nu* raised by the Dragon Kings, such a garment protects its wearer against weather and physical threats, as well as giving the bearer the air of a king.

As a magical object, the clothing possesses a Chi reserve of 8 points.

It augments the Water Aspect of the bearer by 1.

It makes its bearer immune to lightning and extreme heat (up to 100°C) and from cold (down to -60°C).

The clothing duplicates the effects of the following Taos: Tao of Six Directions 3, Tao of the Light Step 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 3.

It offers a Protection of 2.

It possesses a Renown of 20.



The Yao

There once lived a monkey in a great and beautiful forest. It lived a life much like the other monkeys, playing in the trees and eating the fruits that grew there.

One day, when it had left its forest out of curiosity, it was able to watch men working. The great beardless beings were digging a hole to guide a river into it to make it go where they wished. The little monkey was so impressed that it decided to explore the world of men to further understand this strange species. At this time, the August Sages governed men, teaching them to tame nature by building towns and canals. Everywhere in the country, people were working the earth and building walls. The monkey saw all this and lost his animal spirit: it too wanted to be a man and build great things with its hands!

When he returned to his forest, he had changed. He no longer wanted to play in the trees – he wanted to build a village. He attempted to build a house at once, and tried to organise his fellows because he had realised that it was in working together that humans built great things. He gave orders, formed groups and sent the other monkeys to gather fruits so those who had come could eat once their work was complete. But beasts are not men, and the monkey's orders were often forgotten as soon as they were given. He was finally chased away with stones and branches, for the savage animals rejected those who thought to command them.

The monkey had also changed physically: taller, he held himself upright, his face was smoother and he no longer had a place within the forest. He decided to go and live amongst men, to whom he felt closer, but when he arrived in a village he was greeted with fear and caution: no longer a monkey, but not a human either, his appearance meant that they thought him a monster and he was once again chased away.

Saddened, the monkey then climbed the highest mountains to speak to the gods. Who was he and why did all reject him? The response plunged him into an abyss of confusion: "You wanted to raise yourself higher than the place the universe had planned for you, but you have not been able to completely reach what you wished to become. You have no place in this world or any other, not until you have reached the end of your path," was the response of the great Jade Emperor, wisest amongst the gods.

The monkey returned from Heaven and passed through the Kunlun Mountains. Might he find a place amongst the immortals that lived there? However, the Queen-

Mother of the West sent him away: "Neither man nor beast, you must create your own realm. It is a blessing as well as a curse."

The monkey returned to the world of men and still wanders there today, trying to find a place to create a kingdom for him and his own..."

— Popular tale

The Yao

Terrifying and pitiless demons to some, mischievous and harmless nature spirits to others, the *yao* are beings that inspire fear, caution, sometimes hate and always curiosity. Their many powers, their capacity to transform into animals, the sometimes cruel tricks they play on humans: all of this explains the mixed feelings and uncertainties they create among mortals who have to deal with them.

However, the truth about the *yao* is at once more simple and more complex than all the theories put forward. In fact, the *yao* are simply animals who have reached a level of wisdom and understanding of the universe which has allowed them to transcend their nature and to approach a human state of being. For the wisest Taoists, the status of *yao* is to an animal what that of an immortal is to a human: the result of a fusion with the superior truth of the Tao.

In fact, it must be understood that Man is not a creature like the others, created by Nü Wa from yellow clay. Humanity has drifted away from the divine and no longer innately knows the laws of the universe. They can regain this knowledge, however, through learning, meditation, the ascetic life or the creation of an elixir, which raises them towards the Tao and gives powers to rival the gods; and so it is for the animals: certain amongst them, the most exceptional of their race, are capable of perceiving a greater reality. Attempting to approach it, they follow a path similar to that which a human follows to become immortal and can become what is known as *yao*. One of several proofs of this theory is the apparent immortality of the *yao*, who can live ten thousand years or more!

For most, as much among humans as the *yao* themselves, reaching this stage is the end, the pinnacle of evolution for simple animals. However, some believe that the state of *yao* is only a stopping point before reaching the ultimate goal: becoming a human body and soul, so to finally be able to access the true path that is the Tao. They murmur that there exist certain Taoists capable of guiding the *yao* on this path...

Becoming a Yao

As has been shown, an animal is capable of raising itself towards the divine in order to acquire the status of *yao*, but how does this work? The theories are as numerous as spring leaves; however, there are several distinguishable truths:

Firstly, an animal may become a *yao* by itself, evolving of its own free will to acquire immortality. The animal that follows this path is different from its fellow: more intelligent, tougher, stronger, or in some other way more predisposed to search out its place in the universe and move beyond it. The animals capable of doing this are extremely rare.

A wandering Taoist himself travelling the Way can guide an animal of his choice. Often, this is not the result of a conscious decision by the Taoist or *fangshi*. His animal was probably just his companion or familiar and living at the side of an adept of the Tao slowly revealed the Great Truth to it (thus, a monkey raised to help an alchemist at his laboratory ends up comprehending the placing of the elements and their interactions, creating the first step towards becoming a *yao*). However, it can happen that a Taoist consciously guides an animal, hoping to understand the path that leads to immortality by observing the evolution of his disciple into a *yao*. Similarly, a *yao* can choose to educate another animal in this fashion to become his equal.



Like certain humans, the Heavens may choose an animal to live a destiny out of the ordinary. The decisions of the gods belong only to them and it is presumptuous for a simple mortal to attempt to understand them, and it is hard to understand why a simple animal may be chosen to benefit from divine favour. This often results in transforming the animal into a *yao*, since being touched by the Heavens is one of the ways leading to comprehension of the universe.

Finally, a *yao* can simply be born as such, if the parents are also both *yao* (if only one of the parents is a *yao*, the child of such a union is called a *ban yao* or *yao xie*).

There are hundreds of rumours about the ways *yao* come to be. It is said that if the light of the stars bathes a being for ten thousand years it becomes a *yao* (an odd theory since in order to live so long, the animal should already be a *yao*). Some believe that an animal becomes a *yao* after drinking human or demon blood, which explains the cruelty of such beings. Others believe that *yao* are no more than nature spirits, manifestations of the gods of the earth or the forests. There are still more numerous theories, all more fantastic than the last, in villages and inns, after night has fallen and the wind blows outside...

The Yao in the Warring States' Society

The place of the *yao* within the world of men is ambiguous.

No longer animals, they do not have their place among their less-evolved comrades... Not yet human, it is difficult for them to find a place within that society... Moreover, not being immortals either, the Kunlun Mountains and the Eastern Islands are not easy for them to access (although many legends tell of *yao* who have made a place for themselves there).

In fact, the majority of *yao* live amongst themselves or alone, isolated hermits searching for wisdom on the highest mountains. However, the *yao* are drawn to men and cannot help but follow them. While some are happy with only sporadic meetings, others are so fond of human company that they attempt at all costs to live amongst them, which can often be problematic.

In the Cities

The great cities of the *Zhongguo* are metropolises inhabited by tens of thousands of people, each one

following an occupation and living their lives without bothering their neighbours. Such cities are ideal for *yao* wishing to blend in with humanity unnoticed. The anonymity of the large urban centres allows each to have their habits, oddities and eccentricities without being too obvious.

Thus, the most sociable of the *yao*, which are not a large majority, often settle in towns and live a life according to their inner natures: the *yao*-foxes join pleasure houses, the *yao*-rats melt into the underworld, the *yao*-tigers join the militia, etc. In this way, they can assuage their curiosity towards the human world while still leading a pleasant life according to their natures.

The other great advantage of living with townspeople is that they are more rational, less superstitious than the country rustics. Even then, the *yao* tend to hide their natures from the mortals they encounter, who would probably not believe it even if it was right in front of their eyes; the era of reason and rationalisation has closed their eyes to the marvels that always impinge on the world.

In the Country

In the vast countryside of the *Zhongguo*, things are rather different, where men have remained suspicious, superstitious and fearful of the forces of nature. The existence of local divinities and fabulous beings has remained a reality to them, so *yao* wishing to live amongst them must be particularly careful as to not arouse fear and suspicion.

Those living outside the towns are quick to build a pyre or lynch anything that seems strange to them, or which presents traits that may seem demonic in their eyes. The many physical details that differentiate a *yao* from a human being are to them marks proving the strange and unholy nature of the poor unfortunate who has fallen into their hands.

The anonymity of the large cities does not exist in villages: everyone knows everyone for several *li* around and strangers are watched with fear and hostility; more so if they show traits that make the watchers think that they may have a monstrous or demonic nature!

However, in certain communities the *yao* have chosen to show themselves as they truly are. This, of course, only happens in communities where nature and its divinities are considered as benevolent and in presenting themselves as emissaries of those, the *yao* have managed to integrate. Certain *yao* even abuse this situation by tricking the villagers into venerating them as gods – an extremely risky trick considering how ready men are to burn their idols these days...

In the Jiang Hu

By its very essence, the world of forests and lakes is the refuge of pariahs, the solitary and the eccentric: it is thus the ideal place for *yao* wishing to conciliate curiosity with security.

One of the rules of the *jiang hu* is not to ask questions: each has his reasons for coming to live in the world of martial arts and they belong only to him. However, despite this apparent indifference (which is a mark of respect – everyone in the *jiang hu* has to right to a second chance regardless of their past), the world of martial arts is a real society with laws and rules, led by clans and populated by many individuals, either natives or those with a secret to hide.

Thanks to their all but eternal life, many *yao* can become masters of martial arts, it is thus not hard for them to join a clan with an aim to founding their own some day. Some desire to live as hermits while many others chose the life of a *wu xia* searching those to fight and those to train. Thus, a great number of martial arts owe their existence to these mythical *yao*, or warriors pretending to be them to imbue their skills with a mystical aura. More than in any other part of the *Zhongguo*, it is in the *jiang hu* that the *yao* living in the world of men make their homes.

The Yao and Exorcists

Since the beginning of time, there have been quarrels between Taoists over the *yao* regarding their place in the universe.

In fact, the *yao* can be affected by the art of Exorcism: the powers that the *fangshi* learn to fight against demons can also be used against the *yao*. A supernatural creature is vulnerable to techniques of Exorcism because it violates the laws of the universe (such as ghosts refusing to leave for the *Feng Du*, or demons who walk the Earth, which is not their place), which is enough for most exorcists to decide that the *yao* must, like demons, be battled and eliminated, or at the very least sent back to their original animal condition. After all, the reason they have a weakness to Exorcism is that their existence in an abnormality and the role of exorcists is to preserve the balance of the universe by correcting such abnormalities.

However, a more moderate camp, in which are found many alchemists and practitioners of *nei dan* (Internal Alchemy), argue that unlike demons, the *yao* are not innately evil and that the path they follow puts them beyond the judgement of men. For these *fangshi*, mortals do not have the right to interfere with the existence of *yao*.

Between these two extremes, the majority of Taoists judge these things according to the individual case. If a *yao* is a menace or presents a malevolent temperament, it must be eliminated. If a *yao* is happy to live in peace and is working with, and has found a place among, humans then it must be left in peace.

The truth, like everything concerning the *yao*, is complex, because from the beginning, only man was meant to understand the Tao and unite with it, but animals followed their examples and also wanted to follow the Way. Thus, the existence of *yao* is, in fact, a transgression of certain laws of the universe: animals who attempt to transcend their condition, a privilege normally reserved for humans. However, this transgression does no harm: it was simply unforeseen and thus does not disrupt the harmony of the universe. Most of all, it is, for the most part, temporary: an animal that becomes a *yao* in on its way to becoming a human, and from there truly uniting with the Tao, once more obeying the laws of the cosmos.

Yao Characteristics

The *yao* are different from humans in numerous ways. Having diverse and varied powers, often in accord with their animal origins, they also control a natural magic quite different from the rituals of Taoism.

This chapter presents the rules for the creation of a *yao*, step-by-step, for the Game Master to incorporate *yao* NPCs into the campaign (although it is strongly advised that the Game Master does not to allow the players to create *yao* characters).

Animal Origins

To begin with, when deciding the kind of *yao* to create, choose what animal it came from. A *yao*-snake is different from a *yao*-buffalo, for example. In theory, any kind of animal can become a *yao* but as a general rule it is only amongst the most evolved species that they are found: fox, monkey, serpent, tiger, cat, etc. A Game Master wanting to create an unusual *yao* could choose a different animal to make it a surprise: lizard, eagle, shark, etc.

The choice of animal determines the perspective and personality of the *yao*. In fact, although they have, for the most part, transcended what they had been, the *yao* remain marked by it and their psychology reacts accordingly. For example, a *yao*-snake is cold and distant, a *yao*-monkey is playful and a trickster, a *yao*-cat is seductive and cruel, etc.



History

The *yao* are not common creatures in the *Zhongguo*. Although they can be found almost anywhere, they remain hidden the majority of the time and may be hidden in the massive flow of humanity. If the Game Master wants to create a scene with a *yao*, he should consider the reason for the creature to be there, even if it is just a brief appearance (players are often surprised when odd events or people cross their path and may prove curious). What is the *yao*'s name, where does it come from, how has it acquired this status, why is it in the scenario, etc., are many of the questions posed to which the Game Master should find answers.

Aspects and Secondary Aspects

The Game Master is free to add as many points as he wants between the *yao*'s Aspects, but should be careful that this reflects the creature's animal nature. A *yao*-monkey would have a high level of Water and Wood, a *yao*-tiger would have many in Metal, etc. A *yao* can have one or more of their Aspects reach level 6, but the Game Master should be careful not to abuse this: such a being must be old and experienced to reach such power.

The *yao* then calculates its secondary Aspects as indicated in the *Qin* Core Rulebook, its Chi, Passive Defence, Breath of Life and Renown (although many *yao* prefer anonymity to glory).

Gifts and Weaknesses

The Game Master can give a Gift and a Weakness to his *yao*, being careful to choose one which connects to its base animal (Courage of the Tiger for a *yao*-tiger, Placidity of the Turtle for a *yao*-snake, for example).

Skills

Here, too, a Game Master is free to spend as many points as he wants for the *yao* to conform to his ideas. As far as possible, these Skills should be an extension of the *yao*'s nature: a *yao*-fox should have a good level in Seduction, while a *yao*-snake would have several Learning Skills.

The majority of *yao* have retained their animal instinct and their innate capacity for combat, so their level for Hand-to-Hand and Dodging is always at a minimum of 1. They can possess combat abilities, to the limit of their Martial Skills, and can train in one or more styles and master their Techniques.

Supernatural Powers

It is by the many powers they master that a *yao* is distinguished from humans.

Common Yao Powers

Although often very different, all *yao* have these powers in common:

Immortality: The *yao* have reached a stage which allows them to no longer age. Their lifespan is theoretically infinite, although they can still die from wounds, illness, poison, etc. However, even in the case of infections and poisons, their resistance is much higher than that of a normal human: the Virulence of illnesses and poisons are halved when applied to a *yao* (round up).

Shape-Shift: All the *yao* possess the Shape-Shift power, allowing them to transform from their animal appearance to their human appearance and vice-versa. This transformation takes only one action. According to the form they take, they may lose the ability to use certain Skills.

Animal Language: All *yao* can speak and understand the language of their original species.

Vulnerability to Exorcism: The techniques of Exorcism are very effective against the *yao*.

Animal Trait: Although most *yao* are capable of taking on an almost perfect human form, all keep a feature relating to their true nature: a *yao*-fox might have golden eyes, a *yao*-snake might have a hissing voice or cold skin, a *yao*-monkey might have their back or hands softly furred, etc. The *yao* learn to hide these features, or even profit from them in certain cases. There are also certain *yao* who, even in their human forms, remain strongly marked by their animal side and have particularly visible marks: a *yao*-buffalo might have horns, a *yao*-tiger might be marked with black stripes all over their body, a *yao*-rat might have a tail, etc.

Inherited Animal Powers

More specific to individuals, the abilities that a *yao* inherits from its animal side express themselves in two ways: by the use of supernatural powers and by powers that are the equivalent of Taos. The Games Master should select the *yao*'s powers to reflect its nature.

Natural Weapon: Claws, teeth, horns, hooves: the *yao* know how to use their natural gifts in combat.

Natural Armour: Scales, thick hide, solid muscles: many *yao* have means to resist the worst of wounds.

Terror: Some *yao* frighten off humans by showing their most terrifying animal features; they can use this power at will, it is not permanently active.

Various Taos: The Game Master can give the *yao* powers close to that of Taos to demonstrate certain abilities inherent to their natures. For example, a *yao*-monkey would be a master in the use of the Taos of Six Directions and the Light Step, a *yao*-bear would be able to use the Tao of the Strengthened Body, a *yao*-fox would use the Tao of Serene Presence. Obviously, the *yao* can develop other Taos in parallel.

Any other power or ability the Game Master chooses to give the *yao* that matches its original nature.

Magic

No *yao* practises magic, but a few who feel closer to nature are able to draw on its pure and abundant energy without having to resolve to the prayers and rituals of the *fangshi*.

In game terms, the Game Master may give the *yao* powers that are identical to those of *fangshi* Taoists, in any of the three paths open to them: External Alchemy, Internal Alchemy and Divination. The *yao* obviously cannot reproduce the effects of Exorcism.

Technically, the *yao* use magic in the same way as *fangshi*; the only difference is the manner in which the Game Master decides to describe its effects. The *yao* practise a magic that is more direct, more brutal and less ritualised than that of men; this affects how the Game Master presents *yao* magic in a scene.

The Different Kinds of Yao

Yao-spiders

The hero, Jin Kuan, known as the Jade Clawed Dragon, had finally won the rigged tournament organised by the Lady of the Thousand Poisons to bring together and destroy the brave warriors of the *jiang hu*. His victory had been enhanced by the capture of the traitress, and he was now a hero famed throughout the land. Not long after, he learned that his old friend, the Hermit of the Two Forests, had become a prisoner in the Widows' Palace, a place of legend that all wise men in the world of martial arts avoided like the plague. Apparently,

the old Taoist had been investigating the actions of the strange women who lived there, and no one had seen him since. Many clans called on Jin Kuan to go to the Palace to shed light on this mystery and put an end to the malevolence that dwelled there.

The valiant *wu xia* buckled on his sword and set off for the Widows' Palace. Dusk was covering the world when he arrived to present himself at the gates of the imposing pavilion, calling for an audience with the Queen of Spiders, the mistress of the Palace. Three women came to escort him. They were beautiful, but with a disturbing and unsettling beauty; dressed in black, their faces impassive, they led the hero to their mistress' audience hall. She lay among silk cushions, her vaporous robe barely covering the generous curves of her body. Her red eyes rested on Jin Kuan, disdain burning there, along with a certain interest.

"To what do we owe the honour of your visit, young warrior?" Her voice was soft but menacing in some indefinable fashion.

"Rumours have led my feet to your door, my lady. I search for my friend, the Hermit of the Two-Forests, and it is said he dwells with you."

The Queen of Spiders leaned forwards, looking interested. "That is true. The old man visited us and then continued on his way. I do not know where his path has led him since he left us."

Perplexed, Jin Kuan thanked the lady and asked her permission to retire, but the Queen of Spiders asked him to rest in her Palace, as night had now fallen. The *wu xia* was led to luxurious apartments, with a comfortable bed, whose few candles were not enough to completely banish the darkness. A filling supper awaited him, and after eating Jin Kuan settled down to rest, his sword beside him as the reputation of the place and its strange atmosphere gave him grounds for caution.

In the middle of the night, the door opened silently, letting in a graceful feminine silhouette. Half drawing his sword, Jin Kuan rose to feel the Queen of Spiders press herself against him, as eager and bold with her motions as with her words. With her expert caresses, the lady exhausted the warrior's resistance, and he fell into her arms.

The next morning, the Queen of Spiders was alone in the bed, her body at rest and her spirit satisfied. From Jin Kuan, as with his friend the Hermit of the Two Forests, no one ever heard again. It is in this way that the greatest heroes can fall to the charms of women... or creatures who look like them...

— Chronicles of the Jiang Hu, by Northern Owl



Description

Yao-spiders are without a doubt among the rarest; however, their existence is relatively well-known thanks to many legends about their deeds. The vast majority of *yao*-spiders are women. Very beautiful, they have a reputation for being great seducers, not as part of a game like the foxes, but to feed after the consummation of the liaison. So many tales tell of the cannibalistic tendencies of the *yao*-spiders that their reputation is particularly deplorable, although much vaunted is their altruism towards women. Many exorcists attempt to eliminate them without asking questions, if they meet them.

Yao-spiders live in isolated communities, often in the depths of the countryside or the most desolate areas of the *jiang hu*, where even the clans have no authority. Often a queen leads this community, who settles in a palace or small village sumptuously decorated and furnished: the *yao*-spiders like luxury, silk and riches.

Characteristics

In animal form, *yao*-spiders are huge spiders, the size of a man. When they take human form, *yao*-spiders like to adopt the features of a young woman with a dark beauty and generous body to attract men into their web - in the figurative sense, as well as the literal one. In this appearance, a few details betray their true nature: red eyes, fine and vaporous hair, predatory traits, and so on.

The animal powers that *yao*-spiders possess are primarily: Natural Weapon (web), Terror, Tao of the Light Step, Tao of Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Lost Shadow, Tao of the Serene Presence.

Jun Lin, the Queen-to-be

In appearance, Jun Lin is a beautiful young woman, living in a little pavilion just outside the town. Most men know that, for a few coins, she is ready to open her legs and more, and every night, many knock upon her door.

In reality, Jun Lin is a young *yao*-spider who wants to birth a tribe and become their queen. For this, she hopes to use the seed of the men she sees night after night, and who she resists devouring so as not to arouse suspicion. Until now, she has not had much success: only two of her children have survived, who she passes off as her servants. They are both *ban yao*, and her mother waits until they are old enough to know men, so that they can breed also.

Metal 2 Water 5 Earth 3

Wood 4 Fire 5

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Herbalism 2, Perception 3, Dance 2, Eloquence 2, Seduction 4, Hand-to-Hand 1, Bianshu 3, Daoshu 2, Acrobatics 4, Dodging 2

Techniques: Bianshu (Strangle, Disarm), Daoshu 2 (Feint, Direct Hit)

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (web), Terror 9

Taos: Tao of the Light Step 3, Tao of the Sudden Lightning 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 3

Animal Trait: A mark at the base of her spine that she passes off as a tattoo

Chi: 36

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 11

Renown: 15

The Web of the Black Widow Style (Bianshu Whip)

History: The origins of this style are lost in time. It is said that a *yao*-spider created it, using her web as a whip to chastise any men who thought to abuse her. Sensitive to the pain of brutalised women, she agreed to teach her techniques so that they may defend themselves against their tormentors. The Web of the Black Widow Style thus survived until the present day and is usually only taught to women. It is, therefore, particularly popular among the matriarchal clans of the *jiang hu*.

Basis: Only the grace of a woman gives this style its true strength. Once per turn, the character can decide to replace their Metal score with that of Water.

The Spider Weaves Her Web

Requirements: Bianshu (Competent), Repel Technique, Tao of the Breath of Power (Level 2)

Cost in Chi: 5

Effects: (action) In wrapping her whip around her adversary, the character can move them wherever she wishes for a quick and fatal blow. For each action spent guiding her adversary towards her trap (the victim cannot accomplish any actions in this time, save to defend himself), the character can add her level of Wood to damage inflicted by her next blow against an adversary trapped this fashion.

Secondary Effects: The fatal blow makes the end of the whip glow red like a spider's eyes.

The Spider Exhausts Her Prey

Prerequisite: Bianshu (Expert), Mystification Technique, Tao of the Breath of Power (Level 2), Tao of the Thousand Bees

Cost in Chi: 6

Effects: (attack) When the whip lands a blow, the character strikes at the victim's spirit as well as their body, reducing the victim's Chi by the number shown on the Yin die, in addition to the normal damage from the blow. If the victim has no Chi left, the amount adds to physical damage.

Secondary Effects: When struck in this way, the victim seems thinner and weaker.

The Spider's Poison

Prerequisite: Bianshu (Master), Medicine (Competent), Direct Blow Technique, Mystification Technique, Tao of the Breath of Power (Level 3), Tao of the Inner Eye (Level 2)

Cost in Chi: 8

Effects: (attack) The character knows the weak points in the human nervous system and knows how to strike them with her whip to create intolerable pain. When struck, the victim feels such pain that they suffer a penalty to all attacks equal to the character's Metal score for her Medicine level in turns.

Secondary effects: The area struck in this way turns red.

Yao-buffaloes

Li Guan the farmer was an old and solitary man who lived in an old and crumbling house. His wife had been dead for several years and his children had left to seek their fortune in town and had never seen him again, nor sent him any news. The only friend he had was his old buffalo, who some say was as old as he was. Together they ploughed the fields, sowed and harvested, and then sold the fruits of their labours at market.

One year it was very dry, and Li Guan no longer had enough grass to feed his old buffalo, and decided to sell it rather than see it perish of hunger. Taking it to the market, he vaunted its qualities to the disdainful young men, and finally sold it to a landowner, who paid him an insultingly small amount. Li Guan stroked the muzzle of his horned friend and returned to his home heartsick and dead inside.

Several days passed, and one day, someone knocked on Li Guan's door. Opening it to greet this unexpected guest, the old farmer found himself face-to-face with a tall young man, extremely well built and carrying several sacks of grain. "Father, I have returned!" said the young man. Stunned, Li Guan let him inside. The young man did not resemble the son that had left him so long ago, but then, it had been so long, he must have changed...

Once lunch had passed, the young man drew seed grain from the sack, along with a bronze ploughshare. He began to dig furrows and sow the grain, and continued this for several days. The rain fell, the harvest began to grow and as time passed, Li Guan grew used to his son's presence. They talked until late into the night, went to the field and market together and the old man felt blessed by the gods because he knew that the young man was not his son, returned to his hearth, but his old friend the buffalo, who wished to accompany him to the end of his days.

— Popular tale



53

Description

Yao-buffaloes are relatively unknown, for such an animal is rarely believed to have the wisdom and intelligence necessary to transcend its condition. However, buffaloes see more than many think: observers, they have long lived among men and have learnt much from them since the days of the August Shen Nong, the buffalo-headed. Thus, these yao are not as rare as most believe...

For the most part, *yao*-buffaloes are powerfully built but sometimes seem quite slow; in truth, they prefer to take time pondering a problem and consider all the implications before making a decision. They are unwavering, loyal, dependable; their friendship is as solid as steel. To make an enemy of a *yao*-buffalo is a great error as their strength and anger can overturn mountains...

Quiet and hard working, *yao*-buffaloes live amongst men, attracting little attention, which allows them to live a quiet life, suiting their placid and conservative spirit. Tied to the Earth, they are most often farmers, working the soil and respecting the local divinities.

Characteristics

In human form, *yao*-buffaloes tend to take the shape of a man at the peak of his strength, tall and powerfully built, with a placid face. An excessive hairiness, a cow's tail or even horns are often the distinguishing marks of this *yao*.

The animal powers linked to transcended buffaloes are: Natural Weapon (horns, hooves), Natural Armour (hide, muscles), Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of the Clear Spirit.

Qiang Jing, the Bandit King

When Qiang Jing became a *yao*, he decided to settle in a nearby village, close to where he had lived his life as a buffalo, remaining close to those he had served in his previous life.

Working the earth and profiting from his privileged rapport with the forces of nature, he was quickly able to buy his own farm and lead a tranquil life, consisting of honest work, conversations at the local inn with his friends from the village and contemplations on the marvels of the world.

However, all this changed, as it so often does in the *Zhongguo*, because of war. The village community in which Qiang Jing lived was in the path of a powerful army from the neighbouring state, and this meant devastation. The houses were burnt, the fields ruined and the villagers executed or captured. Qiang Jing defended them with all his strength and killed many soldiers, but even a being of his power cannot best an army; after they finally captured him, he was sent into forced labour at a state building site.

He did not stay there long. His rage and hatred brought out his animal nature, doubling his strength. He broke free of his chains, killed the guards and fled with several others. Together, they decided to form a band of brigands harassing armies – guerrillas without affiliation or loyalty, attacking soldiers no matter where they came from. Qiang Jing became the leader of these men, who had gained some respect upon the revelation of his nature – horns had grown from his brow when the rage had overcome him.

Since then, Qiang Jing's band has recruited many men: villagers without homes, fleeing criminals, impoverished *wu xia*. Apart from the first of Qiang Jing's companions, the other men do not know of his true nature: the *yao*-buffalo always wears a helmet and they believe the horns are simply decorations. He has a price on his head in almost all the Warring States, but Qiang Jing knows he has all eternity for vengeance.

Yao-Buffalo Bandit King

Metal 6 Water 4 Earth 4

Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Herbalist 2, Perception 3, Learning (agriculture) 3, Intimidation 4, Legends 3, Art of War 2, Hand-to-Hand 4, Chuishu 6, Craft (various) 3, Swimming 2, Theft 1, Survival (forest) 3

Techniques: Hand-to-Hand (Throw, Trap, Total Block, Disarm), Chuishu (Knock-Out, Repel, Charge, Combination, Two Weapons)

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (horns), Natural Armour 2 (hide)

Taos: Tao of the Strengthened Body 3, Tao of the Breath of Power 2, Tao of the Clear Spirit 2

Animal Trait: An imposing pair of horns

Chi: 40

Breath of Life: 27 (11/0, 7/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: 40

Armour-Breaker

As a fierce warrior, Qiang Jing uses a fitting weapon: a heavy mace of bronze that he wields in one hand, when most men could not lift it above their heads.

Wielded by such a being, the mace, named Armour-Breaker, has become legendary and in time has acquired several traits.

This weapon does 5 damage. It has a Resilience of 13 and a Renown of 13.

Yao-cats

Colonel,

The city of Chendu fell quickly. The Han forces then abandoned it; the citizens did not resist long, and surrendered without too much trouble. Our soldiers have taken the city, which is no more than a large town, and the establishment of your militia has not proved much of a problem. Apparently the rumours of the massacres committed by our armies on recalcitrant populations was the reason for the slughtness of the resistance, further encouraged by the retreat of the enemy army, a retreat viewed very dimly by the population.

In the streets, our patrols are vigilant in maintaining law and order, without resting on their laurels. If we want to push our advantage, we must leave no trace of rebellion behind our lines. The inhabitants of Chendu live in fear of extermination, a fear supported by our execution of several criminals and looters captured when the city fell. The mood in the streets is morose and discouraged. The people no longer dare talk for fear of denunciation, and the town marketplace seems very calm, not to mention the pleasure quarter, which at present only our soldiers visit. In all, everything seems under control.

However, one thing - one person, rather - intrigues me. I do not know why I write of it to you, but a very insolent individual has drawn my attention. At first sight, he seems to be an inhabitant like the others, a simple artisan living in his home, but somehow in him there burns a strange fire. He does not seem fearful; he goes about his business as though our forces had not just seized his city. Oh, he does nothing illegal, nor does he defy us openly - he is content to live as though nothing was wrong. He goes to the market, walks the streets with his head up, speaks to people, and must be the only inhabitant who dares go to the bordellos. He readily salutes our soldiers or even buys them a drink at times (it was actually an under-officer, who was speaking to him, that first drew my attention to him). Intrigued, I went to visit his house. His home is immaculately clean and neat, decorated warmly. The man himself is polite, affable, and from our conversation was friendly, but also somehow uncomfortable: the time, the events, the outside world seemed to have no bearing in his eyes. I admit that his demeanour fascinated me, as a mouse of a cat.

His spirit is clearly of a superior cut to his fellow citizens. If there are others like him among the Han, I fear that our invasion may not continue as planned.

— Captain Su Jao's report to his Colonel, Luo Hen-Che

Description

One of the animals that has lived longest among humans is the cat, both in the countryside as well as the towns. Many sages claim, only half-joking, that it was the cat that domesticated man, not the other way round. In truth, this animal seems to always know what it wants and how to obtain it. Not surprising then that many yao have come from this species.

As many men as women, yao-cats have a sociable nature which pushes them to integrate. Brilliant and well spoken, the yao-cat likes seduction, but their normally distant natures make them seem haughty. With very little loyalty in their nature, the yao-cat knows how to play with the body as well as the altruistic intentions of the mind. Calm, it is closely tied to its hearth and has a very territorial temperament; violation of anything they believe to be theirs is the surest way of drawing their anger.

Yao-cats live mostly among humans. Their conciliatory and discrete temperament allows them to easily integrate and their detached character allows them to live at ease despite the turbulence of the outside world.

Characteristics

Yao-cats enjoy taking the shapes of young people with pleasant features and graceful movements. The details that betray their true nature are generally eyes with vertical pupils, a tail, particularly sharp canines, and so on.

Their animal powers are: Natural Weapons (claws, teeth), Terror, Tao of the Six Directions, Tao of the Light Step, Tao of Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Hidden Shadow, Tao of Ying and Yang, Tao of the Serene Presence.

Li Mao

Li Mao is a female master who, thanks to her intelligence, talent and stubbornness, has managed to attain the position of chief scribe in a wing of the Xianyang university library. Obviously, as a woman amid so many ambitious men, she was given the worst team her male colleagues could find her.

However, Li Mao's yao-cat nature allowed her to get the best out of the team of useless lumps she now heads; alternately cajoling and threatening, not afraid of using corporal punishment (some say that sometimes the crack of a whip breaks the silence of the library, but this



remains a rumour). She always manages to get what she wants, even if rarely on time.

It does not matter: the work is done, and well enough to assure Li Mao her post in the library, which she considers her true home.

Yao-Cat Chief Scribe

Metal 3 Water 5 Earth 3

Wood 4 Fire 3

Skills: Calligraphy 4, History 3, Literature 3, Learning (various) 2, Diplomacy 1, Etiquette 2, Intimidation 4, Seduction 3, Empathy 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, Bianshu 2, Daoshu 3, Stealth 1

Techniques: Bianshu (Strangle, Total Block), Daoshu (Two Weapons, Feint, Double Block)

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (claws), Terror 9

Taos: Tao of the Light Step 2, Tao of the Inner Eye 2, Tao of Ying and Yang 3, Tao of the Clear Mind 4

Animal Trait: Green eyes

Chi: 36

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 11

Renown: 25

Yao-pigs

Since I joined their little group, I have often asked myself why Fen Zhu continues to travel with Chenxi. Neither of them seems to appreciate the other, and barely a day goes by without the Zhao merchant, under the pretext of small talk, delivering his four truths to the young lady. His latest favourite and without a doubt the least funny, was to say she was so stupid as to try to exorcise him.

Chenxi herself would react only rarely. She had confided in me once that despite his obvious faults, Fen Zhu was, in his way, a sort of blessing to them, and it was better to see his good sides. In the face of my surprise, she assured me that among all the men she had met and who had promised tales and marvels, she had never seen such loyalty as that possessed by the rogue who spent his time telling her he was not her friend. Although he was insufferable when it came to the small troubles of life, complaining endlessly that he had to do everything himself, Zhu had often run the most terrifying of dangers for her, never speaking of it, and she was careful never to speak of it too so as not to make him uncomfortable...

However, the man did sometimes remember how to be the most agreeable of companions. When we stopped in towns, he had a knack for getting invites to all the best parties, and once there his presence and humour made his company a pleasure. He was completely changed. I often asked myself who was the real Zhu, the one who enchanted banquets, or the one who cursed Chenxi every chance he had?

One evening, when we had both been at the wine and were swapping filthy stories, I risked asking him the question. His countenance changed immediately and his expression closed off. I feared that I had provoked one of his famous rages and braced myself for a very nasty few minutes but he said nothing. He was just... serious. This sobered me instantly, this man laughed in the face of danger and I think that this was the one and only time I saw him so concerned. He told me that he had once travelled with his best friend, Metal Storm, a sword master from the Blade clan, and that the two of them wandered the Zhongguo, living a life that is probably now impossible. Their paths crossed that of Chenxi, and, although the merchant had been the first to notice the beauty of the exorcist, he found himself simply holding a torch in the face of the new couple. One could have thought him jealous, but it was nothing, Zhu was sincerely glad for his friend, although he naturally felt a little disappointed.

As they wandered, a horror that Chenxi was tracking possessed Metal Storm's body, and his spirit succumbed. The sword master, once so proud, was nothing more than a drooling body, shaking epileptically and capable only of incoherent sounds. Rather than exorcise him, Chenxi was afraid this would kill him and preferred not to. "Just until we can find a solution," she said. This lasted two days, and Zhu saw the young woman grow more and more distant, and his friend suffer in agony, a terrible indignity to the man he had once been. The merchant then entered the tent and, tears in his eyes, approached his friend, who could no longer recognise him and spat a string of insults that would have made a xiongnu blush. There, he slowly strangled him, all the time cursing Chenxi's cowardice and telling himself his friend would have done the same thing for him. It seemed to him that among the last choked words of Metal Storm, the sword master asked him to take care of the young exorcist and protect her.

Since then, just in case, he has kept his promise.

— Memories of the poet Zhu Li-Kuan

Description

Like the buffaloes, pigs seem as first sight to be little inclined to the path of *yao*. However, this animal is particularly useful to men in the *Zhongguo* and it has lived at the heart of human society for thousands of years. Despite this, *yao*-pigs remain rare. Many among themselves say that this is because the pigs prefer to stay as they are rather than become as ugly as men... no one knows if they are joking or not.

In fact, the thing that characterises a *yao*-pig above all is their solid sense of humour. They live life to the full and nothing pleases them more than a good meal in the company of charming and cheerful hosts. Good meat and drink are their passion, as much as games: a *yao*-pig wants to draw as much out of life as possible, and he gives as much as he receives, making them faithful but temperamental; they like giving presents to those around them. However, they are more than simply happy epicureans: *yao*-pigs have a sharp mind and spirit, and have striking intelligence, especially in their social contacts, but most of all, though their rages are rare, they are devastating and they hold grudges forever.

Yao-pigs live for the most part in small towns or the countryside. They often prefer work as merchants or inn owners and a few live as landlords. They like humans, but are also wary of them and do not give their friendship as easily as they make it seem...

Characteristics

The great majority of *yao*-pigs are men but there are a few females. Their human aspect is often of a portly person, with a jovial face and an expressive smile. Their usual animal traits include a snout-like nose, drooping ears, a small tail, bright pink skin, etc.

From their porcine nature, they draw the following powers: Natural Armour (hide), Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Breath of Power, Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of the Serene Presence.

Fen Zhu

For all or almost all, Fen Zhu is a man of around thirty years, well built, who enjoys the good life, known as much for his humour as his excesses and escapades. Paunchy, and trying vainly to hide his oncoming baldness, this Zhao merchant does his best to pass unnoticed. His pink skin, flushing to red when he is angry, and his flattened nose make him a memorable character.

Although, to be perfectly honest, it is rare that Fen Zhu passes unnoticed. Wandering the roads of the *Zhongguo*, he often returns to villages he has been to before and it is rare when his arrival does not result in rejoicing. In fact, far more than his small merchandise, he also brings with him echoes of the rest of the world, new distractions and good humour, along with presents for the children. Nonetheless, he is rarely welcomed in this way the first few times he passes through, for a very strange group, in the eyes of the villagers, accompanies him – and with good reason: the group is composed of a vagabond poet, a young lout, an imposing *wu xia* and an exorcist which, while not sinister, does not exactly inspire confidence.

The peasants' fears would be far worse if they knew the secret that the merchant has only ever told Chenxi: he is not human. Born in a farm in Zhao, he had once been the biggest and handsomest pig on the market, to the point that his owner no longer wanted to sell him, preferring to exhibit him in each town. Many crowded to see him and cursed the uglier pigs, all bought for slaughter. This strongly displeased a *yao*-pig, who was in the market that day, and, to punish him, he turned him into the ugliest creature under the heavens: a man. Since then, bit by bit, Fen Zhu has learnt how to turn back into a pig, but he can only truly return to himself when he has found wisdom... That said, in his honest opinion the challenge seems too boring and demands far too much discipline to be worth the effort.

Since then, Fen Zhu has not stopped wandering the roads of the *Zhongguo*, at first, at the side of his first and best friend, Metal Storm, then after his death, in the company of Chenxi, who he has sworn to protect.

Yao-Pig Merchant

Metal 2 Water 4 Earth 3
Wood 4 Fire 4

Skills: Calligraphy 1, Perception 1, Acting 2, Trade 4, Eloquence 3, Games 3, Exorcism 2, Hand-to-Hand 3, Stealth 1, Dodging 2, Theft 2

Techniques: Hand-to-Hand (Throw, Strangle, Charge)

Powers: Natural Weapons (fat) 2

Taos: Tao of the Inner Eye 2, Tao of Ying and Yang 3, Tao of the Clear Mind 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 3

Animal Trait: Pink skin and flat nose

Chi: 27

4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0,

Renown: 25



Zhuo Shi

The debonair Zhuo Shi spends most of his free time at the Three Blessings Inn, enjoying the fine meals for which he pays good money. Popular, this plump but always well-dressed man has friends throughout the town and women find him charming despite his size.

For many local families, the brave Zhuo Shi is a good match for their daughters because, along with the image of a lover of the good life, Zhuo Shi is also one of the best assistants to the city magistrate. Having entered his service as a simple servant, Zhuo Shi quickly advanced when his superior recognised his talents: a quick mind, and the young man had no equal when it came to gathering information from witnesses or suspects, seeming to do it easily. His jovial face and round body gained him sympathy which bordered on condescension, and he knew how to use it to gain confidence and revelations that the sternest magistrates would have trouble getting.

Today, Zhuo Shi is better placed to succeed the magistrate, whose retirement is imminent. The citizens know that with him, their town is in good hands and it is because of this that several suspicious individuals seek his death...

Yao-Pig Magistrate's Assistant

Metal 4 Water 2 Earth 3
Wood 4 Fire 4

Skills: Bureaucracy 2 Calligraphy 2, Investigation 5, Law 4, Perception 3, Diplomacy 2, Eloquence 2, Etiquette 1, Intimidation 3, Empathy 3, Hand-to-Hand 3, Jianshu 2, Horsemanship 1

Techniques: Hand-to-Hand (Repel, Block, Charge Whirlwind Block), Jianshu (Feint, Total Block)

Taos: Tao of the Strengthened Body 2, Tao of the Inner Eye 3, Tao of Serene Presence 3, Tao of the Clear Mind 3

Animal Trait: A small pig's tail, which he hides under ample clothing

Chi: 45

Breath of Life: 23 (11/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: 35

Yao-foxes

My artistic pilgrimage had led me to Qi, where the beautiful countryside, I had been told, would no doubt help to inspire a few odes.

I had travelled all day and hoped to find an inn to spend the night, or a relay post, but my road was depressingly barren. On top of that, as night fell, a few drops of rain began to fall, and soon turned into a deluge that soaked me to the bone in moments. Sighing, I resigned myself to spending the night under the stars; I headed into the woods in the hopes of at least finding a tree to shelter me from the cold rain.

I had barely crossed into the forest when soft music and faint light caught my attention. Not far away, I could make out a large lit building; I decided to go there and ask shelter for the night, perhaps in exchange for a few recitals. I hurried towards it, and knocked hard on the heavy wooden door. Before someone came to open it, I realised that this was a very beautiful building, richly illuminated and possessing a sort of natural grace. Pulling me from my contemplation, the door opened revealing a beautiful young girl with mischievous eyes.

Before I could speak, she took me by the arm and led me through a maze of corridors and stairs, until we reached a large salon.

Inside was the most beautiful woman I had ever had the pleasure to see. Dressed like a princess, she sat among a multitude of colourful cushions. Her face had the marks of youth but held a wisdom only acquired by those who have lived a long time. Each of her gestures as she served drinks was fluid and natural. Detaching my gaze from hers, I realised that there were other women in the room, talking amongst themselves and laughing behind their veils; all were beautiful but none could compare to my hostess. Once I was able to gain enough control over my tongue to thank her for her hospitality, she cut me off and explained that words are vain, and I would find other ways to thank her.

I am a man well versed in carnal matters, but this simple remark, pronounced in such a calm and innocent voice, made me blush violently. At once, a wave of girls came to surround me, removing my soaked chang pao, massaging my shoulders and feet, combing my tangled hair... At first surprised, I abandoned myself to these attentions with a sigh of relief. My hostess then asked me for news from the world, the states, the many conflicts, the current styles of philosophy... I saw she was as cultivated and vivacious as her body was graceful and attractive; she spoke to me of poets that I knew nothing about and asked me to recite a few of my

works. I happily passed time, but the night was drawing on, and the lady asked her followers to show me to my rooms.

Almost carried by the enthusiastic girls, I found myself in a tastefully decorated and furnished room, with a large and comfortable bed. Just as I thought myself free to relax and fall into sleep, I had the pleasant surprise of seeing several of the followers take their clothes off to join me under the covers. Enthusiastic and full of imagination, they had me live several unforgettable hours before disappearing, laughing, like a flock of butterflies.

Then my hostess arrived, barely dressed in a silken cape. Although I had just believed myself exhausted, I was surprised to feel my vigour returning, and we made love slowly and with great passion; my pleasure was far different from the one preceding it, deeper, more intimate. Finally, I fell asleep, my senses filled to the brim. When I awoke the next day, I was in the middle of a little clearing, alone and naked, my clothes and effects beside me. A dream? No. In my closed hand was a little fox statue, carved from beautiful, bright jade. Smiling, I got dressed and resumed my route.

— *Memoires of the poet Zhu Li-Kuan.*

Description

Yao-foxes are, without question, the most numerous of all in the world of men. Foxes are known for their intelligence and cunning, and so it is unsurprising that the majority of *yao* come from that species.

Yao-foxes are renowned for their mischievous spirit and sense of humour, which they often use to the detriment of humans around them. However, these tricks are rarely cruel and can in fact reveal to the victim that he has been the target of several universal truths. Many philosophers have found their calling after an encounter with such a being. *Yao*-vixens are notoriously great seductresses, overcoming men with their powers. It is often said of an alluring woman that she has the spirit of a fox; such a woman would qualify as a *hulijing* (*huli* means fox). Innumerable poets recall tales in which a man leaves his wife to live with a *yao*-vixen; and as many legends also tell of the woman finally falling in love with the man she had only thought only to use to amuse herself for a while.

In fact, the other characteristic of *yao*-foxes is their great interest in humans. This trait is shared by all the *yao*, but foxes seem to be those most drawn to the mortal world. They have an unquenchable thirst for all that concerns human society: art, history, political relations,

wars, lives of famous people, literature, etc. They are so fascinated that a man capable of teaching them something they do not know finds himself enormously repaid in some fashion or another.

Although this thirst leads them to be very sociable, few *yao*-foxes live among men in their cities or villages. They prefer to stay in the shelter of their forests and wait until humans come looking for them (by chance or because they have been guided there). Some hide under the guise of a wandering artist and walk the roads of the *Zhongguo*, visiting societies without actually belonging to them. With little interest in martial arts, *yao*-foxes are rare in the *jiang hu*.

Characteristics

The great majority of *yao*-foxes are females of human appearance and immeasurable beauty. Graceful and well-mannered, anyone who encounters one understands why none can resist them. The following animal traits betray their nature: golden eyes, tufted tail, fox ears, and so on.

The powers that *yao*-foxes usually possess include Natural Weapons (claws, teeth), Terror (mysterious aura), Tao of the Light Step, Tao of the Inspired Creation, Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of Ying and Yang, Tao of the Serene Presence. Very close to nature, *yao*-foxes often use magic.

Manor of the Misty Spirit

Sometimes, when a solitary traveller is lost, trapped by the night, or when bad weather forces him to take shelter under the trees, they may stumble upon a vast manor presided over by a lady and assisted by many servants.

The woman's name is Chan Juan, and she is one of the oldest *yao* to live under Heaven. She was born during the Xia Dynasty and has lived to the present day acquiring knowledge, riches – and lovers. She quickly surrounded herself with a court of fellow *yao*-vixens, which became her disciples and servants. The lover of the most powerful men of each age, she built herself a palace and has had a great deal of influence in history.

One day, she encountered a simple man, a poet without a coin to his name, who was going to the city to meet other brilliant minds; this man was humble but his knowledge held the depth of the universe, a simple mortal who knew more than Chan Juan ever could. She fell in love and wanted to keep him close to her but he thought he was not ready to end his pilgrimage yet. He



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left her and never returned and she never received word from him again.

She, who thought herself invulnerable, had her heart broken and decided to retreat from the world with her followers. Secluding herself in her modest manor, she used the power that nature gave her to remove it from reality, many years before the Jade Emperor forbade immortals to walk the Earth.

Thus was born the Manor of the Misty Spirit, which sometimes appears in the *Zhongguo*, never far from a traveller (or group of travellers) lost or suffering from the weather. This traveller is always drawn to the Manor and finds themselves welcomed by Chan Juan, who serves them food and drink, and asks for news from the world. If her guest proves knowledgeable and courteous, he may have the pleasure of passing a delightful night, including a sumptuous feast, the attentions of the servants (who are hardly shy) and concluding with a session with Chan Juan herself, whose knowledge of the arts of pleasure is without parallel. Anyone abusing their hospitality promptly falls asleep and most likely awakens in the mud, all their belongings having vanishing – including their clothes.

If the character has behaved well, however, he wakes in the forest alone, with the impression of having dreamed the whole thing. The only proof that it was not a dream is a small jade statuette representing a fox, which Chan Juan always gives to a guest able to entertain her.

Statuettes of Chan Juan

Every guest of the Manor of the Misty Spirit, if they have proven themselves charming and interesting, wakes with one of these jade statuettes at his side; these are imbued with the magical nature of the yao-foxes and possess certain powers.

As a magical object, a statuette possesses five Chi points.

The owner of such an item gains the Gift: Beloved of Nature.

The owner of such an item receives a +2 bonus to Empathy Tests.

The statuette possesses a Renown of 5.

Chan Juan

The lady of the Manor of the Misty Spirit is a very old *yao-vixen*, who has travelled the world for millennia.

So beautiful as to make the sun pale in comparison, she is intelligent and cultured as befits a being of her age. Her wisdom seems infinite and it is rare for one not to fall under the charm of her golden eyes, her body and her spirit, together forming perfection worthy of the Heavens.

Saddened and dreaming of her lost love, Chan Juan still enjoys meeting mortals now and again, to keep up with the events of the world. Still fond of the pleasures of the bedchamber, she shows perfect expertise in this area and those who share her bed never forget it.

Lady of the Manor of the Misty Spirit

Metal 3 Water 4 Earth 5

Wood 6 Fire 6

Skills: Calligraphy 4, History 6, Literature 3, Learning (various subjects) 4, Dance 4, Eloquence 5, Etiquette 4, Music 3, Seduction 6, Empathy 3, Legends 4, Hand-to-Hand 2, Dodging 1, Horsemanship 2

Powers: Terror 13

Taos: Tao of the Light Step 3, Tao of the Inspired Creation 4, Tao of the Inner Eye 5, Tao of Ying and Yang 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 6, Tao of the Clear Mind 5

Magic: Chan Juan has mastered a great many spells, left to the Game Master's discretion.

Animal Trait: Golden eyes.

Chi: 60

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 12

Renown: Her existence is but a vague legend...



Yao-snakes

Three men came out of the tomb, covered in dust, with their arms full of precious things. Having gone a few steps, they lowered their hoard and began to search through the clay statues, the jade bi and the gold and silver jewels. Their rough hands broke the mingqi, their haste making them brutal and crude. Finally, one of them brandished a statuette no larger than his forearm, seemingly made of pure bronze and representing some kind of demon in the shape of a serpent with a hirsute head. "It's this one." The two other thieves nodded. Hiding the statue in a small wooden coffer, they filled their pockets with the jewels and precious stones, then set off, their hands on the hilts of their weapons. They did not see the cold eyes in the shadows, watching...

They had not gone one or two leagues when they met a man barring their path. Tall and thin, he bore a spear and his posture betrayed his readiness for combat. The three tomb robbers stiffened and prepared to fight. The one who seemed to be the chief came forward and demanded that the stranger let them pass. In response, he readied his weapon, getting ready to strike – then moved, faster than a cobra! The robber chief only just jumped back in time to avoid the lethal point, which cut through his clothes. He drew his sword and his men did likewise. Silently they circled the stranger, clearly used to fighting together. The spearman readied himself. His three adversaries began to circle him hoping to intimidate him, and one of them moved forward to strike, leading with his daggers. The spearman dodged gracefully and seemed to deliver a thousand blows in a single gesture: his adversary parried a few but could not protect himself and fell, pierced in many places and bleeding his life out through his wounds...

Even before the assault had finished, the second robber rushed forwards and struck a heavy blow with his bronze mace. The spearman did not have time to move and the blow struck his shoulder. Then the spear darted and the robber found himself with a deep gash across his face; the chief used this opening to charge and attempt to impale his adversary, but again he seemed to slip between the blows; jumping between the two men, he impaled them both with each end of his spear. The mace wielder crumpled, dead before he hit the ground, while the chief tried vainly to regain his breath. He had not even raised his head before the spear slit his throat.

After making sure his three adversaries were dead, the spearman opened the wooden chest and took out the bronze statuette. His hissing voice echoed strangely "Gonggong..." He threw the object to the ground and broke it with a blow of his spear.

— Anonymous tale

Description

Although less widespread in folklore than yao-foxes, yao-snakes are almost as common. Serpents are creatures that are almost direct descendants of the primal forces of the universe and the deities. The August Fu Xi and Nü Wa had the bodies of snakes, and Gonggong would pass as part-serpent himself; as for dragons, the serpents are their cousins. Suffice it to say that this species is particularly talented at producing yao.

Yao-snakes seem contemplative and not very active, some even say lazy. In reality, they are wise and patient and do not see the world in the way of most frivolous species. Intelligent and prudent, yao-snakes never make hasty decisions and prefer to consider all the possible implications of their action before making them. Socially, yao-snakes are paradoxical: they enjoy pleasing and seducing but they retain their reptilian origins in a great inner coldness. Seduction is only a game to them and can never resemble the flames of true love. Despite their apparent infidelity, their connection to time makes them still very possessive. Despite this, yao-snakes have a strong sense of right and wrong, and it is rare that they act in a deliberately malignant manner.

Yao-snakes live in isolated communities in jungles, forests and mountains. They found their own villages but always accept visitors, as long as they are not hostile. Solitary in nature, they do not reject visits from humans, as their curiosity pushes them to find out more about the world. Yao-snakes rarely mix with humans and never come to live in the cities of the *Zhongguo*, even though they may visit on occasion.

Characteristics

The yao-snakes' human appearance is always that of young people with a troubling beauty, making them at once attractive and repulsive. Their movements are often slow and measured, and marked with a certain grace; and when they decide to move quickly, their speed contrasts strongly with their apparent detachment. The animal traits that can betray them include slit pupils, cold skin, a forked tongue, scales, and so on.

The powers usually possessed by yao-snakes are Natural Weapons (fangs), Natural Armour (scales), Terror (reptilian aura), Tao of Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Hidden Shadow, Tao of the Clear Mind. The yao-snakes usually use a magic comparable to Divination.



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The Children of Nü Wa

During the reign of the August Nü Wa, and while Gonggong was sowing chaos around the world, the future goddess took the time, while she was repairing the sky, to save a small snake from flames. Placing it on a vast plain, she murmured a blessing and the little serpent became a *yao*. Falling in love with Nü Wa, he followed her exploits and helped her in her fight against Gonggong and her ascendance as Goddess of Harmony. He decided to consecrate his life to carrying on the august work of preserving the balance in the world.

Gathering his disciples around him, he founded the community of the Children of Nü Wa, charged with following all those who claimed to break the order of the world, to stop them from succeeding in their vile aims. For many centuries, this community of *yao*-snakes fought numerous demons, helped the Yellow Emperor against Chiyao, sided with the immortals wishing to free humanity from the influence of divinities during the fall of the Yin Dynasty, and so on.

When the world finally seemed to belong to humans, the Children of Nü Wa thought their work finished. The founder, the little serpent blessed by Nü Wa, decided to retreat from the world and no one ever heard from him again. Bit by bit, his community split apart... until the foundation of the Sect of Leaning Heaven.

It took several centuries before the *yao*-snake worshippers of Nü Wa realised that this shadowy organisation could call back to Earth their worst nightmares, that which the goddess had trapped in the deepest hells. The community of the Children of Nü Wa reformed under the guidance of a few old *yao* and their long feud against the Sect of Leaning Heaven began, which has lasted to the present day.

The Children of Nü Wa know absolutely that there exists a sect of fanatical worshipers of Gonggong who wish to resurrect their master, but they do not know who leads them, nor their exact intentions. They have been able to note that the agents of this sect, and sometimes demons, gather written work or objects, and they attempt to find these objects to discern the aims of these fanatics. For Cheng Huan, these *yao*-snakes are but a small thorn in his side: yes, they can be annoying, and they occasionally damage a few of his secondary plans, but they are a far smaller danger than Qin Long and their agents, for example.

The Children of Nü Wa are led by a young *yao*-snake named Pa Xing, who has the confidence of the whole community. Their rallying point is a village situated in the mountains, southeast of Shangyong in Chu. They have other refuges throughout the Warring States and recognise each other through a special

sign. The Children of Nü Wa have good relations with communities of other *yao* and humans, maximising their number of allies, or at least informants. Their principal activities consist of finding and eliminating agents from the Sect of Leaning Heaven everywhere they can find them. A few have attempted to find their headquarters to plan a more decisive attack but centuries of research have as yet yielded nothing and many *yao*-snakes have died under the claws of terrible demons, which Cheng Huan invokes to get rid of them.

Pa Xing

Barely a few centuries old, which is young for a *yao*-snake, Pa Xing has become leader of the Children of Nü Wa thanks to the gifts that have revealed within him the soul of the community's founder.

Cold and methodical, Pa Xing is a more than competent fighter, who has seen many of his comrades fall against the worshipers of Gonggong. Every night, he prays under the moon, asking Nü Wa to give him the strength to carry on his mission. Sometimes, he thinks the goddess responds, a soft murmur like a blessing in his ear.

Pa Xing does not understand why his gifts have made him chief of the community, despite his lack of experience. He fears that he is somehow deceiving them and leading them to their doom, but this fear, far from weakening him, seems to bring out his best traits.

Leader of the Children of Nü Wa

Metal 4 Water 5 Earth 5

Wood 4 Fire 2

Skills: Investigation 2, Medicine 3, Perception 4, Intimidation 3, Empathy 2, Art of War 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Qiangshu 5, Stealth 4, Horsemanship 1, Swimming 3

Techniques: Qiangshu (Double block, Double blow, Direct hit, Combination, Feint, Mystification)

Powers: Terror 11

Taos: Tao of the Sudden Lightning 4, Tao of the Invisible Shield 3, Tao of the Inner Eye 3, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 3, Tao of the Clear Mind 2

Mastered Style: Pa Xing knows all the Style of the Shadowless Spear

Animal Trait: Ice-cold skin

Chi: 50

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 11

Renown: 8

The Style of the Shadowless Spear (Qiangshu (spear))

History: This style was created by the founder of the Children of Nü Wa, who wielded the spear with remarkable dexterity. Based on the natural extreme speed of yao-snakes, it uses the wielder's suppleness to land blows too fast for the victim to dodge and creates an impenetrable defence. Nearly all the Children of Nü Wa have mastered at least the base skills of this style, and it has been taught to worthy humans who have aided the community against the Sect of Leaning Heaven. Since then it has spread into the *jiang hu*, but remains relatively rare.

Basis: The character can add his Qiangshu Skill level to his Initiative Tests.

Spear as Supple as the Serpent

Prerequisite: Qiangshu (Competent), Dodging (Competent), Double Block Technique, Tao of the Invisible Shield 2, Tao of the Sudden Lightning 1

Chi cost: 4

Effects: (defence) The character knows, in relying on his dexterity, how to parry blows in a way that makes his defence as infinite as the wind. He can add a bonus to his Active Defence equal to (Wood + Dodging).

Secondary Effects: The spear seems to bend and twist around the blows it blocks.

Cobra's Feint

Prerequisite: Qiangshu (Expert), Direct Hit Technique, Tao of the Sudden Lightning 4, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 1

Chi cost: 10

Effects: (attack) The character can land blows with the speed of a cobra, leaving his adversary with no chance to defend himself. At the start of a turn, before his Initiative Test, he can perform a free attack to which his opponent cannot respond. He simply has to succeed in his Attack Test as usual.

Secondary Effects: The point of the spear hisses like a serpent.

The Innumerable Fangs of the Serpent

Prerequisite: Qiangshu (Master), Double Blow Technique, Mystification Technique, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3

Chi cost: 8

Effects: (attack) The character uses his spear skill in an attack to deliver a flurry of blows against a single adversary. He need only succeed in an Attack Test but he hits with as many attacks as his Water score. The adversary must succeed in an Active Defence against each of them and they all deal normal damage.

Secondary Effects: The spear seems to multiply equal to the number of blows landed.

Yao-monkeys

Once, during a time blessed by Heaven, there was a great go player named Li Kuan, and no one in the nine provinces could best him. He boasted for all to hear that even the gods could not best his skill, but this did not stop pretenders coming from far and wide to test him.

One day, an old white-haired man came to his manor. Surrounded by his admirers, Li Kuan had just crushed a would-be rival, which had put him in a good mood. The old man, with laughing-eyes, came to him and said that he knew one who was better at go than even he. Li Kuan was immediately interested in meeting such a person, and playing against him, but the only man said that this opponent could not move about and that it was up to him to find him where he lived in an old hut in the forest. Li Kuan accepted to go the next day, and the old man left.

At dawn, the arrogant young man saddled his horse and made for the place told of by the old man. Finding it easily, he entered and was not at all happy to find that the one waiting for him, in front of a crude board, was... a monkey! Furious at this prank, Li Kuan called for the real player to show himself but no one came and the monkey placed the first piece on the board. Making the most of his bad luck, Li Kuan sat down and began to arrange his own pieces. Li Kuan soon realised the truth: the animal knew how to play and had undeniable talent. Quickly overcome, he lost the game. Stunned, he demanded that this game not count, he had been too shocked, and demanded a second game, which he also lost. All that day, well into the night, Li Kuan played go with the monkey and lost every time.



The next day, Li Kuan returned and did this every day for several weeks. The man who had boasted that he could beat the gods themselves now learned a little humility: beaten by a primate, this most arrogant of mortals eventually understood his place. Finally, after losing his ten thousandth game Li Kuan began to laugh! The message had become clear to him; in the eyes of Heaven, man and monkey were the same. The go player promised not to forget this lesson and used the fortune he had gathered by his talent to improve the conditions of the poor, before going into the jungle to learn wisdom among his brother primates.

The monkey, who had taken on the countenance of the mischievous old man, laughed long and hard at the good trick he had played on Li Kuan.

— Popular tale

Description

Particularly intelligent and clever, monkeys are a species from which many *yao* have come. Though fewer than foxes or serpents, *yao*-monkeys are sufficiently well known in folklore, integrated into many fables and legends telling of their adventures, their mischievous character well-suited to such tales.

Yao-monkeys are independent, tricky and inventive. They have a sharp spirit, often underestimated due to their frivolous and irrelevant attitudes.

Yao-monkeys like to mock others and themselves, humour is their way of seeing the world. Never truly cruel, their character sometimes pushes them to lie or trick people to achieve their ends.

Yao-monkeys live alone, do not create communities and avoid integrating with humanity. When they do spend time in a village, it is rarely for long and always because they have something to do there, or someone to see. They avoid towns like the plague, and prefer jungles and forests; *yao*-monkeys are thus common in the world of martial arts.

Characteristics

More often male than female, *yao*-monkeys dress in an eccentric fashion and have a deliberately provocative attitude. With no inhibitions, they laugh at the world and their peerless agility can usually get them out of the delicate situations into which their manners often plunge them. They are among the few *yao* who do not attempt to hide their nature, which can be revealed by a monkey's tail, an obviously simian face, long limbs, etc.

The powers inherited by their nature include: Tao of the Six Directions, Tao of the Light Step, Tao of Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands, Tao of the Breath of Power.

Hui Nao

In his youth Hui Nao was a young *yao*-monkey like all the others: mocking, tricky and full of irony. His laughing spirit worked on the many people who crossed his path, as Hui Nao had no lack of tricks to play or jokes to make, and to those who attempted to avenge themselves he was an accomplished warrior, wielding a staff with skill enough to create his own martial style.

One day however Hui Nao met a person who did not react in the obvious way to his daily pranks. The man was not angry after having been put in a difficult position by the monkey's mischief; quite the reverse, he laughed and drew a lesson from it, for which he thanked the *yao*. Intrigued, Hui Nao decided to follow the man for a while the better to understand him (and test his limits). He was Difficult Wisdom, a Taoist, a disciple of one named Zhuang Zi. Skilled in word games and enigmas, he troubled the souls of those who came to listen to him, pretending to open people's souls while really showing them the Tao. As he followed and listened to him, Hui Nao was finally able to open his eyes to the universe; although his temperament did not change, he began to see the tricks he played differently, as a way to access a superior wisdom and share it.

When Difficult Wisdom finally died from old age, Hui Nao renamed himself the Grey Monkey and decided to meditate in a cave to understand the ways humour could open people's souls. He is still there, spending time in meditation, training young apprentices that come to learn his style and duelling against arrogant *wu xia*.

Grey Monkey

Metal 4 Water 6 Earth 4

Wood 4 Fire 3

Skills: Herbalist 3, Perception 3, Acting 2, Games 3, Meditation 4, Taoism 2, Bangshu 5, Hand-to-Hand 3, Acrobatics 4, Climbing 4, Dodging 3

Techniques: Bangshu (Repel, Charge, Double Blow, Mystification, Double Block)

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 6, Tao of the Light Step 4, Tao of the Breath of Power 3, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3, Tao of the Serene Presence 3, Tao of the Strengthened Body 3

Mastered Style: As the inventor of the Style of the Laughing Staff, Hui Nao knows all its secrets

Animal Trait: Monkey's tail

Chi: 40

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 12

Renown: 17

The Style of the Laughing Staff (Bangshu (staff))

History: The Grey Monkey, Hui Nao, created the Style of the Laughing Staff during his endless wanderings in the *Zhongguo*. He corrected several pretentious opponents with his heavy staff and over time, many warriors came to his cave, praying that he take them on as disciples. The Grey Monkey only accepted those who were able to laugh at their failures and mistakes, and trained them in his style. Since then, it has spread through the *jiang hu*, finding a certain success among hermits and wandering Taoists.

Basis: The character can add his Acrobatics score to an Active Defence test.

The Monkey's Grimace

Prerequisite: Bangshu (Competent), Repel Technique, Tao of the Serene Presence 3

Chi cost: 4

Effects: (action) In mocking his adversary and provoking him with obscene gestures and various offences, the character can make him lose his temper. The character must use an action to ridicule his adversary, who suffers a penalty to all his Tests equal to the character's Fire score for the rest of the turn.

Secondary Effects: The character's laughter resembles the hysterical cries of a monkey.

Monkey's Leap

Prerequisite: Bangshu (Expert), Hand-to-Hand (Competent), Charge Technique, Tao of the Six Directions 2, Tao of the Strengthened Body 2, Tao of the Breath of Power 2

Chi cost: 7

Effects: (attack) Slamming his staff into the ground, the character can jump at his adversary to deliver a devastating blow. He can reach an enemy up to fifteen yards away and the blow's damage is equal to double the character's Metal score, plus his Hand-to-Hand score, plus the staff's damage score.

Secondary Effects: When he falls back to the ground after his attack, the character takes a simian pose.

The Monkey in the Forest

Prerequisite: Bangshu (Master), Acrobatics (Expert), Double Blow Technique, Mystification Technique, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3

Chi cost: 10

Effects: (attack) Dancing around his staff, the character can strike at several adversaries around him. He makes only a single Attack Test to strike at a number of adversaries equal to his Acrobatics score, the ST to hit them is equal to the highest Passive Defence among the enemies + 1 for every target after the first. Each adversary can attempt an Active Defence, of course. Attacks hitting their targets inflict normal damage.

Secondary Effects: The acrobatics that the character performs with his staff resembles those of a monkey swinging from branch to branch.

Yao-tigers

It was the end of summer, normally a period of joy and carelessness while waiting for the harvest – but not this year. War had ravaged the country for almost three months, and hordes of deserters and freed prisoners formed gangs and pillaged villages. Ours had not yet been attacked but we had worked at full speed to build a wooden palisade and trained the strongest men, all the while knowing that against skilled soldiers this would be for nothing.

One evening, a traveller arrived at our gates. The villagers wanted to throw him out, not that he seemed particularly dangerous. He was a wreck, unarmed, his face lost behind a heavy hood, but the chief's daughter, a child of twelve years who we all loved, stopped them. The girl was so kind that to her it was unthinkable to let a stranger risk his life if she could help him. To please her, we let the stranger enter, not without warning him just what he could expect if he gave us any problems...

The chief's daughter took him to the empty grain store and told him to rest while she fetched him some supper. The stranger did not speak, only nodded, affectionately ruffling the girl's hair; a banal gesture, but one that made the village relax. The stranger ate silently, and then went to sleep in the straw without asking for anything else; no doubt, he would leave tomorrow. As night fell, the village too slept with a tiredness that overcame even the most dedicated of our guards. At dawn, we woke to a great clamour and an icy fear seized our hearts: a troop of thirty or so robbers had camped outside our palisade. Their chief, a hairy brute,



demanded that we open our gate so that his men could rest and eat. When the village chief asked him to which army they belonged, he howled with laughter and his tone was very threatening. He insulted the courage of the villagers and said it would be beneath him to challenge us and it would be best for the girls and women if the gates were opened now, so that they could see these were real men.

He had barely finished his hateful tirade than the gates to the village opened letting the vagabond (who we had forgotten about) out before closing again. The robber chief was silent for a moment, before laughing again and ordering his men to kill him. A soldier drew his weapon, looking vicious, and... I don't think anyone knew what happened next. The stranger's body seemed to disappear before reappearing behind the soldier, whose neck was now at an impossible angle to the rest of his body, his sabre now in the stranger's hands. The chief began to shout something but before he had finished he was beheaded. Then a surreal massacre began. The stranger who had seemed so weak the night before moved like a tiger, and each of his blows ended a life. He seemed impossible to kill, and soon the robbers began to panic and tried to run, but with a bestial roar the man killed them all with terrifying accuracy and implacable ferocity, leaving them no chance at all.

In a few moments bodies covered the ground. The stranger seemed to slowly come out of his trance, and released his weapon. Turning towards us, he stared at us with piercing eyes. His eyes rested on the chief's daughter, who had watched the terrible scene with us wide-eyed. The stranger stretched and gave her a small gesture with his hand before continuing on his way.

— Testimony of the farmer Hung to the Luo-Jin magistrate

Description

Tigers are creatures with powerful links to the brutal strength of nature, which explains why, despite their great ties to Heaven, few of them become *yao* and prefer to live the life of a wild animal. However, though rare, *yao*-tigers make a great impression on those they meet and leave their mark on history.

Yao-tigers know no fear. Bravery or temerity does not do justice to their spirit of steel. They prefer action to reflection and enjoy charging head down, passion ruling their spirits. *Yao*-tigers are quick to anger, often violently so. Strong-minded, they like to lead and can be stubborn about their decisions. Fond of martial arts, *yao*-tigers enjoy combat, but rarely killing - a difficult duel against a skilled adversary gives them more

satisfaction than a bloody massacre. In this, *yao*-tigers are beings of honour above all.

Yao-tigers have little to do with humanity and rarely encounter them. Their commanding character sometimes persuades them to take those under their wing whom they can influence and mould into their own image: more than one great *wu xia* has learnt his craft at the side of a tiger master living in the world of lakes and forests. The state in which *yao*-tigers are the most common is Chu.

Characteristics

Most *yao*-tigers are male and take on the appearance of powerfully built warriors, with fierce features and supple motions. They dress simply but always carry at least one weapon with them, although they are almost as dangerous unarmed as with a sword in hand. The animal traits that usually betray their nature include a tiger's tail, sharp teeth, black stripes, etc.

The most common powers amongst them are: Natural Weapon (claws and teeth), Terror (tiger aura), Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Hidden Shadow, Tao of the Serene Presence.

Tie Hu

Known among his peers as a deadly warrior, Tie Hu draws a certain pleasure from battle, but unlike most *yao*-tigers it is not the fight itself – between two wills, two techniques – that interests him: his passion is in admiring the weapons. To him, a warrior is nothing without his weapon, and even a mediocre opponent can beat a master if he has a truly great sword.

The goal that Tie Hu has set for his life is to forge the most powerful weapons in the *Zhongguo*. Indefatigable, he works alone, forging swords, spears, maces, sabres, daggers and axes. He always tries old techniques and tests new ones, mixing the results and always getting magnificent results.

If an audacious *wu xia*, having heard of his reputation, comes to find Tie Hu and demands a weapon from him, the *yao*-tiger always duels with him and only allows him to take a weapon if he thinks him worthy. No one knows his criteria: he has given a magnificent sabre to a knight he disarmed with one blow and refused to sell a weapon to an expert who held his own for several hours. It is clear, however, that those who receive a weapon from him have an exceptional destiny; some say that Tie Hu can learn this in the course of a duel...

Yao-Tiger Blacksmith

Metal 5 Water 4 Earth 5

Wood 4 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness: Inspiration of the Tao (Forge) / Code of Honour

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Perception 2, Trade 2, Intimidation 4, Meditation 2, Hand-to-Hand 3, Daoshu 3, Qiangshu 4, Dodging 2, Forge 6

Techniques: Hand-to-Hand (Throw, Blind), Daoshu (Two Weapons, Charge, Double Blow, Mystification, Repel), Qiangshu (Repel, Charge, Direct Hit, Combination)

Powers: Natural Weapon 3 (claws)

Taos: Tao of Sudden Lightning 4, Tao of the Breath of Power 4, Tao of the Inspired Creation 5, Tao of the Serene Presence 2, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 1

Animal trait: Feline eyes

Chi: 90

Breath of Life: 23 (8/0, 6/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Renown: 24

Tiger-blades

The weapons forged by Tie Hu are exceptional in every way, and more than a few wu xia long to wield one. Be they swords, spears, axe-blades or daggers, they always carry the name of tiger-blade. Made from the strongest and lightest steel, they are carved with antique symbols, which a learned man may recognise as the tongue of Yu.

Tiger-blades have a Resistance of 13.

The blades give the bearer +1 to a martial skill, OR a +2 bonus to Initiative OR a +2 to damage (at the character's choice).

Tiger-blades have a Renown of 20.

A Few Other Yao

Tien Guo

Yao-crows are rare and Tien Guo is one of them. Like most of his species, he was a scavenger, flying over battlefields and waiting for the moment the troops retreated to leave himself and his brothers free to feed on the eyes of the dead. One day, however, a man drew his attention, a man who fought with grace and dexterity, showing divine technique. Greatly moved, the crow started studying other blade masters, his spirit ennobled by their movements, the techniques and energy shown when a warrior finds himself between life and death, suspended by the edge of his sword.

Tien Guo became a *yao* – and a warrior genius. Years of observation had allowed him to learn innumerable techniques. As soon as he held a sword in his hands, he wandered the world to challenge the best sword-fighters, to learn and experience that feeling – that unique experience, that blank feeling in the spirit when nothing counts but the fight between life and death.

As time went by, Tien Guo saw his reputation spread throughout the *jiang hu*. Dressed in white, like a god of death – feared and respected because his blade is never cruel and it is an honour to die facing such an opponent. There even exist some aging *wu xia*, heroes battered by years of combat, who actively seek him out to face him. Legends say that his sword is a guide sending souls to the other world and showing them the path of reincarnation.

Notorious Swordsman

Metal 5 Water 5 Earth 4

Wood 4 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness: Claws of the Tiger/ Obsession (feeling the excitement of a duel)

Skills: History 2, Perception 3, Eloquence 3, Empathy 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, Jianshu 6, Dodging 4

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Double Block, Double Blow, Combination, Hold at Bay, Repel)

Powers: Natural Weapon 2 (claws)

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 3, Tao of Sudden Lightning 4, Tao of the Breath of Power 2, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 5, Tao of the Invisible Shield 3, Tao of Ying and Yang 3

Mastered Style: Any sword styles the Game Master wants to give him.

Animal Trait: His long orange fingernails resemble bird's claws.

Chi: 48

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 11

Renown: 35



Nan Kan

Nan Kan has long cursed the destiny that made him a *yao*. A simple toad living beside a river, soft feminine singing drew him every night to the pleasure quarter of a city built near the water's edge. Every night, the toad went to the edge of the quarter, to watch the sublime courtesans whose songs filled him with happiness. Little by little, he grew to wish to possess such a beauty, an obsession that led him to the path of *yao*.

Unfortunately, for him, his human appearance kept many traits of his previous body: small, bald and hunchbacked, his skin covered in pustules and his bulbous eyes never seeming to fix on anything. The first time Nan Kan entered the pleasure quarter, revolted eyes followed him, and no prostitute would sleep with him, even for all the gold in the *Zhongguo*.

Wiping away spittle and mockery, Nan Kan felt his rage rise and he grabbed hold of a young prostitute; the guards who attempted to stop him could not understand how such a deformed being could be so good at combat... Returning to the swamps with his prey, Nan Kan let his fury rule him: he raped her so violently that in the end she died, without him realising...

Since then, Nan Kan decided that since the gods had denied beauty to him, he would destroy it in all its forms, no matter what it cost him.

One day, the *yao*-toad heard talk of a society of assassins, the Sect of the Five Poisons. Intrigued, he set out to investigate them and managed to capture one of their members – a woman; he tortured her for a long time before she revealed the society's headquarters. Although well trained to resist torture, the society's instructors had no idea of the viciousness and cruelty of which Nan Kan was capable – the woman told him this before dying. Nan Kan then set off and presented himself at the entrance to the Sect of the Five Poisons. Every guard who attempted to stop him was killed and finally, the *yao* challenged Master Toad for his place and defeated him. He then became one of the leaders of the most feared sect in the *jiang hu*.

Nan Kan still bears the title of Master Toad, which he has held for three centuries. The members of the sect believe he is an incarnation of Toad, one of the Poisonous Animals – and in a way, they are not mistaken. The *yao* still enjoys destroying beauty and often fulfils a contract alone when he knows the target is one of handsome physique or a known artist.

Master Toad

Metal 4 Water 6 Earth 4

Wood 2 Fire 1

Gift and Weakness: Bronze Breastplate / Obsessed (destroy beauty)

Skills: Medicine 3, Perception 3, Intimidation 3, Bangshu 5, Hand-to-Hand 4, Acrobatics 4, Stealth 4, Climbing 3, Dodging 3

Techniques: Bangshu (Double Blow, Charge, Double Block, Disarm, Repel), Hand-to-Hand (Throw, Strangle, Direct Hit, Combination)

Powers: Natural Weapon (poisonous skin), Terror 11

Taos: Tao of Six Directions 6, Tao of the Light Step 4, Tao of Sudden Lightning 1, Tao of the Breath of Power 2, Tao of the Strengthened Body 5, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 4

Animal Trait: His appearance.

Chi: 20

Breath of Life: 27 (10/0, 7/0, 5/-1, 4/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Renown: 0



Lao Shu

When he thinks of his life, Lao Shu only sees endless books and pages without end. Even when he was a simple rat he lived in a library. Little by little, the place fascinated him: those long clean corridors, the neat shelves, the respectful silence, the unalterable order... The atmosphere contributed to his awakening, and he became a *yao*.

However, Lao Shu saw no reason to change his life much. He managed to get a job as a handyman in the place he had lived all his life; his role was to arrange the books, clean the corridors, prepare the necessities for writing, fill out the forms, make inventories. Simple tasks, hardly glorious for an immortal being, but Lao Shu was content with them, and led a life that was if not happy then at least satisfying. Barely literate, and more interested in arranging books than reading them, Lao Shu nevertheless began reading in his spare time and through the great variety of books he began to acquire some culture.

His zeal and complete dedication finally drew him towards his destiny. The chief scribe could not help but note how scrupulous the small, stooped greying man was, very much taking to heart the little tasks others would have accomplished quickly and without much care. The man sent off a recommendation and Lao Shu was promoted to a much larger library: that of the Scribes of Wen Chang at Linzi.

Lao Shu was at first disturbed at having to break ties to move to a new library, but very quickly he was delighted: the Scribes' library was immense, filled with dusty books and forgotten archives. Lao Shu has decided to create some order out of this and applies all of his perfectionism, which makes him a respected man, if one who is gently mocked when his back is turned.

Yao-Rat Library Handyman

Metal 2 Water 4 Earth 6
Wood 5 Fire 2

Gift and Weakness: Favoured of Wen Chang (bureaucracy) / Mind of the Hare

Skills: Bureaucracy 4, Calligraphy 3, Literature 2, Law 3, Perception 2, Learning (many subjects) 3, Etiquette 2, Languages 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Stealth 2, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapon 2 (gnawer's teeth)

Taos: Tao of the Light Step 2, Tao of the Inner Eye 4, Tao of the Inspired Creation 2, Tao of Ying and Yang 4, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 2, Tao of the Clear Spirit 5

Animal Trait: Rat's teeth.

Chi: 72

Breath of Life: 21 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 11

Renown: 23

The Company of Spirit-Animals

Under this strange name hides a group of *yao*, a wandering circus led by a mysterious guide whose members hide their nature... and then reveal it, hoping that people's incredulity will pass them off as charlatans and actors.

Going from village to village, from city to city, appearing on the occasions of festivals and celebrations, the Company of Spirit-Animals wanders the *Zhongguo*, spreading joy and amusement wherever it goes. Its members are acrobats, jugglers, storytellers, comedians and buffoons, and their only goal seems to be to create shows that widen children's eyes. They do not hide their animal traits, which the public takes to be part of their costumes.

When they settle somewhere, it is usually only for a few days, or a week at most. Their spectacle takes place several evenings in a row and during the day, the members wander through the streets or rest in their caravans. Their reputation is good enough that even the cold cities of Qin open their gates to them. Often new performers ask to join them, but the leader does not allow spontaneous new members, and those belonging to this wandering circle seem not to have changed for decades.

The leader of the troupe is Bi Zien. Always wearing a heavy black coat with a hood, he remains distant and rarely shows himself to the public. Many believe that this is an actor's trick to make people's curious – and they are not entirely wrong.

In fact, Bi Zien is an immortal. Wandering the *Zhongguo* for centuries, he has always been fascinated by the *yao* and what their existence implies. Deciding to study them up close, and see whether they can evolve to a higher state when guided by an Immortal, Bi Zien had the idea of forming a group of wandering artists with various *yao* and plunging them into the heart of human society to see how that would affect or change them.

As time passed he became profoundly attached to his protégés, and the life of an entertainer seduced him more and more – in a world of everlasting war, to bring a smile to the face of a child seemed to him the greatest thing to do, to the point of making him lose sight of his initial goal...

The Company of Spirit-Animals is composed of about half-a-dozen *yao* of all kinds, all living together in relative friendship (despite a few inevitable clashes). Some have no home beyond the Company, while others come and go as they please.



Wei Lai is a *yao*-vixen of great beauty. She is a storyteller and receives the curious in her caravan to predict their future. Of course, as any entertainer, she never predicts unpleasant fates, even if she sees them and prefers embellishing the future to telling the bare truth. Her clients are overcome as much by her predictions as her natural charms – particularly since she usually overheats her room and dresses accordingly...

Chu Jue is a *yao*-monkey. Like all his fellows, he has a fierce sense of humour and great agility. He is the group's acrobat, whose exploits and falls provoke hilarity from the children. Working like this for years, Chu Jue has begun to care for the innocence he sees in the eyes of young boys and girls. When he is not performing, he carves wooden toys, which he gives out to the children of the villages they visit, playing the fool to make them laugh.

Pang Ran is a giant, his stature impressive to even the most hardened of warriors. He is a *yao*-bear, whose strength is superhuman. Playing the Hercules of the Company, he draws admiration from women and jealousy from men as he performs acts of great strength: drawing heavy chariots filled with stones or lifting granite boulders. When he is not performing, he is charged with the troupe's security, wielding a solid staff to hold the local ruffians at a distance.

Tao Wang is a brilliant contortionist, capable of escaping from any cage, even if covered in chains with every limb bound. A *yao*-snake, he has kept his original dexterity and enjoys the audience's fear when he sets himself apparently impossible tasks (such as being plunged completely bound with bronze weights on his feet, into a deep barrel of icy water). He delights in the amazed silence that follows each successful escape and, with time, he has become as warm and friendly as the rest of his companions.

Bian Zhi was once a little spider in the northern forests. Having become a *yao*, suffice it to say the sinister reputation of his fellows (for the most part from tarantulas and black widows) does not apply to him. Quiet and helpful, always polite, Bian Zhi is the official costume-maker of the troupe. Weaving original and brightly coloured clothing he is, without a doubt, the one who most considers the Company as his real home. If it were ever threatened, his kindness would give way to a cold and pitiless willingness to fight.

The Hu twins, Ma and Zai, are *yao*-tigers particularly attached to one another. While performing, they create choreographed combats so beautiful that more than one sword master has fallen in love with their technique. Although talented warriors, Ma and Zai much prefer to create spectacles than true battles, for them the excitement of the duel is nothing compared to the

applause of a delighted crowd. When the Company travels, the tiger-twins protect the convoy along with Pang Ran.

The Company sometimes recruits new *yao*, with the agreement of Bi Zien, but no one is ever kept against their will. Some who join the circus wander with them for a few seasons, then leave to follow their destiny elsewhere. Others find in it a refuge, a haven in a troubled world – and everywhere they go, the Company of Spirit-Animals sow laughter and joy.

The Heritage of the Yao

Capable of taking human form and entering society, the *yao* often have occasion to indulge carnally with humans. Innumerable tales tell of liaisons between a vixen and a man, or a powerful tiger and a woman, and while they make romantic souls dream they also have a foundation in reality.

Yao blood has flowed in humanity's veins for a long time, bringing strength and wisdom to those who have such a parent, making them heroes without peer.

The Ban Yao

When a *yao* mates with a human, the fruit of such a union is known as a *ban yao*: half-*yao* or almost-*yao*.

With a foot in each world, the *ban yao* inherit many gifts but are nevertheless limited by their half-human condition. They possess supernatural powers, and a much longer life span than most humans, but are still recognisable by a morphological detail betraying their true nature (and which can make them pass for true *yao*!); and, most of all, they are vulnerable to Exorcism techniques.

Many *ban yao* do not find a place in the world, too human for *yao* but too strange to live among men. Solitary, many prefer the easy path of retreating from the world, but a great majority attempt to mix in society, hiding their nature and attempting to live like everyone else, moving frequently so that no one notices their abnormally long lifespan. A few profit from their gifts to

search for glory and honour – after all, is their paternity not divine and are they not gods walking the earth?

Characteristics

The *ban yao* have many gifts in common with *yao*.

Like their supernatural parent, they possess powers from their animal nature (Natural Weapons, Natural Armour, Terror). They also have a very long lifespan (three times as long as a human's for a pure *ban yao*, twice for the grandchild of a *yao*).

On the other hand, they are incapable of changing form and cannot automatically understand the language of their parental species... Their ability to wield magic remains human, forced to rely on the rituals and practices of the path of Taoism.

Sharing the weaknesses of the *yao*, they can be betrayed by an animal trait, and fear exorcists.

The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of a *yao* are also considered *ban yao*; beyond three generations the blood is too diluted to conserve the supernatural abilities.

Creating a Ban Yao Character

If a player wishes to play a *ban yao*, they can use the following rules. Obviously, the Game Master has the final say on whether such a character is suitable for his game, and the player should work closely with him when creating the character.

Concept

The player should start by deciding what species his parent *yao* was, to start getting an idea of what powers he might attain and what animal traits he might possess. Remember, a *ban yao* has a very long life-span, double or triple that of a powerful man. Equally, thanks to the supernatural blood flowing in its veins, a *ban yao* is also vulnerable to Exorcism techniques.

Speaking the Language of the Parent Species

If the player wants his character to be able to talk to the animals from which his parent came, he needs to gain Mastery in the Language Talent.

Buying Powers

With the 15 points for purchasing Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic, the character can also buy powers expressing his animal nature; the Game Master should check the powers chosen are consistent with the character's animal parentage.

Here are the costs of buying these powers; they are cumulative:

Natural Weapon

| | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|
| Level | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Cost | 1 | 3 | 6 |

Natural Armour

| | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|
| Level | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Cost | 1 | 3 | 6 |

Terror

| | | | |
|-------|---|---|----|
| Level | 7 | 9 | 11 |
| Cost | 1 | 3 | 6 |

The level of these powers can only be increased by experience.

Animal Trait

The player must choose a detail for their character that could betray his inhuman nature. This can be drawn from those of the *yao* in the previous pages.

Tiger-Faced Swordsman

His mother died when he was born and the young Tsao was raised by his father, a crude man with a fiery temperament. Father and son lived together for a long time in a small isolated house, going into the neighbouring village only to buy necessities. From this time, Tsao remembers most of all the long days of training. A peerless warrior, his father put a wooden sword in his hands as soon as he could walk and taught him all about fencing. When he was older, he had to fight every day to the limits of his ability against his father, who did not hold back, attacking with all his strength; often the combat ended with Tsao crumpled on the ground bleeding.

However, despite this harsh treatment, the boy knew he was loved. When he was not training, his father and he went fishing or hunting together, went to the village for festivals, wandered in the woods together... then, his



father would often speak of his mother, with whom he was still very much in love; thanks to this, Tsao felt that he had known her. Life continued in this way for many years.

Tsao became a vigorous and gracious young man, with a light step and strong and precise movements. When he was sixteen, his father decided to travel with him. Their wandering took them to the State of Chu. There, the old warrior gave Tsao his sabre and told him these words: *"Nowhere in this world has a place for skilled swordsmen. Everywhere the machines of war have replaced the honour of the old warriors. Only here, in this State, can a man as you create a destiny with his blade. Make me proud, my son."* – And he left him there.

Tsao soon had to think of survival. He loaned out his talent with the blade to many employers and his reputation began to spread. Wielding a sword since childhood, the young man was a talented swordsman, rare even in Chu. Finally, Tsao became one of the many disciples of the Heaven Blessed Twelve, the most famed sword masters in the *Zhongguo*, and it did not take long for him to take a place in their ranks as a new Tiger.

Today, the one known as the Tiger-faced Swordsman is almost seventy but looks only thirty. All see this as a blessing from Heaven, the favour of the Western White Tiger, but Tsao knows the truth. Every night, when he trains alone or with his sons in the vast garden of his palace, he feels a far-off gaze levelled at him. There in the forest a tiger watches him, and in his eyes shine the pride of a father.

Legendary Swordsman

Metal 5 Water 4 Earth 5

Wood 4 Fire 4

Gift and Weakness: Courage of the Tiger / Loyalty of the Dog

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Perception 3, Eloquence 2, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 4, Meditation 3, Art of War 4, Hand-to-Hand 3, Daoshu 4, Jianshu 5, Gongshu 2, Horsemanship 3, Dodging 4, Forge 2, Survival (forest) 4

Techniques: Hand-to-Hand (Throw, Blind, Strangle), Daoshu (Feint, Combination, Hold at Bay, Two Weapons), Jianshu (Direct Hit, Hold at Bay, Mystification, Feint, Double Blow), Gongshu (Snapshot, Double Shot)

Powers: Natural Weapon (claws), Terror 11

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 3, Tao of the Breath of Power 4, Tao of the Sudden Lightning 5, Tao of the Invisible Shield 3, Tao of Ten Thousand Hands 5, Tao of the Inner Eye 3, Tao of the Serene Presence 4

Animal trait: His face is covered with black stripes that pass for tattoos.

Chi: 75 **Breath of Life:** 23 (8/0, 6/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Renown: 140

The Yao Xie

The heritage of the *yao* runs through humanity's veins. Without knowing it, many people carry within them a fraction of this supernatural blood, having a *yao* or *ban yao* among their ancestors. Generally, this blood is too diluted to manifest, but it can happen that in unions and marriages two people both with *yao* in their line have a child together, and that child will have a small part of this power in its heritage.

Such a person is known as a *yao xie*, or *yao-blooded*. Even if the gifts of this parentage are much less than those of a *ban yao*, they can make an individual exceptional, a hero or a pariah depending on how they are used.

Characteristics

A *yao xie* is a human apparently like any other. He does not live longer, he is not vulnerable to Exorcism and he cannot change shape. One single element which distinguishes him from a normal human is a small gift coming from his *yao* ancestry: the courtesan who can make her nails become as strong as steel, the powerful woodcutter who does not feel pain, the *wu xia* with eyes so cold he can freeze you at a glance, and so on.

Zhu Cha

As a child, Zhu Cha was already different from others his age. The son of farmers, his life should have followed the path traced by his parents, but it did not such thing. Displaying from an early age a temperament which others called cruel, Zhu Cha liked to kill and eat animals. To begin with he contented himself with rats and birds, but slowly hardened to killing dogs and cats. When these habits were discovered, the horrified villagers decided to banish him from their village. Thus, aged nine years old, Zhu Cha was alone on the roads of the *Zhongguo*.

However, he did not die. His survival instinct protected him and he lived as a wild child in the forest, hunting food which he ate raw and sometimes even alive. Bit by bit he began to consider himself an animal, and saw man as his prey. At night when he slept in the trees, the voices of cruel and malevolent creatures whispered in his ears. Spiders crawled into his clothes and wove their webs in his hair. They whispered forbidden secrets and called him 'parent'. Already half-mad, Zhu Cha finally cross the line into insanity.

New Gift

Yao Xie: *The character has among his ancestors one or more yao, and from this inheritance draws a particular gift. He can choose one of the three yao powers (Natural Weapon, Natural Armour and Terror) at level 2, and can use it once per session. If he wishes, he can also buy a level in the Languages skill to comprehend the animal language of his distant heritage; he does not understand them perfectly but is able to interpret their expressions.*

Now adult, Zhu Cha is a tall and very thin man, with bony limbs and disturbing eyes. Wearing rags, he left his forest and began to wander, going from village to village and committing terrible crimes. As a child, he enjoyed torturing animals, as an adult, he prefers children, mutilating and devouring their heads before leaving their bodies behind him. Everywhere Zhu Cha goes children disappear, their bodies found hideously mutilated days later. Many magistrates are hunting this mad killer, but their investigations always hit a fundamental problem: no one knows how Zhu Cha thinks. It is impossible for a human to find logic in his actions, simply because there is none.

Zhu Cha has no human emotions left, and does not see himself as human. Evil is a concept he does not understand; his instinct and base desires are all that guide his life.

Notorious Serial Killer

Metal 4 Water 5 Earth 4

Wood 2 Fire 1

Gift and Weakness: Yao Xie (Terror 9) / Air of the Snake

Skills: Herbalism 2, Perception 4, Intimidation 3, Languages 1, Hand-to-Hand 5, Acrobatics 4, Stealth 5, Climbing 3, Dodging 3, Survival (forest) 5

Techniques: Hand-to-Hand (Blind, Hold at Bay, Disarm, Direct Hit, Strangle)

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 3, Tao of the Light Step 2, Tao of Sudden Lightning 1, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 2, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 4

Chi: 20

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: 25 (as a serial killer)



Those who stare into the abyss...

This section provides statistics for the characters which appear in the tales and excerpts in the preceding chapters, which may serve as inspiration for Game Masters. These are ready-to-use NPCs, for use in a single story or as recurring characters for an entire campaign.

Chenxi

Chenxi is what one might call a fallen exorcist. Once raised by a Taoist sect in Wei, she lived a childhood protected from the world in the company of wise people who saw in her an incarnation of Nü Wa. This was a great opportunity for the young orphan; she was well instructed and, most of all, taught the disciplines of Divination and Exorcism; but it did not last. The sect soon drew the attention of bandits who sacked it, pillaging and systematically killing everyone. Chenxi only survived due to her pale complexion, which made her appear dead. When she came to, she took the only thing that seemed intact among the carnage - a bronze mirror - and fled to the nearby village, but not before cursing Nü Wa for this massacre... an act that came back to haunt her.

Chenxi met her first love shortly after her flight. Ill fortune, the gods, or Nü Wa's anger meant that her beloved was not only her father, but also that he was no more than a ghost, one of the very beings she had been taught to detest and fight against since childhood. After some adventures, which the young exorcist sometimes likes to share with others, if only so as not to forget them (although she disguises them as simple stories), she decided to wander the paths of the *Zhongguo*. No one knows if she does so to make some sense of her life, to accomplish some mysterious task, or simply to flee from those chasing her, but she does not seem ready to stop anytime soon.

These days, she voyages with a merchant from Zhao named Fen Zhu, whom she had attempted to exorcise when they first met; a boy everyone calls Chickpea; and sometimes a *wu xia* named Celestial Fist. Her relations with Fen Zhu are not very cordial and seem to touch on painful memories, but they are nevertheless very close, particularly when one of them is in danger. Chenxi has finally found equilibrium in her itinerant life, and if she knows she is being tracked by a multitude of enemies (rival Taoists, fundamentalist exorcists unforgiving that she does not destroy all ghosts, ghosts she has provoked, or created - a gift from Nü Wa) then she attempts to do as much as possible in these few months before she is caught up with...

Metal 3 Water 3 Earth 5
Wood 3 Fire 4

Gift and Weakness: Sense of the Tao (Exorcism) / Haunted Soul

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Herbalist 2, Perception 2, Intimidation 2, Languages 2, Seduction 1, Divination 2, Exorcism 3, Legends 2, Meditation 3, Taoism 2, Theology 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Jianshu 3, Gongshu 2, Stealth 1, Dodging 2, Theft 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Blind, Disarm), Gongshu (Snapshot, Long Shot)

Taos: Tao of the Breath of Power 1, Tao of the Sudden Lightning 2, Tao of the Invisible Shield 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 2

Divination: Deadly Omens, Cracking of the Gods, Feel the Energy of the World

Exorcism: Blessing of Wood, Sense of the Yin, Talisman of Control of Lost Spirits, Disperse Spirits, Vengeance of the Gods, Amulet of Protection

Chi: 45

Breath of Life: 21 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 8

Renown: -

Zhu Li-Kuan

Born in a rich Han family, Zhu Li-Kuan quickly displayed great intelligence and an appetite for knowledge. Educated at a young age, he went to study in Xinzheng to become a diplomat; his father dreamed that he would become an official in service of his State.

However, although Li-Kuan was very intelligent, he was also a great dreamer. With his passion for poetry and literature he declared himself a poet, and though he would have had no trouble becoming a diplomat, he sought no functionary post and preferred to spend his time writing poems and odes in the hopes of impressing the world's great men. His family's fortune provided for him and he was able to follow his love with all the eagerness of youth. While his father was disappointed that his son was not a diplomat, he loved him too much to reproach him.

A handsome young man in the flower of his youth, Li-Kuan is a mediocre poet but a good orator, which makes him seem brilliant in the eyes of his public. Although his poetic talent is lacking, he makes up for this with a curious gift - everywhere he goes, supernatural occurrences follow. Walking in the forest, he meets imps and sprites. Taking shelter in a ruined house against the rain, he meets an old ghost whom he helps put to rest and who recites for him several old works of poetry. Lost on a lonely road, he spends the night with the

most pleasant *yao*-vixens. Every time, the meetings are to his advantage and bring him some form of blessing (inspiration, a gift, the attention of the gods).

To accompany Zhu Li-Kuan in his artistic wanderings is the best way of finding adventures at once passionate, distracting and sometimes frightening, particularly if one loves poetry!

Metal 2 Water 3 Earth 3
Wood 4 Fire 4

Gift and Weakness: Ease of the Courtesan / Mind of the Hare

Skills: Calligraphy 3, History 2, Literature 4, Learning (Poetry) 4, Eloquence 3, Etiquette 3, Games 2, Seduction 3, Empathy 5, Legends 3, Hand-to-Hand 1, Horsemanship 2, Dodging 2

Taos: Tao of the Inspired Creation 2, Tao of Ying and Yang 4, Tao of the Clear Mind 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 3

Chi: 30

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -

Su Chi-Min

Born in a well-to-do family in Qin, Su Chi-Min was from a young age very curious about the world around him and determined to understand it. His parents quickly sent him to a tutor to develop his intelligence (and most of all to get rid of a kid who really did ask too many questions).

Too scatter-brained to be truly brilliant, Su Chi-Min entered university thanks to connections and his family's wealth, but there again he seemed to find it impossible to focus on one subject and wandered between almost all the courses, completing none. When he reached the end of his studies he had no diploma and no goal, save to go back to his family house and take over the running of his lands from his father.

However, at that point destiny intervened. A man had noticed Su Chi-Min: the librarian of the university, who saw that the young man had read every kind of book on the most diverse of subjects. Such a thirst for knowledge interested him, and he recommended Su Chi-Min to the Scribes of Wen Chang. On the way home he was met by a group of scholars, who asked him to join their organisation.

Thus, the young man found himself among the Scribes of Wen Chang. Initially, profoundly affected by the great

library of Linzi, he spent his nights reading anything and everything, as he had always done. Then, one night, he found old archives mentioning the existence of an ancient city from the Xia Dynasty. Fascinated by the descriptions he read there, he decided to find this fantastic city. His enthusiasm finally persuaded his superiors to let him have a few months for research before mounting this expedition; and quickly Su Chi-Min found an old map in Zhao, marking out the city. With the expedition put together, the young scribe set off on his adventure after hiring several bodyguards.

The expedition was a fiasco. The jungles south of Chu, where the city was supposed to be, was filled with dangers, strange beings and absurd chimeras. The group was decimated and Su Chi-Min only managed to return thanks to the skill of several heroes of the *jiang hu*, such as Falcon and Scorpion. However, this failure did not diminish Su Chi-Min's thirst for discovery: although the Scribes of Wen Chang opposed it, he is determined to put together another expedition, counting on his old bodyguards. This time, he hopes to surround himself with experienced heroes before going on his adventure.

Metal 2 Water 3 Earth 4
Wood 4 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness: Tongue of Tsia Chen / Curiosity of the Rat

Skills: Calligraphy 3, History 3, Perception 1, Learning (many fields) 1, Eloquence 3, Languages 2, Legends 3, Stealth 1, Dodging 1, Survival (Jungle) 2

Taos: Tao of Ying and Yang 3, Tao of the Clear Mind 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 2

Chi: 36

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -

Zhan Luo Zi

Zhan Luo still keeps a very clear memory of his grandmother from his childhood, an old woman with a deep voice, telling him stories. As the oldest person in the village, she knew a great many stories and legends, and Zhan Luo was always ready to listen to her, an enchanted child with wide, curious eyes. At the age when most children interested themselves with other things, he continued to keep her company so that every day he would hear a new story.



However, one day, the old woman's life ran out, but as he grew up Zhan Luo's passion for legends and fabulous beings never left him, and he dedicated his life to it. Quickly known for his encyclopaedic knowledge of the many legends of the *Zhongguo*, many universities offered him a chair as their professor of folklore, but Zhan Luo knew that the creatures he had read and written so much about were more than folklore and that many truly existed. Oh, of course, people believed in dragons and nymphs... but, in general, the majority seemed to be distancing themselves from ancient beliefs and the myths were dying, little by little. In libraries, philosophical and scientific texts pushed away those of tales containing the wisdom of the ancients.

In reaction, Zhan Luo decided to write a book on that question, a sort of masterwork compiling descriptions of all the fabulous beings that populate Heaven and Earth. He has been working on this for almost twenty years, and his 'Classic Mysteries of Heaven and Earth' is enriched almost every day by random meetings and tales.

Now almost sixty, Zhan Luo Zi lives in a comfortable manor but is still eager to take to the road if he thinks there is something to discover there, or someone to meet. The old scholar never hesitates to compensate those willing to give a tale or recital on supernatural creatures; unfortunately, he meets as many people willing to spin him a tall-tale as he does honest men. And exorcists – well, those *fangshi* have a well-deserved reputation for not being the most talkative... But thanks to his perseverance, Zhan Luo has gathered an impressive amount of information and hopes that a disciple will follow in his footsteps when he has left this world.

In the meantime, the old scholar is always on the search for adventurers who have true tales to tell him.

Metal 2 Water 2 Earth 4

Wood 5 Fire 4

Gift and Weakness: Memory of the *Zhongguo* (Legends) / Disgrace of Fu Xing

Skills: Calligraphy 3, History 3, Learning (folklore) 4, Eloquence 2, Languages 3, Exorcism 2, Legends 5, Theology 3, Horsemanship 2

Taos: Tao of the Clear Mind 4, Tao of the Inner Eye 3

Chi: 40

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -

Northern Owl

The young Bei Maotu is a scholar from Qi. Beginning as a historian in Linzi university, he quickly found his passion for those events forgotten by history, the acts of anonymous people that, although most often ignored, nevertheless have the tiniest impact on people's lives. Although the majority of his comrades hoped to join the entourage of a powerful man whose life they would write about, Bei Maotu instead wanted to dedicate his life to the large and small events of 'minor' history, that of the common folk, or the pariahs cast out by the society of the Warring States.

Thus, he went straight into the society of outcasts, the parallel world peopled by anonymous heroes known as the *jiang hu*. The young man rapidly wandered between the territories of the clans and began to gather recollections, tales, large and small stories, legends, and so on. He wrote those down in a masterwork known as 'The Chronicles of the *Jiang Hu*', and quickly gained the name of Northern Owl (no doubt due to his great eyes, which widened when he listened to an account). His reputation served as a writ of safe-conduct: even the bloodiest of brigands wanted to pass into history, and though Northern Owl had no knowledge of battle at all, the promise to write down the bandits' lives on the bamboo scroll of memory was enough to persuade all to spare his life.

Now that he has gathered the innumerable stories of the *wu xia*, Northern Owl wants to go even further and become a privileged witness of these secret heroes' lives. He is therefore ready to join a group of adventurers, as long as they are ready to live dangerous adventures that he would be then able to write down as a direct spectator.

Metal 2 Water 3 Earth 5

Wood 4 Fire 4

Gift and Weakness: Favourite of Chen Wang (literature) / Mind of the Hare

Skills: Calligraphy 3, History 3, Literature 2, Learning (*jiang hu*) 3, Eloquence 2, Languages 2, Seduction 1, Empathy 1, Legends 3, Jianshu 2, Dodging 2, Horsemanship 1

Taos: Tao of Ying and Yang 3, Tao of the Clear Mind 2, Tao of the Serene Presence 2

Chi: 30

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -

Terror of Ghosts

His real name Kong Bu, Terror of Ghosts is the archetype of the *fangshi* exorcist: of indefinable age, wearing a large black *chang pao* covered in esoteric symbols, and with a thin body and pale skin, he often looks more terrifying than the creatures he fights. His grave voice is always calm, and his settled attitude reassures those who call on him – for Terror of Ghosts is an exorcist of no small talent indeed.

As a child, though, Kong Bu seemed to have a completely different destiny. The son of a wandering doctor, he followed his father's trade, intending to carry on in his place; and by adolescence was already a confirmed practitioner. Once, when he and his father were in a village, they found that a mysterious epidemic was spreading through the region. Going to the houses of the stricken they were soon exhausted, and they too fell ill. Kong Bu managed to recover, having been close to death, but his father succumbed after long agonies – the epidemic continued its ravages and the young doctor could do nothing against it.

One day a man came, covered in talismans and with cold eyes. He called himself an exorcist and said that he had come to stop the disease, spread by a pestilence demon close by. Kong Bu insisted on accompanying him; the man refused until he heard that the young man had survived the disease. *"The poison this demon spreads is always fatal; you must have been stronger than it, because the Tao protects you."* Together, *fangshi* and doctor searched for the demon's lair, and when they found it the exorcist confronted it and returned it to the Hells. He asked that Kong Bu become his disciple: *"Healing people is a noble calling, but guarding them against invisible menaces is even more necessary, even if it is so much harder..."* Taking the name of Terror of Ghosts, the young man followed the way of the Exorcist beside his new mentor.

Today, aged almost forty, Terror of Ghosts is a master exorcist who has forgotten nothing of his past as a doctor. He has honed his skills in the subject through lectures and practice, meaning that in general people who meet him think well of him. Behind his fearful exterior is a patient and good man, always ready to aid others. His actions among men also translate to the supernatural: he prefers to come to the aid of a ghost so it can find rest rather than destroying it; and with the *yao* he is always careful not to act too quickly.

Metal 4 Water 3 Earth 5

Wood 4 Fire 2

Gift and Weakness: Patience of the Turtle / Disgrace of Fu Xing

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Herbalist 2, Investigation 3, Medicine 4, Perception 2, Diplomacy 2, Intimidation 3, Internal Alchemy 2, Exorcism 6, Legends 3, Meditation 3, Taoism 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Jianshu 3, Stealth 2, Dodging 2, Survival (various) 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Feint, Double Blow)

Taos: Tao of the Sudden Lightning 2, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3, Tao of the Invisible Shield 2, Tao of the Inner Eye 4, Tao of Ying and Yang 1

Internal Alchemy: Chi is the Breath of Life, Fan the Flames of Life

Exorcism: Blessing of Wood, Power of the Sun, The Compass of Spirits, Beyond the Veil, Shield the Body and Soul, From Water to Fire, Vengeance of the Gods, Shield from the Souls of Sinners, The Rite of Exorcism, Judgement of the Ten Kings of Hell

Chi: 20

Breath of Life: 21 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -



Adventures at the Edge of Reality

The three scenarios in this chapter should not need more than a few gaming sessions to finish. They should prove easy to introduce into different parts of the *Zhongguo*, and at any time. They may be used to link together different, more ambitious adventures, or to represent a voyage undertaken by the characters.

The Sins of the Father

This scenario plunges the players into the consequences of an event which happened several years ago: an elusive serial killer, a thriller-style adventure, and occult intrigue – something to make their characters think.

The story is set during the New Year celebrations, or another ceremony drawing large crowds.

Overview

The characters arrive in town at the same time as bloody events are taking place, putting the population in danger. The police forces seem incapable of stopping this wave of killings. However, when one of their companions is placed in danger, will the characters succeed in resolving this threat? And which will they choose when their sense of justice and loyalty oppose each other?

Setting the Adventure

Ideally, this would take place in a northern town of some importance (enough to warrant a governor) or the characters possess some attachments (family, friends, shifu) there. If they have played the scenarios in the Core Rulebook, Nao is an ideal location. If this place is set in the place where snow is unlikely (Chu, for example), then consider heavy rains to be falling at this time. The climatic conditions serve to establish a sense of being confined, everything grey, where people walk with hands and faces covered. In addition, in cases of acrobatic prowess, snow-covered or slippery roofs add an interesting sense of the dramatic. Nothing essential to the story, but leaving it out would be a shame.

Fear in Town

For two days, snow has been falling non-stop on this province of the *Zhongguo*. By chance, the blizzard has quickly given way to a lighter snow. Nonetheless, a cold wind blows, cruelly freezing the hands and faces of the characters as they follow the road towards a town almost lost in the whiteness. When the town - their destination - finally appears on the horizon, promising warmth and comfort, a pale sun blazes out for a moment from the grey clouds.

The characters should feel a sense of relief when they enter the town. The formalities of entry shrink to a mere annoyance against the possibility of warmth. However, the guards checking their identities seem nervous. They eye their weapons and equipment, ask why the characters are visiting, how long they plan to stay, etc. If a character seems surprised by these unusual interrogations, the sergeant only says that all the police forces are tracking a dangerous criminal. He remains evasive, cutting short any discussion, and simply warns them against any bad behaviour in town during the festivities. Apparently, being unable to learn any more here, the characters have nothing to do but to enter the town.

Encounters

Ideally, the characters should encounter an acquaintance in the town. A cousin, a childhood friend or an old master would serve very well (especially if Nao is their birthplace). If not, then the Game Master should modify the details of this adventure in order to implicate one of them in the events about to happen. The adventure assumes they meet a cousin of one of the characters, a scholar called Fen Lo, who has done rather well for himself and lives in a wealthy district of the town.

The characters have an address in the town where they know they will be welcomed. They cross the snow-covered streets to their destination and notice the large amount of patrols. People walk with heads hooded,



hunched against the wind. Despite the preparation for the festival, the town does not seem happy.

This is put into even more contrast by their host's warm welcome. Even though surprised by their visit, Fen Lo is delighted to see them and summons his servants to bring the heroes a hot meal.

Let the characters gain their bearings; Fen Lo has no lack of anecdotes about his cousin and is an attentive and generous host. The conversations revolve around memories but also to what has happened to them. Fen Lo is married and has just had a son.

He offers the group his home to lodge in for as long as they are planning to stay. His comfortable house has more than enough rooms for this.

Once rested, the players will no doubt want to know more about this criminal so desperately sought after by the police. Fen Lo does not know much on this subject, just what is commonly known: three murders have been committed during the week, all in this district. The malice and cruelty of the murders have shocked the citizens: the corpses were horribly mutilated. They were all young, the sons of powerful men. Fen Lo only knew them by sight but, like everyone, these events trouble him greatly, particularly since the magistrates do not seem to have any kind of lead.

Guilty Secret

The reason behind these murders, the first in a long series, stretches back twenty-five years. At this time, the family of the nobleman Silver Falcon exerted a significant influence in the town, where the new governor was attempting, little by little, to introduce the legal reforms of the central government. The aristocracy quickly grew antagonistic, and the two started a veritable war of influence which troubled local affairs. Exasperated, a delegation of townsfolk attempted to reconcile the two men.

The governor seemed ready to negotiate, but when they arrived at Silver Falcon's home the nobleman thought himself betrayed by the populace he had once protected. He lost his temper and in a fierce rage fell on the ambassadors. By sheer chance, one of them, Yun the old soldier, managed to defend himself and struck the man a fearful blow, dropping him to the floor unconscious. The seven ambassadors thought him dead, as did his wife and child. Their cries panicked the poor men, little used to this kind of situation. Petrified with fear, they decided to cover up their deeds. They torched the house, locking the occupants inside. Silver Falcon's family died in the flames but the aristocrat woke in time to see them die and, filled with fury, swore to avenge them. The seven men heard the curse but no one escaped the flames. Silver Falcon died, but his spirit rose three days later to haunt the mortal world.



During this time, the seven men returned to their work; the governor wondered what had truly happened but said nothing, too happy that the problem had resolved itself in his favour. He covered up the affair and persuaded the magistrate to close the investigation: it had been a simple and tragic accident. However, the ghost of Silver Falcon wanted revenge. He first haunted Yun, his 'assassin', brought him to the point of madness and attempted to possess him, but this attempt failed; the skilled warrior's will, combined with his guilt, prevented the ghost from taking possession of his body. Worse, he ended up trapped within Yun's body without being able to affect it. Yun went insane, his spirit constantly tormented by this inner voice. He left to live outside the town and adopted the life of a hermit, keeping the vengeful ghost trapped within him as a way to absolve his guilt.

The six other emissaries found their businesses discretely sponsored by the governor and quickly prospered to become some of the most powerful people in the town. However, since that sad day, none of them speaks of it and avoids it at all costs.

Today

Twenty-five years after the incident, Yun's weakened spirit has finally given way. Silver Falcon's ghost is free but his thirst for vengeance and hatred has strengthened during his imprisonment. The town has changed greatly in two and a half decades, and he needed several days to find the traces of his murderers: they have grown old, rich, and raised families. As he had lost his only son, the spectre decided to kill the children of those responsible: three died in less than a week. He hopes to leave fourteen victims before completing his revenge, seven children and their fathers. His powers have strengthened in this time, particularly in possession. Thus, every night he takes control of a different person. He uses this body to spy out a future victim, follow them and discover their habits. Then, when he feels ready, he strikes. The host wakes the next morning with no idea of what has happened.

The ghost is determined and methodical but also very intelligent. Yun, now completely mad, wanders through the town, predicting dire calamities. His old companions fear they know the reason for the killings now.

It just so happens to be that Fen Lo is the son of one of these old killers.

A Bloody Trail

There are a number of clues for the characters to follow in their investigation.

If the characters have links to the town authorities, they can find information on the killings without too much trouble; if not they have to talk to those who found the bodies, or persuade the magistrate to talk to them, or let them examine the bodies.

The murders seem to have a number of points in common: three young men, all from rich local families. The murders were committed at night, when the victims were alone, one in an alley, two in their bedrooms. The corpses have deep wounds caused by a blade but have been strangled to death, their tracheas crushed. Finally, all had an expression of terror on their faces.

For the moment, no one has made the link between these deaths and that of Silver Falcon. The magistrate tasked with the investigation, educated logically, refuses to consider supernatural causes.

Night Attack

The characters can use the evening to talk to Fen Lo but the fatigue of their voyage quickly catches up with them. He leads them to their rooms and bids them good night but they have barely blown out the candles before a woman's scream cuts through the darkness, coming from the other side of the house. The characters can reach her either through the corridor or the balcony surrounding the house. In the first case, they reach the room of Fen Lo's wife, she is crouched in a corner of the room, holding their child and bearing deep wounds on her arm. Their cousin is unconscious on the ground; he fainted when faced with the spectre's power. If they come via the balcony, however, they see a silhouette jump to the road and run away. Silver Falcon does not know that the characters are in the house (they have just arrived) and runs the moment he hears their footsteps. This may be an opportunity for a chase across the roofs of the district. The roads are large but the balconies and verandas are numerous, though bear in mind that the snow (or rain) has made the roofs slippery, adding an extra element of danger. Every so often, Silver Falcon stops to rip an icicle from a roof and throw it at the characters (damage 1). He runs until he reaches a wall surrounding the interior of a temple and its gardens full of snow and wooden benches. He leaps the wall easily and by the time the characters have followed, he has vanished, no doubt hidden in one of the many alcoves. The ghost, not wishing to be caught here, leaves his host body; the characters find a haggard young man, freezing cold and apparently with no idea where he is,

still holding a bloody dagger. If the characters are too loud searching the garden, they alert the acolytes... and probably a patrol.

Strange Amnesia

The curious, would-be assassin's name is Gon, a horse-groom, who only remembers having gone out with a few friends, then nothing more. He seems obviously incapable of committing the feats of skill shown by the phantom in its flight, which looks set to implicate the characters in the affair.

Fen Lo only remembers his wife's scream and a terrible figure that made him faint. The weapon taken from Gon is indeed the one that had wounded the young woman but he strongly claims his innocence. The magistrate, for whom the case seems obvious, has Gon kept in the prison for closer interrogation. However, he now does not trust the characters either and dispatches an agent to keep an eye on them (they will no doubt notice him soon enough).

Fen Lo cannot explain the motive for this attack. He does not have any enemies. However, the characters can gain a valuable clue. A doctor is at the young woman's bedside and if the characters mention the amnesia, he says that he has had a similar case two days ago, as well as one of his colleagues (most of the hosts did not consult a doctor for their 'nocturnal absence'). If questioned, they tell a tale very similar to Gon's: going out at night, the cold and the darkness.

What Trail?

Where to look for more information? The magistrate refuses to see them. Fen Lo does not seem to understand. Gon makes a very bad culprit. However, after this night, a few townsfolk begin to make the link between Silver Falcon's death and this affair, forcing them into the investigation.

Yun: In the morning, the characters see a gangly figure wandering down the road. Dressed in rags, his eyes wide and mad, he howls apocalyptic prophecies: "Damned town, accursed town, sons of assassins, the Hells come for you. The blood of the dead will turn the earth red, a silver falcon screams for your heads, it will devour you. Cursed, a thousand times cursed!" etc.

It is impossible to get anything sensible out of this man, whose screams quickly draw the guards who throw him outside the walls. It is possible to find him again in a clearing almost a *li* away. He has built a small shack



there. Yun cannot hold a proper conversation but he often repeats the words “silver falcon” which seem to provoke great fear in him. If they insist, the poor man shows them a path through the hills leading to the ruined manor of twenty-five years earlier. When the characters leave him, he seems to return to himself and cries after them, “We are cursed, and the sons bear the sins of the father!” Then he falls back into incoherent muttering. Few still remember Silver Falcon and those who do only recall a tragic accident that happened some twenty years ago.

Si Li, Silver Falcon’s Servant: Now very old, she rambles a little and still works as a servant in the governor’s house. Absent that fatal night, she was the first to find the ruins. She could not approach the still-burning pyre but she clearly remembers having heard her master’s voice howling from the heart of it. She still remembers the words: “Assassins! I curse you, traitors, and your bastard children! I condemn you to hell and will kill you myself!” At the time, the magistrate did not record her statement. How to find her? Yun’s wanderings could put the characters on the right track, leading them to her. If not, they might see her frail figure around the ruined manor, where she prays every day.

The retired magistrate: He still lives in the town. Very reluctant to begin with, he may be able to reveal to the characters that the governor insisted, in person, that this ‘sad story’ be shelved as quickly as possible. He also tells them of the delegation of townsfolk and the bad relations between Silver Falcon and the governor. A search in the archives reveals the dossier, which holds little but Silver Falcon’s name.

The gashes: This is a false trail but could be interesting to make the character lives more difficult. Silver Falcon is very intelligent and has an idea to slow down the investigation. Very learned in Taoism, he has some knowledge on the subject and he carves esoteric symbols on the corpses. A *fangshi* character should have little trouble in interpreting the symbols (Test of Wood+Taoism ST 6). Should the characters lose themselves in hypothesis and research this lead, the ghost strikes again. An investigation in the town leads nowhere; here, like everywhere else, under the facade of logic the old traditions are still strong. Eventually, as they ask questions, they enter a bar where an old man often drinks. Rumours connected to Taoism always lead to him. In fact, this man, Da Xi, has been recently called on to help a man recently arrived in the town. If threatened or offered a few coins, he points the way to the inn the man is staying at. It is Grey Claw, a *fangshi* in exile. Seething with resentment, he feeds his anger and researches the darkest parts of his art. His room resembles that of a sorcerer; he believes the characters are emissaries of his tormentors and immediately attacks

them. It is up to the characters to overcome him if they want to hear his story and realise he is innocent.

The other killers: There are now only four, not counting Yun; two others have been dead for some time (including Fen Lo’s father). They had begun to suspect the truth even though they do not understand why the revenge is only now taking place. When the characters begin to investigate this situation, Fen Lo receives a message: after so many years, they decide to meet and consider what to do. They recognise Fen Lo as a victim of the same vendetta. The characters find their friend worried and distracted. He leaves in the early evening, explaining that he has to work late, but he does not go to his office. He joins the reunion where he discovers the truth about what happened twenty-five years ago. If the characters follow him, they also hear the version that the killers tell (which minimises their role, as they are accusing Yun of the killing).

Those Brave Men

To help keep up the pace of what might otherwise be a slow investigation, this secondary event should be used to give the characters a sense of progress. A small group has decided that since the authorities cannot protect them, they will take matters into their own hands. As the characters are investigating, these ‘brave townsfolk’ jump the characters, as they have just arrived in town and are thus suspect. They have heard that they had something to do with the attack on Fen Lo and that is enough for them! They are not a serious threat to the heroes, twelve men whose numbers bring them courage (treat them as simple henchmen armed with a staff). However, as they are innocents, the character should be careful not to seriously harm them, or worse.

The Trail

The next day, a new body is discovered floating in the river. Same signs, same clues. However, this is a special day and despite the fear spreading through the population, the inhabitants leave their homes in order to celebrate the New Year. Since their arrival, the characters have assisted in preparing for this event. A timid sun lights the roofs and from dawn, the processions, celebrations and ceremonies follow each other. The festivities last three days.

The characters no doubt continue their investigations and, thanks to Fen Lo or by their own deductions, they discover the killer’s identity. What to do now? During the day, the spectre hides within the ruins that were once his. This sinister ensemble of blackened pillars and

unstable ruins could be the site for a spectacular duel. However, if Silver Falcon thinks himself in danger, by an exorcist for example, he plays his trump card and attempts to possess one of the characters and flee into the town. At night, the characters cannot find the ghost, always tracking down his next victim. In any case, they find, placed on an altar, a woman's bracelet and a child's toy, both blackened and charred. Souvenirs the ghost has kept which prod him to vengeance every night.

If they chase him during the day, or if they intercept him when he tries once again to kill Fen Lo, the characters face him once more. If he feels endangered, Silver Falcon flees again, but this time he has an impressive advantage: the passing crowd gives him an almost innumerable amount of bodies to possess. In an instant, he jumps from one to the other, forcing the heroes into an exhausting chase. He uses his hosts to harass his enemies, and the characters should bear in mind that they are innocents. If cornered, he attempts to possess one of the characters, the one with the least chance of resisting him. He then attempts to return to his ruins.

By now, the characters should have realised who Silver Falcon is and the motive for his vendetta; if not, he then he tells them and calls on their sense of justice. He gives his version of the story with as much melodrama as possible, attempting to manipulate their feelings towards the only emotion he now knows: vengeance.

It is up to the characters to choose. They cannot let Silver Falcon assassinate people for the crimes of their fathers, but his vendetta is nevertheless legitimate even if it consists of breaking the twenty-five year old silence over this story, and questions the positions of the richest men in the city. So, how to resolve this situation? This time, the choice is entirely that of the characters, who have to deal with the consequences...

Protagonists

The Spectre of Silver Falcon

Although consumed by vengeance, blinded by hatred, and devoured by pain, he remains a cold and calculating manipulator. A dangerous adversary who uses his hosts (he can use his Skills or theirs) without regard. His real torment may touch the characters, but his vendetta no doubt goes too far for their sense of justice.

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 3

Skills: Jianshu 3, Daoshu 2, Intimidation 3, Dodging 2, Taoism 2, Art of War 3, Acrobatics 2, Eloquence 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Total Block, Double Block, Double Blow), Daoshu (Direct Hit, Double Block)

Powers: Formlessness, Possession 7, Terror 11

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 3, Tao of the Light Step 2, Tao of the Thousand Bees 3, Tao of Ying and Yang 2 (Silver Falcon mastered these when he was alive; dead, he uses his host's reserves of Chi to use them again)

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 24/0

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -

Grey Claw

This *fangshi* adept got a little too involved in the politics of the town he came from and saw himself exiled. Swearing revenge, he plunged himself into study of the darkest arts. Grey Claw is not really cruel, only drunk with rage and paranoia. If the characters question him, he believes them to be assassins sent by his old masters and attacks them. The characters must use the best persuasion they have to bring him to reason and discover who he really is.

Metal 2 Water 3 Earth 4

Wood 4 Fire 2

Skills: Herbalism 2, Intimidation 1, External Alchemy 4, Meditation 2, Taoism 3, Hand-to-Hand 1, Daoshu 2, Dodging 1, Calligraphy 2, Learning (The Hells) 2

Chi: 36

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: -

Prepared Potions: Silence of the Lake, Freeze the River, Evil on the Air, From Flower to Seed

Possessions: Travelling equipment, daggers, potions, alchemical material



The Eternal Lover

Introduction

Note: This adventure works best if Lo May is the first *yao* the characters have met, taking them completely by surprise. In any case, at the end of the scenario the characters will have found many fabulous objects to add to their legends and no doubt made new allies.

One Winter in the Zhongguo...

The characters are on the road towards a destination of their choosing. They have been walking for several days through hills covered in groves of trees and dark pines. At night, the freezing temperatures and northern winds force them to find shelter and huddle around a small fire. Tonight, however, as darkness chases away the last embers of the day, the lights of a small town not far away wakes in them the promise of a warm bed beside a fire and a hot meal.

Exhausted, the characters can rest in this isolated little settlement named Hungo (which the Game Master can place in any State). Although of modest size, the town possesses a sturdy wall, and great, fortified gates control access. The countryside, like the town, shows the prosperity of the inhabitants. The fields seem fertile, the lumber industry seems productive, but most of all, an iron mine and foundry play a great part in local life.

The characters stop at this town and, as night truly begins and the light of the moon gleams in the sky, knock at the door of one of the many inns surrounding the marketplace just behind the great gates. They are finally able to rest and eat a good meal.

Yellow Moon, Voice in the Night

Having washed and prepared for a delicious meal, the characters begin to relax. Take time describing things: the players will no doubt want to know more about the town. They share the main room of the inn with half-a-dozen other people. Five of them are merchants on their way to the next large town. They are only passing through Hungo even if they plan to sell their merchandise there for a large profit. The sixth person is a veteran state soldier on leave after a long mission as emissary. He is going to see his mother who lives alone in a village further to the south and has stopped for the night in the settlement. He is Fong Sho, and comes across as very friendly and welcoming. Finally, the

innkeeper, a large and jovial man called Hang chats with his hosts while he serves good food and drink.

The characters are able to learn a little more about their surroundings by following the conversations. Let a relaxed and friendly atmosphere take the fore. Fong Sho talks of his campaigns and the merchants tell various little anecdotes about their travels. Beside a warm fire, alcohol loosens tongues and the characters soon feel ready for their beds.

Outside, an icy wind rushes through the streets, lit by coloured lanterns outside of pleasure houses, taverns and gambling dens, and a few people come and go despite the cold. Now feeling at home, the characters can make the most of their evening here, or prefer to remain in the warmth. The modest inn obliges the men to share one large room and a smaller one for women. However, they face onto the back of the house, over a tree-filled and quiet yard. It is no doubt already late by the time the characters reach their beds, particularly if some decide to partake in the local pleasures: gaming dens, halls for massages and hotels that while not precisely luxurious, are still beyond the reach of the average farmer (see the tariffs in the Core Rulebook).

The cold and silent night promises a peaceful sleep. However, the characters have barely closed their eyes before a strange feeling seizes them. Images from their childhood suddenly come to the fore, happy and almost forgotten until tonight. It takes them a few minutes to understand the origin. Outside, over the cry of the wind, a few notes of a flute can be heard, sometimes the voice of a woman, crystalline and pure but melancholic, a gentle song that wakes in them the best moments of their childhood. A glance out of the window reveals the facade of a large wooden, two-story building. The curtains in the windows of the ground floor let a soft orange light filter through and the enchanting music seems to come from there. The characters quickly realise that this is a luxurious mansion for courtesans.

The Woman of the Silk Veils

The characters may want to see for themselves what this is; if not, they discover the following information by asking amongst the inhabitants of the area, in the form of rumours and overheard conversations.



The establishment is known as the 'Four Sisters' and offers its clients music, drinks and relaxation in charming company, but in reality is it entirely due to the actions of one artist. The players hear many rumours about her, sometimes contradictory. She is clearly a woman of great beauty, but some say she is the mistress of a disgraced king, others that she is a ghost come to tempt men onto the path of damnation. It should not take the characters long to realise that no one knows who she is. The only concrete information they can find is at the 'Four Sisters' from the mistress of the house, Madam Shin. This greedy old woman never misses a chance to vaunt her own charms, particularly if the characters have drunk several glasses of alcohol during the conversation.

The young artist is called Lo May, and is said to come from the northern state of Yan, which seems to be confirmed by her slight accent. She arrived in Hungo, alone, three weeks ago, looking for work.

She plays the flute and has an extraordinary voice with enchanting power, as they have already realised. She speaks little, sleeps through most of the day and only emerges at night. She lives in the establishment, in a bedroom on the second floor, and barely leaves it, passing her days sleeping or playing music. Madam Shin has never seen her take a lover, despite the many men and women who have fallen under the charm of her melodies.

There is nothing left to do but to meet this strange young woman. They can do it this very night by slipping into the performance room (though Madam Shin watches out for this), or the next day during the next performance. During the day, Lo May refuses to

receive anyone, a strange habit which should intrigue the characters.

Once they see her, the characters understand why so many lovelorn legends are born around her.

Lo May is indeed beautiful. With a harmonious face, golden skin and green eyes, a mouth with fine dark lips, long silky hair reflecting auburn – and a primitive and savage air, at once disturbing and deeply attractive. A doll dressed in sumptuous veils of multicoloured silk, which only reinforce her beauty, but more magnificent still is her voice, melodious and enchanting, supernatural, evoking celestial songs.

White Moon, Tragic Loves

Now that we have established the setting and mood, let us look to the heart of the plot. Of course, this is the beautiful Lo May; but there is also a second element, a young thief by the name of Second Choice.

The young man is barely seventeen and comes from the town previously visited by the *yao*. There, often frequenting the establishment where she preformed, Second Choice fell utterly in love with the courtesan, to the point of becoming completely obsessed with her. Very intimidated, he could not bring himself to speak to her before she left. When he discovered that the object of his desires had left the city, he rushed after her, and found himself in Hungo the day after she had arrived. Since then, he comes back every night to listen to the song of his beloved, but still cannot speak to her. However, he does court her, in his own odd fashion.



The Reflection of a Yao

No one in Hungo knows the truth about the pretty courtesan, so here it is, or at least part of it. The young girl is, in fact, a yao: a cat-woman transformed by the blessing of the gods. Here is her story:

It is a simple story, that of a cat, which lived, long ago, in the court of the Xia Dynasty, in the palace beside a princess named Lo May. This young woman, still an adolescent, found herself a hostage in a rival city, a political pawn between two ambitious states. Every day, the cat contemplated her magnificent mistress and listened to her nostalgic songs, because she had a soft voice, like the song of a flute. The cat was her only friend, her comfort, and the only other living being she had to share her solitude in her gilded cage. The nights passed, the seasons came and went, but still the cat remained loyal in her affection for the young woman, wanting only a few caresses and the pleasure of listening to her songs.

The violence of men often has little place for laws, or the lives of those weaker than themselves. The two sovereigns quickly grew provoked and war broke out. The hostage princess now was of little value and, filled with rage, the cruel king broke into her chambers one night. Despite the young woman's pleas for mercy, he fatally stabbed her. The cat threw herself furiously upon her friend's assassin, deeply clawing his face and putting out his eyes, and then fled the palace, escaping

the royal guards trying to hunt her down. The princess's body was thrown into a communal pit and forgotten in those troubled times, but every night her little cat would lie beside her and mew her sadness and loss, like a funeral song cast towards the Heavens and the moon.

The sad song finally reached the Celestial Court. Such loyalty touched the gods and they decided to recompense the small cat for her faithfulness. The touch of a ray of moonlight did their work and the little animal became a yao.

Since then, under the name of Lo May, she wanders the Zhongguo, singing the songs she once heard as a cat, while lying on the cushions beside her mistress. Since then, she has developed her musical talent to an incredible level and lives from her art, travelling from town-to-town, from one house of courtesans to the next. She stays as long as she likes, or as long as there is demand for her skills.

She sings of the memory of the forgotten princess, as well as ancient odes she enjoys singing.

Naturally joyous, here and there she seduces companions for a night and abandons them at once, leaving them to their dismay. She retains nothing from her lovers, forgetting their faces and leaving behind her broken hearts and families – a sort of revenge against men who constantly try to dominate women.

Using his talents as a burglar, he robs a house every night to find a jewel worthy of his beloved. In the morning, Lo May finds it left on her bed. Thanks to her supernatural gifts, she quickly found out who was responsible for these extravagant gifts. Amused, she lets him continue his little game and, naturally, she keeps the jewels.

In the morning the characters hear rumours about the recent spate of robberies, which defy the authorities of Hungo. The robber enters a house every night but each time takes only one jewel.

Finally, one last protagonist enters the game. Several months ago, Lo May was passing through Handan and amused herself in seducing a rich merchant of the city. Having become completely dependent on the young woman, he could not stand being without her. He languished for several weeks, letting his business affairs fall to pieces and his family worry themselves sick. Finally, he committed suicide. His only son, Gu Jin, swore to avenge his death and wanders through the Zhongguo looking for the beautiful yao with her spellbinding eyes. He arrives in Hungo with his escort the day after the characters.

A Day of Seduction

Thus, Lo May has been wandering for a long time from town to town, developing her art and living day-to-day, without wondering about tomorrow or the consequences of her lover's games.

How will the characters react to her? If they come to watch her performance, they are hypnotised by her song and her flute. In the same way, if they managed to meet her in the 'Four Sisters', her beauty and charm renders them speechless. The aura of seduction around a yao affects women as well as men: no one is immune. Wise characters should wonder as to the nature of this overwhelming attraction and realise that some kind of magic is in effect.

Most of all, as soon as Lo May sees the characters, she realises that they are heroes of skill and correctly judges their valour. She knows that Gu Jin is on her trail and has no doubt that the magistrate has made the connection between her arrival and the thefts. Lo May knows that the characters should be able to protect her from this situation and so she chooses from among them a new lover for this town. She turns her charms

on the character with the highest Fire score (if it is a draw, compare the Earth score). With a wink, a smile, a gesture, she attempts to draw the character's attention and make them understand what she means. How does the character react? As soon as this first meeting has taken place, Lo May becomes more determined and is not afraid to make the first move in order to provoke further encounters. This seduction phase should be played carefully. The characters approached by her find themselves entirely under her charms but the less affected characters can take a step back and see the situation rationally. It is also very likely that they become aware of the strange comings-and-goings around the inn the next day.

A group of 'merchants', come from Handan, enter Hungo at dawn. Three men and their cart, accompanied by a group of six mercenaries with crude manners. It is, of course, Gu Jin and his two bodyguards, plus a few henchmen he has hired for this task.

Let the characters take their time and enjoy the day. If they have not done so already, they may attempt to meet the seductive Lo May and learn more about her, but if they have already met the beautiful *yao*, she is the one who provokes the next meeting. With all the skills she knows, Lo May finds herself 'accidentally' on the same street as the character from whom she hopes to get favours. When she approaches, trying to talk to the hero, a man wearing rich clothes joins the little group; he is Xiao Ping, a notary utterly in love with the young *yao*. He completely ignores the character and speaks directly to the young woman. This aged man bluntly admits his mad desire and his wish that Lo May marry him. He speaks of his riches and grows annoyed when the *yao* laughs in his face. Humiliated, he raises his hand to strike her, and what happens next depends on the characters.

If he strikes Lo May, she throws him a dark look filled with menace. Before leaving Hungo, she visits him at night and he is found the next day with his throat ripped out. However, if the characters intervene, the *yao* hides behind her chosen lover, looking frightened and defenceless. The characters must tread carefully, Xiao Ping works for the state and benefits from certain powers. He could send militia to provoke a fight with the characters, or have them watched (two agents of the local magistrate owe him favours, simple bodyguards) and jumps on the slightest chance to make their lives difficult.

Lo May passes a little time with the characters, she talks of her art but remains evasive about her past, simply letting out that she has suffered a great deal. Faithful to her seductive techniques, she plays with her voice and smiles, then quickly turns and goes back to her apartments, no doubt leaving the characters in her thrall.

Until nightfall, the characters can wander in Hungo and learn about Lo May, and about what is going on in town, on the streets where the grey clouds and cold wind create a sombre mood. Here is a list of the various events that could cross their path that day.

Gu Jin's arrival: In the morning, the vengeful son's group passes through the town's fortified gate. They take up residence at an inn close to that of the characters. Gu Jin quickly organises a surveillance around the 'Four Sisters' and Lo May as soon as she leaves the building. He attempts to quiz the inhabitants about the *yao*. Sooner or later, he meets the characters.

Fong Sho's challenge: The characters meet Fong Sho again during the day. He seems more upset today and throws the characters dark looks. What has happened? Nothing too original, the soldier was to leave Hungo at dawn but delayed his departure to have an evening with the beautiful *yao*. However, he was refused entrance to her room by Madam Shin; Lo May was sleeping. Frustrated, he provoked a fight and was thrown out by the tenacious bodyguards. Then, he later saw the same courtesan on the arm of one of the characters and became extremely jealous. He knows he has nothing left to do in town, but, under the *yao*'s charm, he cannot bring himself to leave.

He wanders all day around the 'Four Sisters', drinks and groans about his bad luck in the drinking dens of the area. That evening, completely drunk, he finally dares to challenge his rival. Normally, Fong Sho would be a dangerous adversary but right now, drunk and depressed, he is much less so. The character challenged should realise the situation and, if intelligent, should check the combat so not to harm the foolish man.

Vengeance of the cruel notary: Xiao Ping broods on his humiliation. If the characters have intervened between him and Lo May, he uses the slightest excuse to put the militia on their trail. He may even ask some of them to give the characters a good beating.

The suspicions of the magistrate: Magistrate Tan, the head of Hungo, associates the thefts with the presence of Lo May in town. He comes during the day to the 'Four Sisters' to meet her and ask her a few questions. In this conversation, even this stern man is still vulnerable to the charms of the *yao*. However, he cannot let go of his suspicions and swears to keep a watch on her so that she is constantly under surveillance. Make sure the characters see the magistrate leaving Lo May's quarters, or hear about it. It is up to them to find out more about the subject, the *yao* is very evasive if the subject is mentioned. However, she knows that it is time for her to prepare to leave Hungo.



The shy thief: Second Choice has slept through the morning and then wanders through the district, staking out the site of his next robbery and trying to find the object of his desire. If the characters are interested in this story of theft, and are capable of persevering, they notice the young man's presence in Hungo. No one knows what he is doing here, even though the innkeeper whose room he rents suspects he has something to do with Lo May.

Blue Moon, Thief in the Hells

A freezing and windy night falls over the provincial town. The characters have to juggle Fong Sho's challenge carefully, so that Xiao Ping's militia does not interfere.

They can then watch Lo May's performance and pass a pleasant hour with her at a dinner organised by Madam Shin for her and her fellow guests (around forty people).

The night proves to be rich with events. Firstly, the affair of the jewel thief is resolved. In fact, Second Choice cannot stand being silent any more and tonight approaches Lo May and admit his love for her, bringing her a new gift, of course.

It is now important for the Game Master to keep the events in the correct order. Here are, in chronological order, the events that may come to perturb the characters this night:

Sunset: Fong Shu challenges his rival to a duel.

Nightfall: Lo May sings at the 'Four Sisters'. The evening continues into the middle of the night through a dinner organised by the house.

After midnight: Lo May, advised by a false message, leaves her room and goes to the Lover's Wells where Gu Jin is waiting to ambush her (see below).

An hour later: Second Choice enters the 'Four Sisters', soon followed by Magistrate Tan. The characters become involved with these strange events.

Once dinner is finished, Madam Shin gives them leave to go and Lo May returns to her chambers. If the character she has tried to seduce follows her, she kisses them, and perhaps even more if they are charming enough. Afterwards though, the courtesan insists that her lover leave her room. She says she prefers sleeping alone, which is in fact true, rolled up on a cushion in her cat form.

The characters meet outside the walls of the pleasure house, unless they plan to spend the evening in company. Either way, their attention is soon be drawn back to the 'Four Sisters', as a clamour breaks out beside it. A dozen people are standing just outside, accompanied by as many from the militia. On the doorstep, Madam Shin is speaking to Magistrate Tan, who has just arrived. Characters who have returned to their rooms to rest are woken up, as their windows open onto the street. It seems unlikely that the characters remain out of this business and quickly join the crowd to find out what happened.

Magistrate Tan explains to Madam Shin that a new theft has been committed near here. However, a servant caught the perpetrator in the act, and though they could not identify who it was, they were definitely seen fleeing towards the 'Four Sisters' by the rooftops. Immediately, Lo May was a suspect and while some went to fetch the magistrate, others blocked access to the house and demand that they bring out the courtesan. In fact, Second Choice was seen and stupidly decided to hide here, near the *yao*. Having failed to find her, he is hiding in the house.

Madam Shin at first refuses to accommodate the functionary but then gives way as the militia forms a security cordon around the angry crowd. Tan asks her to choose several impartial witnesses to help him from the crowd. Thus, as soon as she sees the characters, Madam Shin calls them over because, not mentioning that one of them is Lo May's lover, she thinks them the most sympathetic to her cause.

The heroes accompany the magistrate to Lo May's chambers but no one answers when he knocks at the door. Once it is open, it is obvious no one is there. Strangely, the window is open despite the freezing wind (the means used by the cat-*yao* to leave via the rooftops and balconies). Magistrate Tan begins to search and quickly finds the stolen jewels wrapped in a roll of silk. The character that searches the adjoining room also makes an interesting discovery. Near the bed, in the middle of the folds of a delicate robe, they find a small message written in a rough hand on a piece of bamboo, asking to meet Lo May at the Lover's Well, nearly an hour ago. Most of all, this message is signed by the character the *yao* has chosen for a lover! Having asked, they discover that this is a fountain in the residential quarter, reputed for being a place of romantic meetings.

When they ask for more details, a small noise on the balcony draws their attention. A thin silhouette slips furtively past their window. Second Choice is trying to leave the house by jumping on the roof of the neighbouring building. The characters should jump to pursue them, because the silhouette is much too large to be that of Lo May, and extremely suspect.

A rooftop chase ensues; Second Choice is fast but the Taos and the skills of the characters should make the difference. Some tiles are icy and pillars and scaffolding allow for great leaps, the grey shadows penetrated by the light of the moon. Below, Magistrate Tan, the militia and the crowd follow the perilous chase on the ground. Finally, the characters should catch up with the young thief. Taken to the magistrate, he tangles himself in arguments and denial before finally admitting everything and proving the courtesan innocent.

However, the characters must now find out what has happened to Lo May.

The Lover's Wells

Magistrate Tan notes down Second Chance's confession but says that he would also like to speak to Lo May about this matter - but where has she gone at this late hour? If the characters have discovered the note in her bedroom, they know where to go. If not, then since the magistrate sent several groups of militia across the town to find her, the characters may do the same. They may simply have to follow the militia and send them on the wrong trail (again, they must be careful to stay on the right side of the law).

Finally, the characters find themselves in a small square with a stream running through it which the inhabitants call the Lover's Wells, but the place is completely empty and dark.

Lo May is not stupid and was wary after receiving the message. In her feline form, she left her room and made her way here, where she saw Gu Jin and his three hired swords waiting in ambush. She stayed a while until the three men decided, a little before the characters' arrival, to meet with the rest of their group at the foundry. Gu Jin had planned to kidnap Lo May and torture her before disposing of her in one of the large metal wells. He bribed the master of the night team in order to do so and the workers themselves are less than observant (see the paragraph on foundries, Core Rulebook). They are still at the foundry, debating how to proceed from here in order to complete the young man's vengeance.

After following them to their hideout, a room next to the foundry, the *yao* doubled back and, passing by the Lover's Wells, saw the characters. She knows that she must leave Hungo at once but decides on a final plan to lose her pursuers. While the characters are looking around the fountain, they hear mewling. A beautiful black cat is sitting on the stone and watching them intently. If they try to approach her, she jumps from the fountain, advances a few places and turns to stare after them, still mewling. She guides them like this to the



foundry, a few yards away. At no time does she let them approach close enough to touch her, even if it means using her Taos and arousing their suspicions even more.

The characters should now realise that Lo May is at the centre of a huge web of intrigue, entangled in sorcery. Once in front of the iron foundry, the little cat disappears. A careful look around reveals Gu Jin and his men, still talking. Their conversation is clearly about Lo May and the best way to kill her. What will the characters do now?

Red Moon, Silver Swords

The *yao* has not finished her little scene. While the characters are still considering their next action, they hear a melodious and familiar voice calling for help. Gu Jin and his men are equally surprised but react immediately and run from their room to the inside of the foundry. The character should follow them at once.

The hot and acrid air inside the vast building contrasts sharply with the icy wind sweeping the streets. Bamboo walkways hang over the huge bronze wells, filled with molten metal flowing slowly towards the ingot moulds. Large barrels of water are spread out at regular intervals, ropes and chains hang from large pillars from the roof, almost twenty feet above them. Finally, three enormous furnaces growl against the far wall. At night, the activity in the factory has slowed greatly. The master and the six night workers maintain the fires and clean out the wells and moulds. One or two are still working, filling the moulds with molten metal.

Lo May, still in her cat form, has discretely entered the building. Although now dressed in a crude tunic belonging to one of the workers, which still reveals all her curves, she has climbed on top of one of the pillars beside the furnaces and is pretending she has been tied there. Of course, the night team, like Gu Jin, is completely shocked to find her here but before the characters have had time to ask any questions, Gu Jin howls. "Catch that bitch, a month's salary to the one who brings me her heart!"

Immediately, armed with tools and swords, the merchant's henchmen throw themselves towards the young woman who screams again. Her plan is working perfectly, the characters should normally react quickly to 'save' her – and fight off her enemies.

The area allows you to stage some rather spectacular duels. Use the props and setting to their best advantage: the heat, the faint red light, the molten metal, the walkways and the pillars – everything that could make this combat memorable. Their adversaries are far weaker than they are but also far more numerous. If the players have really understood the nature of Qin,

they should be able to imagine a hundred ways to stage incredible feats of skill and prowess.

Logically, the characters should win this battle and may be able to capture Gu Jin and hear his side of the story. After that, it is up to them to decide if they want to hand his band over to the authorities.

What about Lo May? She takes advantage of the general confusion to take her animal form and disappear quietly, leaving the men to their fight, it is nothing to her...

Note: Be careful that the characters understand one important thing: the foundry and the building belong to the state. If they cause too much damage, they could get into a great deal of trouble. Magistrate Tan may understand but he is still bound by the law; as for Xiao Ping, he jumps at the opportunity to embarrass his rivals.

Silver Moon, Nostalgic Melody

Lo May immediately returns to the 'Four Sisters' as soon as battle commences. Unseen, she goes to her room, packs her belongings and leaves the building. She hides her belongings in a merchant's cart and takes her animal form to crouch there unseen. At dawn, when the town gates open, she departs Hungo, leaving behind her the town and her lover of one night – as well as some amusing souvenirs.

The characters should now realise the degree to which they have been manipulated and may begin to understand Lo May's true nature. If they decide to try to find her again through Madam Shin, they of course discover that the beautiful courtesan has left Hungo – but has left behind a small gift, a beautiful bamboo flute on which a talented artist has carved the figure of a malicious-looking cat.

The Protagonists

Lo May, yao-cat and hundred-year old courtesan

For several centuries this beautiful *yao* has wandered the roads of the *Zhongguo*. As time has gone by, she has developed her talents to incomparable heights. She still dwells upon her memories of the tragic princess who was her friend. Even though she might entice a man here or there, this relationship rarely lasts long, and such men never really mean anything to her. She is amused at the desire she draws from others and, even more, the jealousies and deceptions this provokes. Lo May is not really cruel, just independent and careless.

Metal 3 Water 5 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 6

Skills: Calligraphy 2, History 3, Perception 4, Learning (World of Courtesans) 3, Acting 2, Dance 2, Music (Flute) 5, Music (Song) 5, Seduction 4, Legends 1, Daoshu 3, Acrobatics 3, Stealth 3, Dodging 4

Techniques: Daoshu (Direct Hit, Double Block)

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (Claws)

Taos: Tao of the Light Step 3, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 4, Tao of Ying and Yang 4, Tao of the Serene Presence 4

Animal Trait: Green eyes, has to sleep 14 hours every day

Chi: 60

Breath of Life: 21 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 3/-3, 2/-5)

Passive Defence: 10

Renown: 15 (recognised artist)

Possessions: A sack filled with beautiful clothes, several flutes of bamboo and wood, a few cheap jewels, a handsome mother-of-pearl hairbrush and a silver mirror.

Gu Jin

The young son of a merchant ruined by his love for Lo May, he has launched himself on a vendetta for the honour of his family. He does not know of the *yao*'s true nature but suspects sorcery. Furious and determined, he does not know that his thirst for vengeance is leading him to his own destruction. He is far from a hardened warrior or hero but throws himself into combat without thought for his own safety.

Metal 3 Water 2 Earth 2

Wood 3 Fire 3

Skills: Bureaucracy 1, Investigation 1, Perception 2, Trade 2, Bangshu 2, Dodging 2

Techniques: Bangshu (Double Blow)

Chi: 12

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 7

Renown: 9 (son of a Handan merchant)

Possessions: Fighting staff, a few travelling affairs, a still full money pouch.

Gu Jin's Bodyguards

Old servants to his father, these two veterans have come from the Zhao army and follow the young man out of loyalty and good pay. They are the most dangerous adversaries, far more so than their master. For convenience, their statistics are almost the same.

Metal 4 Water 3 Earth 2

Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Perception 2, Intimidation 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, Jianshu 3 (for one), Qiangshu 3 (for the other), Stealth 1, Dodging 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Block, Feint) /

Qiangshu (Repel, Charge, Double Blow)

Taos of the first bodyguard: Tao of the Six Directions 2, Tao of the Breath of Power 2

Taos of the second bodyguard: Tao of the Invisible Shield 2, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 2

Chi: 18

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 8

Renown: 5

Possessions: Their weapons, their travelling things, heavy fur and leather coats (protection 2).

Gu Jin's Mercenaries

Six simple henchmen, motivated only by money and equipped with badly-made steel swords and reinforced clothing (Protection 1).

Foundry Workers

Like the mercenaries but they fight with their tools (Improvised Weapons). Their master is just a little stronger and uses a steel bar as a mace (Chuishu 2, Manoeuvre: Knock-out).

Second Choice, Young Thief in Love

Metal 2 Water 4 Earth 2

Wood 3 Fire 2

Skills: Perception 2, Games 1, Improvisation 1, Acrobatics 1, Stealth 3, Dodging 2, Climbing 2, Theft 2

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 2

Chi: 18

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: 5 (thief)

Possessions: Second Choice has only the clothes he wears and a few coins he has stolen.

Fong Sho, an Enchanted Veteran

Metal 4 Water 3 Earth 3

Wood 2 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness: Bronze Breastplate / Pride of the Rooster

Skills: Law 1, Perception 2, Intimidation 2, Jianshu 2, Qiangshu 3, Nushu 2, Horsemanship 2, Dodging 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Block, Double Block), Qiangshu (Repel, Double Block, Whirlwind Block)

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 2, Tao of the Strengthened Body 2

Chi: 27

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 7

Renown: 5 (State soldier)

Possessions: His weapons and a backpack for the voyage.



Ceramic Guardians

Introduction

This third scenario is based on a straightforward mystery and should not pose too much of a problem for the characters, at least at this level. However, the power of the adversaries which face them poses a definite problem. While it is possible to resolve this adventure with brute force, it is the most dangerous solution and characters choosing this path should not emerge from it unscathed. A good deal of ingenuity is encouraged when it comes to dealing with the different situations.

Note: This adventure could be set in most of the provinces of the *Zhongguo*, in preference a region with many valleys and large areas of wilderness (forests or deserts). It would be easier for the Game Master to hide the tomb in one of these places and explain why no one has found it until now. For the same reasons, it should not be too close to a large city where the large concentration of people would make this hard to believe.

A Meeting on the Road

Many dirt roads criss-cross the *Zhongguo*, and the reasons for the characters to voyage along them are many also. Since dawn, the characters have been following a small road, winding around sheer mountains. They have travelled for several days, the weather warm and dry, along this smooth and reliable road. A capricious wind sometimes blows dust in their faces but also brings some coolness. However, since this morning, heavy grey clouds have been clustering on the horizon and promise heavy rains and violent storms. The characters should start thinking about finding shelter for the night, but there are no villages or towns in sight. They have seen no one else today.

Around mid-day, the characters encounter a small convoy, moving slowly in front of them and consisting of two ox-drawn carts, filled with goods (mostly bales of silk but also pottery and ceramics and a small chest hidden in the silk), which comprise the whole Little Profit's worldly wealth. The wandering merchant travels through the whole of the *Zhongguo*, buying here and selling there – everything and nothing. His business is not very lucrative but is enough for him and his two workers, brothers named Fu and You, to live off.

The characters quickly catch up with the carts and should quite naturally start talking with them. Little

The Secret of Little Profit's Servants

Will fortune soon smile on the wandering merchant? Unlikely. In fact, and rather unfortunately for a merchant, Little Profit is completely honest, not to mention very compassionate towards others. Though he invests the majority of his money in his business, he always offers alms to the poor and to the temples of the towns he visits.

Fu and You have understood that they will never make their fortune accompanying this merchant. They have instead decided to create their own business alongside that of their boss. They profit from their constant travels in the traffic of funeral objects. Contacted by a group of criminals specialising in tomb-robbing and led by the formidable Thunderblade (see below), they use Little Profit's business to transport the stolen objects across frontiers and sell them on as part of a corrupt river of crime running through the Warring States. Unfortunately these two dishonest brothers, sick of the feeble percentage they get back, have decided to double-cross their accomplices. Hidden among the bales of silk, a wooden casket holds three superb jade figurines from the Yin Dynasty. Fu and You hope to sell them at their full price in the next town, but Thunderblade has realised their duplicity and will not be played like this.

Profit has some knowledge of the area and tells them that they should reach a modest sized town by nightfall. He also tells them that there will be a toll post further on, a few *li* from the main commercial road.

While the two workers remain taciturn and silent with the characters, speaking only to each other in low voices, Little Profit is jovial and friendly to them – particularly if he has heard of them (see the rules covering Renown in the Core Rulebook). He suggests that they travel together since they seem to be going in the same direction. “After all,” he says, “A voyage in good company is more enjoyable and safe.” He even offers to pay for the characters’ travel if they seem to be on hard times. Of course, this is not simply altruism but also the thought that his travels would be far safer with the characters in tow.

Fu and You remain quiet, leading the beasts and obeying with more or less enthusiasm the slightest command from their employer. Curious, and an incorrigible gossip, Little Profit maintains the conversation



throughout the morning. He asks the characters many questions but freely speaks of himself, his business, the many places he has been, etc., and while the merchant's chatter fills the next hour, at least it passes relatively quickly. Soon, the little convoy crosses the next hill, and, on the plateau that it leads to, they see a building beside the road. The barrier of the toll post is down, but, strangely, no guard has come to speak to them.

A Mystery Beside the Road

The deserted toll post is a very strange sight. Little Profit himself seems worried at this unfamiliar situation. Let the characters imagine what might have happened before they go to try to find out for themselves. When they approach, they are struck hard by the silence reigning over the area, broken only by the caws of the crows flitting overhead. A long barrier blocks the road; the door of the wooden hut normally housing the guards is wide open, but they can see no trace of the soldiers.

Whether they are prudent or not, the characters have nothing to fear here. The violent events here took place more than two hours ago. The characters find that the inside of the small building is utterly destroyed, as though a hurricane had swept through it. Furniture is broken on the ground; the wooden wall at the back crushed as though a bull had run into it. A few yards away, beside a twisted tree, the corpse of one of the soldiers is bent into an impossible posture. A close examination reveals that the bones have been broken in a dozen places: the man died due to violent blows that literally crushed his skeleton.

A close search of the area reveals the body of the second guard. He has also suffered a lethal blow that broke his neck and threw him from the road and into the bushes

nearby, almost thirty feet away. Like the first, his sabre is out of its scabbard showing that he had tried to defend himself in vain. A good tracker discovers some traces (Test of Wood+ Survival ST 7 or Perception ST 9): someone or something had come from the forest, from the direction of a small wooded valley towards the guard post, but a strangely straight trail indicates that the creature was not at all bothered by the terrain. It is difficult to discover any more from these faint traces, but they seem to belong to a very large man. Finally, the trail is lost a few yards further on, amidst trees and mossy soil.

Once more, let the players imagine all sorts of explanations as to what happened here. They will most likely imagine Taos or magic used on the guards or the buildings. At any rate, Little Profit, worried, insists that the characters remain with him until they reach the next town. This strange event is explained later.

Note: If the characters decline Little Profit's offer, they arrive alone at the toll post, then the town. There, the crowd causes them to wait and the merchant's carts rejoins them in the queue waiting to enter the town.

A Momentous Arrival

The characters finally rejoin the main road after about half an hour. They soon meet a group of cavalymen and can inform them of what has happened at the toll post.

The cavalymen ask them a few questions, verify their identities and leave to check on the guard post.

When the characters arrive in sight of the town, huddled at the bottom of a valley where a large river flows, twilight is already shrouding the sky. The clouds from



that morning start releasing their water, the rain falling in a warm torrent. The characters and their companions are quickly soaked even before they arrive at the heavy wooden door leading to the town. Many merchants and voyagers, townsfolk in a hurry to return to their homes, are presenting themselves to the guards who, despite the crowd, still obstinately insist on seeing everyone's papers and the contents of their carts. Little Profit complains but perceptive characters see Fu and You glance at each other nervously.

The town is, for the most part, on an island in the middle of the river. A wooden bridge, about twelve feet wide by thirty-six long, leads directly to the barbican which protects the town entrance. A small wooden balustrade serves as a parapet rail, and the current of the arm of the river which separates the town from this bank visibly swells in the torrential rain.

The night and the dense rain reduces visibility to a few yards and the customs check becomes more difficult until half a dozen more militia come to help those already working, with large oiled paper lanterns. A queue has formed before the gate, bringing complaints from those trying to find shelter. The characters are stuck in the crowd, which carries them along one step at a time, heads bowed under the rain streaming from their hats and coats.

It would be easy to drop their guard at this moment, and unless the players say that they remain vigilant, they are taken completely by surprise by what happens next (giving them a -4 penalty to their Initiative Test).

Three days ago, Thunderblade went in search of his two errant pawns. Thinking they would come to this town, he hoped to intercept them with a few of his men before they entered. If the characters remain attentive, they notice two hooded men waiting at each pillar of the bridge. A Test of Wood + Perception (ST 9) allows them to spot three more in the crowd, fighting against the flow of people to get closer before they get to the gate. Thunderblade hopes to use the confusion to find the two brothers and regain the statuettes, but Fu and You are alert and spot Thunderblade as he waits for them, arms folded, in front of the barbican. His henchmen are almost upon them before they attempt a desperate act. Fu pushes one of the characters violently, the one who seems the best at fighting, in front of the three criminals heading towards them. By reflex, they immediately draw their swords and jump into combat against this supposed bodyguard. From here on everything disintegrates into complete chaos.

Four more of Thunderblade's men block the entrance to the bridge while three more face the characters. Their chief climbs up the balustrade and shouts, urging his men to fight.

Finally, his faithful second-in-command, Ardent Arrow, joins him and lifts his bow to aim at the convoy where the characters are. The crowd finds themselves caught in the middle of the fight and panics as soon as blades are drawn. The mad push forward means the militia cannot reach the fight and it takes them at least two minutes before they can aid the heroes. The characters should not have time to understand what is happening, only that they have been caught in an ambush. Do not give them time to ask if they are the target or if there has been a mistake. Force them to react quickly and create a complicated combat.

As the crowd presses towards the bridge, they make the combat even more difficult. The rain and darkness are bad enough by themselves. The carts can serve as shelter against Ardent Arrow's bowshots but if the characters seem to be getting the upper hand, then he and his master join the combat.

The combat should give them impression of confusion and panic, particularly if they are trying not to hurt any innocents in the process, a restriction that does not bother Thunderblade. If the characters seem to be in trouble then the militia comes into play (never mind this lost chance at a legend!) but the situation should cause some impressive feats of skill. Finally, either by reaching the statuettes or by realising that he cannot prevail, Thunderblade breaks combat, but in his own style, with panache: he uses the Tao of the Breath of Power to break the bridge. The use of Taos or a Test of Water + Acrobatics (ST 10) allows him to jump to shore. He is quickly out of reach and flees, abandoning the men still in combat and leading the others away.

Little Profit and his fellows fall into the fast-flowing river, along with half-a-dozen others: old men, women and children. The whole bridge threatens to collapse, carried away by the current. What will the characters do? After all, they are supposed to be heroes and trying to save these people earns them a few points of Renown.

Meeting in the Magistrate's Office

Once the chaos provoked by this conflict is over, and the people in the river rescued, the local authorities show a great deal of interest in the characters. If they joined the rescue attempt Magistrate Fan Goan's welcome is slightly less suspicious, but he still demands they shed some light on this affair.

Give the characters their chance to explain and ask their own questions about Thunderblade's motives. Little Profit affirms loudly that he has no idea what caused the conflict; he seems sincere. However, the characters notice that Fu and You are even quieter than usual. A

Test of Earth + Empathy (ST 7) confirms that they are hiding something.

Questioned, at first they each proclaim their innocence, but if the characters participate in their interrogation they may be able to push the two brothers into admitting the truth. If a clever character decided to check the chariots, the bandits' obvious target, he discovers the statuettes. If not, then Fan Goan condemns the two to be tortured and they immediately admit everything about their business with Thunderblade, revealing to the characters why they have just had to fight.

Little Profit is horrified that his trust has been thus betrayed (he is honestly kind and naïve!) and warmly thanks the characters for saving his life (particularly if they saved the two wagons on the bridge).

Whatever the case, it is very late by the time the characters are permitted to leave and find a room for the night. Outside, the rain continues to fall and the streets seemed to have turned to streams. The characters eventually find an inn where they can dry off and enjoy a frugal dinner. Little Profit accompanies them but complains endlessly about his bad luck. After a few drinks, he grows cheerful again and he begins to elaborate on his plans for the future, always just as loud.

Dawn has barely broken before a loud voice wakes the entire establishment. The innkeeper, embarrassed, comes to fetch the characters and tells them a patrol of six guards is waiting for them downstairs. Their chief, a one-eyed and sour-looking veteran, demands that they dress as quickly as possible because Magistrate Fan Goan demands to see them. He crushing tone speaks volumes about his thoughts on the ragged vagabonds he considers the characters to be. As unpleasant as this is, they have no choice but to put on their still damp and cold clothes. Thankfully, the rain has stopped and a pale sun glows through the heavy grey clouds.

The soldiers lead them across town to the magistrate's office. As they pass, the townsfolk cease what they are doing to watch them and the characters hear their whispers, more or less favourable, about their behaviour the previous night.

They are led to the magistrate, who welcomes them with a light morning meal. He seems as alert as though after a long night's rest, although he maintains he has worked all night. If the characters have a high positive Renown, his behaviour becomes far more pleasant. He tells them he could use men such as they, with reputations as heroes and of doers of great deeds. Naturally the town is full of good people, but he claims none have the abilities necessary to deal with difficult problems. Once he thinks he has piqued the characters' interest and flattered their vanity, Fan Goan gets to the point.

For about fifteen days, alarming reports have been reaching him from the southern villages. Apparently, a terrible creature is devastating the region and has already killed a dozen people.

They speak of a stone colossus, an invincible and immense demon, but the magistrate thinks these are the ravings of superstitious peasants. He thinks that it has to do with a criminal instead, like Thunderblade, a bandit who has mastered Taos, and he needs the characters to track down and arrest his man, in order to bring peace and security to the area.

The characters undoubtedly make the link between this tale and the devastated toll post they saw yesterday. If they tell Fan Goan of this, he analyses each element according to his hypothesis and refuses any non-rational explanation.

To finish, he asks the characters to join his service for a few days, enough time for him to investigate this affair. The salary he offers is modest but correct (ten pieces per day per person). If they seem hesitant, Fan Gian reminds them of what happened the previous night and that money is needed for the repairs on the bridge they helped destroy – just in case.

Rumours and Preparations

The characters, whether through greed, desire for fame, or simple curiosity, should accept this mission. Fan Goan expects to leave the next day, and the characters have a day in the town to rest, go over last night's fight and buy new equipment if necessary. They can also try to learn a little more about this 'monster', which has terrorised the villages.

They need go no further than the gate guards, who see people come from all over the world, or to a place where they can meet these people themselves. However, they quickly find that these are nothing but rumours and speculations; someone's brother's cousin knew a person who saw the monster but no one seems to have seen it for themselves.

"No doubt because no one has survived an encounter with the monster," says an old man, a little away from the others. His name is Po and he once lived in these fearful villages before coming to find shelter in the town, but miserly as ever, he only agrees to talk to the characters in exchange for a drink or a few coins. Po speaks quietly, glancing into the corners as though about to impart a terrible truth. According to him, the creature is a terrible... ghost. Yes, but not just any ghost, because there is something nearby that none speak of and which the characters do not know. About a day's



march south lies a large tract of forbidden wilderness that even Magistrate Fan Goan, in spite of repeated, has not managed to integrate into the town's territory.

In fact, the expedition sent there last year never came back, and the locals begged him not to try again. Rumour has it that an army, killed centuries ago in a bloody battle, haunts the place. Po says - and the character can see the fear burning in his eyes - that the army's general returns to deliver vengeance and strike dead all those who trespass on the ground where his warriors rest. Is it mere superstition?

Do the characters believe the story the old man has told them? At any rate, Fan Goan laughs in their faces if they speak of this legend to him. Educated in logic, he mocks anything supernatural. However, having come from a small rural community, he understands the power of a hero in such troubled times and still feels a certain fear after hearing the tales of one of the town elders. He thinks that the characters ought to put their exceptional talents in service of the state and refuses to accept a magical cause for these events, mostly through fear that this might actually be the case.

The sun has barely risen the next day before the magistrate and the characters are on their way. They have to use a temporary rope bridge to cross the river, and it is impossible to leave by horse. They have to walk to the first village.

The Sinister Trail

They make their way along the muddy road the characters arrived by until they reach the toll post. The two new guards stationed there are repairing the building. Fan Goan questions the characters on what they saw the first time, and follows the trail as far as possible, but has to abandon it at the top of the escarpment. The guards' murderer seems to have emerged from the rock of a steep cliff (about a hundred feet high) which dominates an enclosed valley, leading to the river that passes through the town. They can also see the rooftops of two small villages nearby, but it seems impossible to descend the cliff.

Fan Goan decides to pursue his investigations in this valley and leads the group on. Once more, as night is closing in, the rain begins to fall, a storm breaks and travelling becomes difficult. It seems unlikely that they will reach a village, but the characters soon spot the outline of a rickety cabin set back from the road. It is the home of a shepherd which could easily hold them all and offers a dry night, but as they approach the cabin, a hideous smell hits their nostrils. They soon find the decomposing corpse of a peasant on the floor of the building. The heat of the last few days has no doubt accelerated the decomposition; he has been dead for at least three days.

Like the murdered toll guards, he seems to have been beaten to death, and his expression is one of unrelenting horror. Fan Goan refuses to sleep here and pushes them onward. They finally arrive at the first village a little after the Hour of the Tiger, exhausted and soaked through. The worried and suspicious peasants give them a cold welcome, but when Fan Goan explains who they



are and why they are here, the peasants relax a little. The village chief, a man named Li Dong, welcomes them to his home, which holds his entire family, about a dozen people. The other villagers crowd around the windows despite the late hour and the pelting rain.

Fan Goan and the characters once again meet the same superstitions and legends; no one has actually seen the 'monster'. The village has already had four deaths, in the same manner, always isolated and near the river. However, they gain a couple more clues: the second village in the valley (situated a little further on, close to the high hills and forbidden region) lives under the same terror, but was the first to suffer a death. The first death took place three weeks ago; but four days ago, a group of six people, who Li Dong suspects were bandits even though they did not trouble the villagers, passed through the village, heading to the edge of the valley. Strangely, they were carrying tools for excavation (spades, picks, etc), and the one leading them looked more like an educated man than one from the provinces.

Runs Like a Hare

The next day, the characters can return to the road, most likely following the path taken by the grave robbers. After half a day's march on rough and rocky ground along the river, they reach the second village. However,

after an hour the characters catch sight of a silhouette standing in the middle of the river, now swollen by the rains. The man is dressed in rags, his hair and beard long and unkempt, and he is trying to cross at what was once a ford. If the characters do not say anything, Fan Goan calls out to him, asking who he is, but the poor man just glances around in fear towards the little group and moves faster, the water now up to his shoulders. His strange behaviour should draw the characters' attention and, if they approach the river, the man begins to scream and loses his footing, carried away an instant before managing to right himself. If they want to catch him, they have to succeed in a Test of Water + Swim (ST 7) to cross the river successfully. At any rate, Fan Goan insists that they bring him this man.

This is Runs Like a Hare, exhausted, starved and mad with fear. For three weeks, he has been running from the clay warrior, but, lost in madness, he has not been able to leave the valley. At first, he seems terrified of the characters and they must be patient and calm him before he is able to speak. A bit of food helps to win his trust. He is clutching an object tightly against his bare chest and he attacks anyone who tries to take it from him with nails, fists and teeth. It is a magnificent and, no doubt, very old necklace made of gold and jasper.

It is up to the characters to try to get as much information out of Runs Like a Hare. Be careful,



What's Actually Going On

About three weeks ago, a group of men led by Zhong Yi, a historian and grave-robbing rival of Thunderblade, passed through this isolated valley.

A few months earlier, Zhong Yi's researches in the library of the state capital had allowed him to find mention of an ancient tomb hidden in this area. Even though the references were vague and seemed like legend, Zhong Yi took a risk and financed this expedition. A worthwhile risk, in fact, because he found, hidden in a bend of the river, a forgotten burial mound so old it seemed like part of the countryside. Determined and spurred on by the thought of riches, they opened the tomb, but it had some nasty surprises for them.

Zhong Yi thought that it was the tomb of a dead queen (or, at least, an important woman), who may even have lived in the time of the Yellow Emperor. At any rate, the builder of the sepulchre was determined that no one would violate it. The eager grave robbers set off the first traps and died without even realising what had

happened to them. The survivors were more prudent and, with a lot of luck, managed to enter into the burial chamber. A dozen clay statues representing ancient warriors watched over a magnificent stone stele. On it, a statue, covered in plaques of the purest jade, faithfully represented the traits of a beautiful young woman, a necklace of gold and jasper hanging around her neck. One of the pillagers rushed to grab hold of the necklace before Zhong Yi could stop him. At once, the clay statues animated. The bandits made for poor adversaries in comparison and, despite a doomed flight towards the exit, setting off more traps, their group was decimated. Only the thief, appropriately named Runs Like a Hare, made it out alive, running as fast as he could out of the forbidden area, still clutching the precious necklace.

Two animated guardians waited at the mouth of the tomb. One of them returned to watch over his queen, while the other set out to find the thief, drawn by the magical essence of the stolen necklace. Runs Like a Hare is still in the valley, now driven half-mad by his experiences, and the clay warrior still pursues him, killing all who cross its path, giving birth to the legend of the stone warrior who haunts the land.

however, as his explanations remain confused, he often speaks in gurgles and jumps at the slightest noise.

Once they feel they have more or less reconstructed his story, a flock of crows suddenly takes flight from a nearby bush. There is a sound like a dead branch under a heavy foot about thirty yards from the characters. The ceramic guardian has tracked them down. Runs Like a Hare screams and seems in the grip of a terrible panic, trying to get away by any means.

Faithful to its orders, the clay warrior attempts to reclaim the jewel and furiously attacks any characters in its way. Despite its power, the numbers and skills of the characters should prevail. A perfect solution would be to coax it into the river, where it quickly sinks under its own weight and disappears under the water. However, should a dry summer follow one year, this victory may be slightly pyrrhic...

Note: If the characters just give the necklace back to the guardian, it still seeks to kill Runs Like a Hare as punishment, afterwards returning to the tomb with the precious necklace. If the characters decide that there is no reason to go to the tomb after this, when they return to the village, they hear of more armed men passing through, soon after they left. Thunderblade and his men, hearing the rumours, have also gone in search of the tomb, risking letting loose even more guardians. Fan Goan decides that they must track them down to avoid more horrors.

The Ancient Tomb

If the characters have managed to protect Runs Like a Hare, he can point them in the direction of the burial mound but refuses to go back there himself, to the point of fighting them off and running away. Without this information, it takes the characters three hours to find it alone. It is a burial mound more than forty yards in diameter and twenty feet high. Huddled by a bend in the river, time and nature has almost hidden it completely: it could just as easily be a natural feature, along with the dozens of other hills in the area. In fact, observant characters notice that these too resemble smaller tombs. This is actually a necropolis holding the remains of kings from a kingdom forgotten in time.

No path leads to it and the characters have to cross the terrain, which becomes more and more chaotic, until it reaches a line of grey stones around the mound. The characters discover on the way the remains of several bodies, both of man and horse. They are members of Zhong Yi's expedition, the remaining horses having escaped.

Even if they have gone back to the village, the characters are the first there, as Thunderblade has fewer clues and searches a larger area. Apart from the sound of the water running past the foot of the mound, this area remains utterly silent. No animal troubles this last resting place. A quick look around allows the characters to make out the entrance to the mound. On the opposite side of the river, the remains of a camp are still visible, and a little further on lies the mouth of the tomb; an enormous block of stone had been barring the entrance, but torn out it now lies on its side next to the camp.

Let the characters make their plans before entering. Runs Like a Hare may have warned them of some of the perils that lie inside.

Pebbles slip and slide as the characters climb the gentle slope leading to the sinister entrance. A little taller than a man, the opening is supported by large boulders and blocks of carved stone. It leads to a small circular hall with a marble floor, covered in ochre sand. There is no other way in, and besides this room, the rest of the tomb is plunged in darkness. This is the entrance hall, and two corridors lead off in different directions into the tomb, which become spirals that constantly cross each other, giving them the impression of a labyrinth without end. The builders created many traps to get rid of potential robbers. Many no longer work, their mechanisms decayed over time. However, the simplest traps are still functional. Twice the characters find the corpses of members of Zhong Yi's band, one crushed under a trapped ceiling, the other impaled on spikes beneath a trapped floor.

Finally, at the heart of the level, the characters find a new circular room containing a paved ramp leading dozens of yards down. The room is completely empty except for many beautiful carvings in the walls. They represent mythological creatures to ward off tomb robbers and bandits. The characters descend to a low antechamber where many wooden chests are stacked. These hold ancient bronze pottery and beautiful female clothing, which the thieves had already started removing. At the base of the ramp, the characters find the remains of the rest of Zhong Yi's expedition. The man himself is also among them, his body crushed. The dry air and constant temperature of the tomb has preserved the bodies so they have dried without rotting.

Beyond this room is a large opening dug into the grey stone. Through this is the funeral chamber, a vast hall, eighty yards in diameter and twelve feet high, the ground covered in the same fine ochre sand as the entrance hall. Eleven stone alcoves hold clay soldiers like the one the characters have already encountered; if the characters have killed it, the twelfth is empty. In the centre of the room, on a pedestal, stands a jade statue. It represents a huge and beautiful woman, serpentine



in shape and bearing a cruel smile. At first glance, there seems to be no treasure in here. However, a close examination reveals cracks in the jade and an opening in the flank of the statue. After arriving here, knowing the dangers of the clay warriors, what do the characters do?

Assault of Steel, Assault of Earth

The characters find themselves at the entrance to the funeral chamber, facing their fears and doubts. Unless they have taken real precautions, the next moments take them completely by surprise, because Thunderblade has found their tracks.

Accompanied by any men who survived their last meeting, and four mercenaries hired later, he tries once more to surprise his adversaries. He thinks that they too have come to rob the tomb and believes them rivals. In fact, if the fight seems to go against him, he offers the characters an alliance and a half-share of the treasure, but right now he would rather seek revenge and launches a surprise attack against the characters.

The clay guardians do not move unless one of two things happens: a person touches, voluntarily or not, the pedestal, or blood touches the floor of the chamber. If so, those whose magic still functions animate and attack the combatants indiscriminately. The statues pursue them to the first room, or further if they have stolen something (remember what happened to Runs Like a Hare). Thankfully, for the characters, time has eroded the spells placed on the statues. A close examination shows that some of them simply fall to pieces or refuse to move. Use this excuse to give the characters enemies they can realistically deal with. Ideally, from one to six statues join the fight.

Thunderblade quickly realises what he is facing and reevaluates his chances of survival. If the battle seems lost, he flees, abandoning his men again and leaving the characters to deal with the guardians and cover his retreat, but, as before, if he thinks that characters may win, he allies with them, to betray them later on (by leaving them in the funeral chamber and blocking up the door behind him).

This time, the setting does not give the characters much chance for tactics against those whose strategy is to simply advance and destroy. Apart from Ardent Arrow and Thunderblade, the robbers are no match for these stone monsters. The characters will probably retreat to the labyrinth, but a nasty surprise awaits them there.

The Labyrinth of Souls

In fact, Zhong Yi is not entirely gone. This learned scholar could not accept dying here, under the blows of a simple monster animated by ancestral magic. He, considered the best tomb robber in the *Zhongguo*, dying like this, quietly and without glory? Impossible.

Such determination not to die here, forgotten, was enough to keep his spirit alive in this tomb, but while this is a new experience for him, and his capacities as a ghost remain weakened by inexperience, he still faces the characters and torments them.

As for Thunderblade, he recognises him as a rival and cannot accept that they might succeed where he had failed. He appears to all of those who attempt to flee through the labyrinth; his aim is to stop them getting out alive.



To this end, he uses his powers to try to get them lost by calling to one or the other, alerting and guiding the clay statues towards them, and even trying to possess them if one seems to be getting too close to the exit.

Try to maintain total confusion in these scenes. The danger of the statues is a constant and serious threat, because they are no minor opponents; Thunderblade and his men do not help matters and even if the characters enter an agreement with the tomb robbers, they have to understand that this is temporary at best and that they could be betrayed at any moment.

The darkness, the combat, the complicated labyrinth and the fear of the guardians should test the characters' nerves to the limit and make them lose all sense of direction or of the situation. Zhong Yi's ghost makes everything even worse, particularly if he possesses one of them to make more trouble. He is an extra problem in a situation already chaotic enough.

Eternal Peace

Powerful characters may be able to destroy their adversaries, animated statues, robbers and the ghost, but while this is possible, it would be at a grave cost considering the power of their enemies and some might not get out alive. An alliance with Thunderblade does allow them a respite and they can deal with each problem one at a time. An exorcist could deal with Zhong Yi, relieving the characters of that menace while they deal with the other enemies. Do not forget that if Magistrate Fan Goan is with them, the characters have to protect him as well as themselves.

The simplest solution is simply to leave the tomb. The ghost of Zhong Yi cannot follow them and the guards do not if they have not taken anything. They then just have to replace the stone block in the entrance and perhaps find a way to make sure no one else desecrates the place. Remember that there are a dozen other mounds nearby...

Finally, if the characters do manage to conquer all opposition, what do they get? Apart from more glory to their names and the possibility of stealing riches from the tomb, they may want to open the sarcophagus. If so, they will be disappointed because little by way of treasure is in there. A frail corpse rolled in rotting brocade and mummified by the years is all they find, the meagre treasure limited to the bracelets on her wrists and a magnificent bone comb carved with her name: Scarlet Lotus. Who was she? A mystery - discovering this is the stuff of another adventure. At any rate, the builders of her tomb wanted to make sure she would never be disturbed.

Indeed, at this moment the structure seems to tremble and murmur. A scholar might be able to understand a few ancient words, hateful whispers and ancestral curses. The ground shakes; rivulets of dust fall from the walls, the stones buckle and fall. Then, from the gaps in the stones comes a jet of water. The tomb suddenly becomes a death trap. The tomb connects to the river and opening the sarcophagus has triggered the last trap, pressurised water now floods the chamber. It takes less than a minute to drown this place, which should give the characters just about enough time to leave, but they do not get away so easily. They still have to cross the labyrinth and time is of the essence, because though the water does not rise above the lower level, the foundations of the tomb have started to crumble and the whole mound seems to be about to collapse. Put the characters under pressure, force them to remember the way out (if they have not yet marked the way), or another solution might be to break their way out (Tao of the Breath of Power to blast a tunnel, for example). Set this up like a small apocalypse; the ground shakes, the walls break, the ceiling is caving in, dust, darkness, and if they have not yet dealt with their enemies, they use this time to try killing them and the situation becomes critical.

Nevertheless, these are heroes: magic, Taos and destiny should allow them to escape. Players may invent new solutions and should be rewarded for heroic and spectacular actions.

Finally, who was Scarlet Lotus to earn such protection? The unravelling of her story may allow characters to discover and shed light on new mysteries – but this is another adventure...

The Protagonists

Little Profit

This wandering and aging merchant is affable and friendly. Small and starting to put on weight, his hair is starting to grey. However, he cannot imagine giving up his work, which he loves and prizes above all, and his longing for freedom pushes him to wander endlessly. Honest beyond all logic, he has a secondary role in the adventure but can become a reoccurring character in future scenarios, showing up here and there at the right moments and bringing advice and help thanks to his many connections.

Metal 2 Water 2 Earth 3
Wood 3 Fire 4

Gift and Weakness: Linguist / Loyalty of the Dog

Skills: Bureaucracy 2, Calligraphy 1, Perception 1, Learning (commercial routes) 3, Trade 3, Languages (Xiongnu, Northern Dialects) 2, Bangshu 1, Craft (rope making) 2, Dodging 1

Chi: 18

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 7 **Renown:** 15

(wandering merchant)

Possessions: Walking staff, two ox-drawn carts, various merchandise.

Fu and You

Working for Little Profit for more than three years, these brothers are desperately trying to become rich at his side. This is why they use his business as a way to transport stolen works of funeral art for Thunderblade and his gang. Cowardly and suspicious, they hope to double-cross their superior by selling the statues they have stolen without paying Thunderblade – a story of thieves soon to link with the characters' own story. Little Profit, too trusting, knows nothing of this.

Consider their statistics as those of henchmen (see Core Rulebook).

Fan Goan

The young and idealistic magistrate is a handsome man with refined manners, who actually comes from a village of peasants of which there are many in the region. His great intelligence meant he was able to enter into a famous school in the capital. He tries to hide his humble origins behind a professional mask, but these resurface in his superstitions about ancestral beliefs and his faith in Taoism, which he has never really succeeded in hiding. Fan Goan is a kind young man, but proud and direct and with a high opinion of the law and the state.

Metal 2 Water 4 Earth 2

Wood 4 Fire 3

Skills: Bureaucracy 3, Calligraphy 2, Law 3, Investigation 2, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 1, Empathy 1, Jianshu 2, Horsemanship 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit)

Chi: 18

Breath of Life: 17 (6/0, 5/0, 3/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 8

Renown: 20

Possessions: Marks of his position, sword.

Thunderblade

Once a Yan official, this elegant and handsome man hides beneath his warm façade a cold and cruel soul. Wily and quick-witted, Thunderblade has also received a good education. He knows how to use his charm and vigour to offer compliments or threats to achieve his goals. For the last six years he has led a gang of sundry criminals, gathered under his authority, charisma and, for the moment, the success of his enterprises. At first a highwayman, he has found a less dangerous and more lucrative trade as a grave robber and seller of antique artifacts. After his first few tentative successes, he wanted to expand his activities and hired Fu and You to extend his sphere of influence, and in so doing came up against his rival, Zhong Yi. Having discovered his underlings' betrayal, he sets off after them to stage an ambush.

Thunderblade is a very intelligent and powerful enemy. He always judges situations carefully, to take maximum advantage. Thunderblade may become a reoccurring and implacable enemy (or, even, an occasional ally).

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 3

Wood 3 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness: Mask of the Demon / Wanted (Yan)

Skills: Investigation 2, Law 1, Perception 2, Intimidation 2, Games 2, Empathy 3, Art of War 2, Jianshu 4, Nushu 2, Stealth 2, Horsemanship 2, Dodging 3

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Total Block, Feint, Double Blow, Combination, Disarm)

Taos: Tao of the Six Directions 2, Tao of the Light Step 2, Tao of the Breath of Power 3, Tao of the Sudden Lightning 3, Tao of the Serene Presence 1

Chi: 36

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9

Renown: 8 (deserter, bandit)

Possessions: A magnificent ornamented sword, stolen from an ancient tomb, clothing of excellent quality, horse.



Ardent Arrow

Tall, thin, with a drooping face and quick eye, this man is forty-four years old and was once the chief of the gang Thunderblade now leads. Beaten in a duel, Ardent Arrow conceded his place and Thunderblade decided not to kill him, preferring to keep him on and use his gifts, guessing that the aging brigand would not be a threat to him. He was right; Ardent Arrow does not regret his old life, as the success under their new leader has given him riches of which he had never dreamed. In fact, his loyalty is without question unless Thunderblade was to betray him first, in which case the characters may find an unexpected ally.

Metal 3 Water 4 Earth 2
Wood 3 Fire 2

Gift and Weakness: Courage of the Tiger / Ascetic (chastity)

Skills: Perception 3, Intimidation 2, Games 2, Jianshu 2, Gongshu 4, Throwing 2, Stealth 2, Horsemanship 2, Dodging 2, Theft 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit, Double Block), Gongshu (Snapshot, Double Shot, Long Shot, Double Target)

Taos: Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3, Tao of the Inner Eye 2, Tao of the Hidden Shadow 2, Tao of Ying and Yang 2

Chi: 24

Breath of Life: 19 (7/0, 5/0, 4/-1, 2/-3, 1/-5)

Passive Defence: 9 **Renown:** 9 (bandit)

Possessions: Sword, bow and arrows, horse.

The Bandit's Bodyguards

These are simple henchmen (See Core Rulebook) wielding swords and sabres. They usually fight together and use well-rehearsed tactics to trap their enemies and crush them under sheer weight of numbers.

Runs Like a Hare

This young man is unremarkable except for his speed at running, which gave him his name and is the only reason he is still alive. He has fallen into madness following his experiences in the tombs, which was the superstitious boy's first adventure. He is deeply attached, for no real reason, to the stolen necklace from the funeral chamber, even though it is the object drawing the guardian to him.

Zhong Yi's Ghost

Zhong Yi was, in life, a jealous and envious man; greedy for power, riches and prestige. Even dead, he refuses to let Thunderblade or anyone else succeed where he has failed. His ghost wanders through the labyrinth, hides when the characters first enter and only reveals himself when he wants to. He has not yet mastered his new powers but he is capable of putting together effective strategies to lure the characters in the wrong direction and lose them forever in the tomb, or force them to fight the clay warriors.

Metal 2 Water 2 Earth 4
Wood 4 Fire 3

Skills: Calligraphy 3, History 3, Arts 2, Eloquence 3, Intimidation 2, Legends 3, Jianshu 1, Horsemanship 2

Techniques: Jianshu (Direct Hit)

Powers: Formlessness, Terror 9, Possession 7

Chi: 0

Breath of Life: 20/0

Passive Defence: 8

Renown: -

Clay Warriors

These animated statues have protected the tomb of Scarlet Lotus for generations. They crush their adversaries with their heavy fists or use bronze swords, and their clay bodies are very resistant to damage. Blind, they locate by sound: simply breathing is enough for them to find an enemy, but loud noises confuse them. They also have a connection with the treasures in the tomb and follow them to kill the thief and take back the jewels.

Metal 4 Water 3 Earth 3
Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Perception 4, Hand-to-Hand 3, Jianshu 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (fists, bronze swords), Natural Armour 5, Terror 7

Chi:

Breath of Life: 30/0

Passive Defence: 87

Funeral Rites and Tombs

Zeng Zi, disciple of Kong Fu Zi, has said: "The third day after death, the body is placed in the coffin. Everything put in with them must be of good quality and without fault, so that he will not have to repent for all he took from his parents in life. The third month after death comes the burial. The longest mourning period must not last more than three years but those who have gone cannot be forgotten. Thus, the wise man holds within him the memory of his mother and father throughout his life, and regrets their loss, but he does not have to repent that loss, because he still upholds his duties to them. On the anniversary of their deaths, he will forbid himself music or pleasure."

- Li Ji, the Book of Rites

The Rites

The funeral rites have undergone some evolution over time, since the days of the Three August Ones and the Five Sovereigns; however, the usual codes of burial are written within the Book of Rites, although variations on it exist around the States of the Northern Plains and those of the south.

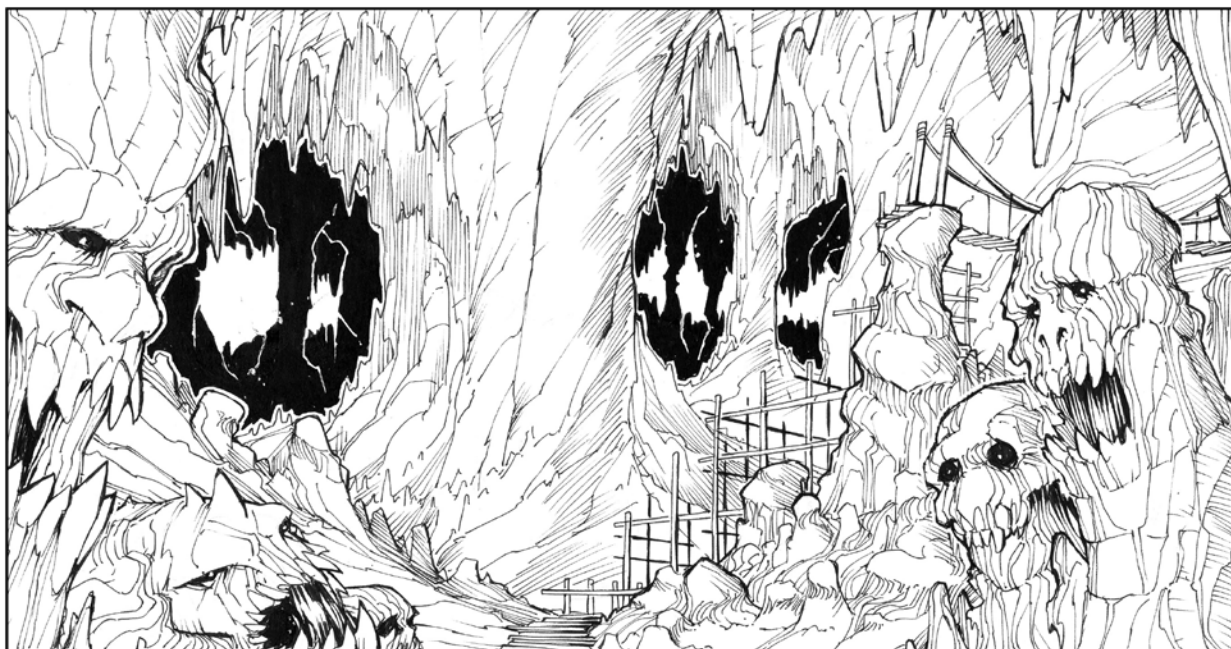
Mourning and the ancestor cult is of great importance to the people of the *Zhongguo*, as is the need of the descendants to show filial piety. In fact, the word used for the dead, *koei*, also means 'dependant'; the dead depend on the living, for them to create a cult around them with offerings assures peace in the after-life and allows them to reincarnate quickly. It is often the case that the rites can only be performed by a male descendant, no matter his age.

These cults mostly concern only the most powerful and important figures, such as nobles, princes and kings, since humble men have no means to inter themselves in a great tomb, but the rites performed are universal.

The Book of Rites details the general rules concerning mourning clothes and the length of mourning (depending on the family status of the deceased) and these rules are usually meticulously respected, no matter the social class of the dead and their family.

Here are the usual stages of a classic funeral of an important person, say a prince or other royal:

Firstly, a funeral Steward is named to watch over the organisation and process of the rites, making sure they conform to protocol. This Steward can be an educated man but superstitious families prefer a Taoist.



Specialised doctors massage the body of the dead with camphor oil and aloe to make the limbs flexible and conserve the suppleness of the skin, embalming the body while treating it with various spices, inks and mercury which slow putrefaction by killing bacteria. Finally, they plug all orifices with pieces of jade, so that the inner breath does not escape.

During this time, geomancers determine the best date for the funeral and the placing and orientation of the tomb according to the oracle taken from throwing yarrow stalks in the *Yi Jing* and consulting the flows of energy according to their conjunction with the soul of the dead.

The period of mourning which precedes the funeral varies greatly, from several months to years (but always less than three) according to the importance of the dead. The inhabitants of the *Zhongguo* have always thought that as parents give three years from their lives to teach their children, they deserve three years of tears.

The clothes of the dead are usually made from hemp or rough linen, such as *zhancui*, along with a barely hemmed linen coat which the partner of the deceased must wear for three years. White is seen as the colour of loss and sadness.

Weepers Dressed in White

During this period of mourning, the family can recruit weepers who are lodged and well looked after until the date of the burial. They wear white tunics and red belts and play small red cymbals to give rhythm to their sad chants.

Artisans create three ritual coffins of different sizes, which fit inside each other, named *guo*, in which the deceased's body is placed. This triple coffin is then carried to the tomb that will be its new home.

Once, the offerings in the tombs were meant for the ancestors but over time, objects intended to serve the dead in the afterlife have replaced these: furniture, ritual objects, toiletries, perfumes, weapons, etc. This custom is still very much alive. This can also include bronze or ceramic plates, tripods, cups, closed vases, basins for ritual ablutions, etc. There is usually a large table inside so that offerings can be placed, prepared or sacrificed there, according to the correct rite. Food is also provided and the animals sacrificed inside.

In ancient times, it was normal to sacrifice and bury the dead's wife or wives, his slaves and even his councillors to accompany the dead to the Yellow Springs but the philosophers of Spring and Autumn stood against this barbaric custom and since then it has become rare. In their place, the family prefers to bury small clay statues in the form of those close to the deceased, called *mingqi*.

After the burial, a wooden tablet is carved with the name of the deceased and the family use this to burn incense under, and make offerings to it in the deceased's stead. Sometimes the clothes of a great official are kept to make him feel more present during rites venerating ancestors.

The funeral plaque is usually placed in the main room of the house, on an altar bearing many other such plaques and representing ancestors up to the fifth generation; beyond that a communal plaque allows the living to pay homage to the souls of distant ancestors.

Graves and Tombs

Generally, these are burial mounds in which mausoleums are situated on different levels, usually with at least three rooms.

In the North, stone and wood can be used too but in Chu it is traditional to use wood covered in white clay, without stone at all.

The grave is usually around forty feet deep. Between the walls of the tomb and the beams that form the sepulchre is charcoal. The posts that form the walls are first covered in bamboo matting, then a thin coat of charcoal, then a layer of clay just over a foot deep; and, finally, thin alternating layers of different clays until at ground level.

A typical tomb is composed of at least three rooms. Here is a typical tomb which the Games Master is free to change according to the scenario:

1) The chamber of the followers is common in ancient royal tombs but the custom has been more or less abandoned in the Warring States. One had to be rich and powerful to take others into death with one. This room is further away from that of the deceased, which indicates the subordination of the servants and the high rank of their master. The servants are there to serve their master in death as they did in life.

2) This is the adjacent room, the chamber of ceremony, where offerings to the ancestors are made of food and such, left in various purpose-made vases. They are generally made of bronze for the richest or copies made of ceramic for those of more modest means. In the richest tomb, these can be made of silver or gold.

It is also in this room that *bi* of many coloured jades are left.

Finally, it is in this room that the familial objects and furniture belonging to the deceased (tables, chairs, ornate braziers and silk clothes) are placed.



3) In the same room, which serves for ritual ceremonies can be found musical instruments for the deceased: many bronze bells, alone or as chimes (sometimes up to sixty-four bells), drums on pedestals, simple flutes or panpipes made of bamboo, with eighteen pipes and zithers of twenty-five strings.

Sometimes the coffins of artists admired by the deceased can be found in the chamber of the followers.

4) In this room are kept the many weapons protecting the dead in the world beyond and which likewise represent his power. There can also be personal weapons that the deceased used to hunt or fight with, which were not passed on to his son. Weapons, in these troubled times, are at a premium and the deceased must be buried with the ability to defend himself against demons and trickster spirits during his voyage to *Feng Du*.

5) Finally, this is the chamber of the deceased. It holds the sarcophagus of the dead but also perhaps that of his wife or those close to him who have followed him in death; but this is more often replaced by many *mingqi* statuettes representing them instead.

Two or three coffins can be stacked inside each other. The coffins are often lacquered red or black. Inside the last one are the remains of the deceased, wrapped in silk in which is sewn jade jewellery (pearls, brooches, plaques, *cong* tubes ornamented with monsters and *bi* discs). Sometimes the whole body of the deceased is covered in jade plates sown together, as armour to protect them. This custom, named 'buried by jade', is certain proof of an important person: the stone, remember, is a symbol for immortality.

The tomb is guarded by monsters painted on the walls or sarcophagus and by terrifying statues means to frighten away thieves. They can represent terrible creatures or armed men and it is rumoured that alchemists know how to make them come to life, so that they may defend the tomb...

In the state of Chu, for example, the top of the coffin is covered by that of a ritual monster with the paws of a tiger, antlers of a stag, head of a bear, dragon's tongue, and the tail of a fox. This creature, named *Zhenmushu* or *Giashu*, frightens away bad influences. Often sculpted of wood then painted, it can also be cast from bronze.



New spell for External Alchemy

Clay Animated in Blood

Talent: External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time: One week

Duration: A month or eternity (see text)

ST to prepare: 11

Chi cost: 15

Improvement: N/A

As masters of ancestral knowledge close to kings and princes, alchemists can create artificial blood, allowing them to give life to a ceramic statue.

With mercury, gold and many other rare minerals, they create a substance in which they pour a part of their Chi, the Taoist force of creation. This artificial blood, the colour of silver, receives a drop of blood from the person they from now on obey; this servitude lasts a month and can be renewed afterwards. If the blood comes from a corpse, then the statue forever guards the body and animates, if threatened. Once the blood has been prepared, it is then injected into the statue so that it spreads throughout the clay.

A dose of silver blood permits the alchemist to animate one statue the size of a man, or two half that size.

To animate a very large statue (such as one representing a horse or tiger), the alchemist must prepare two doses.

Here are two examples of the statues; the Game Master may use these examples to create their own statues as fits their needs and scenarios.

Ceramic Soldier

Metal 3 Water 2 Earth 3

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Perception 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Jianshu 3, Dodging 2

Powers: Natural Weapons 2 (stone swords), Natural Armour 3

Chi: -

Breath of Life: 20/0

Passive Defence: 6

Clay Tiger

Metal 4 Water 3 Earth 3

Wood 2 Fire 1

Skills: Perception 4, Claw and Bite 3, Dodge 3

Powers: Natural Weapons 3 (claws and teeth), Natural Armour 3

Chi: -

Breath of Life: 35/0

Passive Defence: 7

Index

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|---|-----|---|---------|--|-----|
| A Bloody Trail | 82 | Fen Zhu | 57 | New Gift | 45, 75 | The Spectre of Silver | |
| A Day of Seduction | 88 | Festivals and Dancing Days | 43 | Newly born Jiang Shi | 11 | Falcon | 85 |
| Adventures at the limit of reality | 80 | Flight | 8 | New spell for External Alchemy | 108 | The Spider's Poison | 53 |
| Adventure Seed | 25, 36 | Fu and You | 103 | New Supernatural Powers | 8 | The Spider Weaves Her Web | 52 |
| A Father's Fishing | 80 | Funeral Rites and Tombs | 105 | Nian | 27 | The Style of the Laughing Staff (Bangshu (staff)) | 67 |
| A Few Demons | 15 | Future Spider Queen | 52 | Night Attack | 82 | The Style of the Shadowless Spear (Qiangshu (spear)) | 65 |
| A Few Ghosts | 8 | Ghosts | 6 | Northern Owl | 78 | The Style of the Web of the Black Widow (Whip) | 52 |
| A Few More Celestial Creatures | 45 | Ghost Scribe | 8 | Ogre | 15 | The Taotie | 19 |
| A Few More Fabulous Creatures | 34 | Ghosts, Revenants and the Living Dead | 6 | Pao Lian-Mi | 18 | The Trail | 84 |
| A Few Other Yao | 69 | Gifts and Weaknesses | 50 | Pa Xing | 64 | The Woman of the Silk Veils | 86 |
| A Few Spirits | 13 | Graves and tombs | 106 | Pi | 28 | The Yao | 46 |
| All Kinds of Demons | 14 | Grey Claw | 85 | Ping feng | 34 | The Yao and Exorcists | 49 |
| A Loving Eternity | 86 | Grey Monkey | 66 | Pixiu | 29 | The yao-buffalos | 53 |
| A Meeting on the Road | 94 | Gui38 | | Possessed Corpse | 16 | The yao-cats | 55 |
| A Momentous Arrival | 95 | Guilty Secret | 81 | Powerful Jiang Shi | 11 | The yao-foxes | 58 |
| A Mystery Beside the Road | 95 | Gu Jin | 93 | Qiang Jing, the Bandit | | The Yao in Society | 48 |
| Animal Origins | 49 | Gu Jin's Bodyguards | 93 | King | 54 | The yao-monkeys | 65 |
| Animal Trait | 73 | Gu Jin's Mercenaries | 93 | Red Moon, Silvery Swords | 92 | The yao-pigs | 56 |
| Ardent Arrow | 103 | He | 45 | Rumours and Preparations | 97 | The yao-snakes | 62 |
| Armour-Breaker | 54 | Hui Nao | 66 | Runs Like a Hare | 99, 104 | The yao-spiders | 51 |
| Aspects, | | Illusion | 8 | Sacred Carapace | 38 | The yao-tigers | 67 |
| Secondary Aspects | 50 | Inherited Animal Powers | 50 | Shu-Emo | 18 | The Yao Xie | 74 |
| Assault of Steel, Assault of Earth | 101 | In the Cities | 48 | Silver Moon, a Nostalgic Melody | 92 | Those who stare into the abyss... | 76 |
| Bai Hu | 39 | In the Country | 48 | Speaking the Language of the Parent Species | 73 | Thunderblade | 103 |
| Ba She | 21 | In the Jiang Hu | 49 | Spear as Supple as the Serpent | 65 | Thunder-Sheep Wool | |
| Becoming a Yao | 47 | Jian | 34 | Statuettes of Chan Juana | 61 | Clothing | 46 |
| Bei Jiao-Lin | 8 | Jianglong, the Dragon-Sword | 44 | Strange Amnesia | 83 | Tian Nu | 44 |
| Blue Moon, a Thief in the Hells | 90 | Jiao Ren | 23 | Suanni | 35 | Tian Yang | 45 |
| Buying Powers | 73 | Jingwei | 34 | Su Chi-Min | 77 | Tie Hu | 68 |
| Celestial and Fabulous Beings | 37 | Jiutou Niao | 24 | Supernatural Capacities | 50 | Tien Guo | 69 |
| Celestial Lance | 9 | Jun Lin, the Queen-to-be | 52 | Taowu | 35 | Tiger-blades | 69 |
| Ceramic Guardians | 94 | Kilin | 40 | Tears of Jiao Ren | 24 | Tiger-Faced Swordsman | 73 |
| Chan Juana | 61 | Kun and Peng | 34 | Terror of Ghosts | 79 | Two Examples of Spring Festivals | 43 |
| Chenxi | 76 | Lady of the Manor of the Misty Spirit | 61 | The Ancient Tomb | 100 | Wandering Poet | 77 |
| Chi Mei and Wang Liang | 20 | Lao Shu | 71 | The Bandit's Bodyguards | 104 | Weepers Dressed in White | 106 |
| Chou yanjing | 16 | Leader of the Children of Nü Wa | 64 | The Ban Yaos | 72 | White Moon, Tragic Loves | 87 |
| Clay Animated in Blood | 108 | Legendary Swordsman | 74 | The Children of Nü Wa | 64 | Wugong Sui | 31 |
| Clay Warriors | 104 | Li Mao | 55 | The Company of the Spirit-Animals | 71 | Xiao | 13 |
| Cobra's Feint | 65 | Little Profit | 102 | The Different Kinds of Yao | 51 | Xing Tian | 32 |
| Come from the Hells | 14 | Local Gods | 13 | The Heritage of the Yao | 72 | Yao-Buffalo Bandit King | 54 |
| Common Yao Powers | 50 | Lo May | 92 | The Innumerable Fangs of the Serpent | 65 | Yao-Cat Chief Scribe | 56 |
| Creating a Ban Yao | | Long | 42 | The Jiang Shi | 10 | Yao-Characteristics | 49 |
| Character | 73 | Long Ma | 45 | The Labyrinth of Souls | 101 | Yao-Pig Magistrate's Assistant | 58 |
| Curious-Minded Scribe | 78 | Magic | 51 | The Lover's Wells | 91 | Yao-Pig Merchant | 57 |
| Damned Taoist | 18 | Manor of the Misty Spirit | 59 | The Medicine from the Body of a White Tiger | 41 | Yao-Rat Library Handyman | 71 |
| Defy the Verdict of Death | 11 | Mao Jingyu | 26 | The Men Shen | 19 | Yao-Tiger Blacksmith | 69 |
| Diverse Spirits | 12 | Master Exorcist | 79 | The Monkey in the Forest | 67 | Yellow Moon, a Voice in the Night | 86 |
| Dongwushou Emo | 15 | Master Toad | 70 | The Monkey's Grimace | 67 | You Nu | 35 |
| Encounters | 80 | Meeting in the Magistrate's Office | 96 | The New Year and the God of the Hearth | 28 | Yu Nu | 13 |
| Eternal Peace | 102 | Mei | 13 | The Protagonists | 92 | Yu Ren | 36 |
| Example Damned Soul | 18 | Mei Sing-Li | 9 | The Protagonists | 102 | Zhan Luo Zi | 77 |
| Explorer Scribe | 77 | Monkey's Leap | 67 | The Reflection of a Yao | 88 | Zhong Yi's Ghost | 104 |
| Explorer Scribe | 78 | Monsters and Marvels | 20 | The Rites | 105 | Zhu Cha | 74 |
| Eyu Ren | 22 | Nan Kan | 70 | The Secret of Little Profit's Servants | 94 | Zhu Li-Kuan | 76 |
| Fallen Exorcist | 76 | New Divination Spell: Call on Suffering | 18 | The Sinister Trail | 98 | Zhuo Shi | 58 |
| Fan Goan | 103 | New Exorcism Technique: Spiritual Fist | 16 | | | | |



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