

# Tianxia



**WAR, IRON & STONE**  
BY JACK NORRIS AND MIKE OLSON





**WAR, IRON &  
STONE**



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# HUANGZHOU

# DONGZHOU









## CHAPTER 1

# THE NORTH

### FROZEN FLOWERS, COLD COMFORTS

"I can't believe how cold it is" stammered Ping, pulling her fur cloak tighter around her. She marveled at Smiling Ox, who trudged along bare-chested through the snow, humming happily to himself.

"You must learn to fill yourself with warming *Chi*, Ping! It is the best remedy against the cold," the big man said with a smile.

"I think it was the two chickens and three jugs of wine that warm our large companion more than his superior internal energies," said Detective Dishì, adjusting his own cloak to keep out the biting northern winds.

"A full belly remedies many problems," Ox replied just a bit defensively.

"Whatever. How far is it now?" Ping asked. She could not see more than ten paces ahead of her in the icy fog. *Icy fog*, she thought, *why do the gods hate me?*

"I am sure I don't know," Dishì said truthfully. Used to the twisting streets and back alleys of Bao Jiang, he was unfamiliar with the mountains of northern Shenzhou.

"But I'm guessing we're about ten minutes further along than the last time you asked."

"Quiet!" hissed Wolf-Eyed Yue. Their wild woman companion was so quiet her friends had forgotten she was even there until she spoke, "Do any of you hear that?"

Ox cocked his head and listened, "I hear nothing."

"That's what worries me," Yue said, slipping her spear from her back and gripping it in her gloved hands.

"Only Yue would find silence to be a prob—" Dishì's snide remark died in his throat as the fog cleared, and he saw the figure standing above them on a nearby cliff.

The woman was dressed all in pale blues, grays, and whites that blended into the snow-covered cliffs surrounding the narrow pass. Her pale flesh and blue-white hair added no color to her appearance. She was an icy ghost in the middle of a frozen wasteland. She betrayed no emotion as she regarded them, her features an icy mask.

"Is that..." Ping began to ask.

"Frozen Flower, the Snow Maiden," Dishì finished for her.

"She's beautiful," Ox whispered.

Frozen Flower, the fabled lady of Snow Maiden Grotto, clearly arched one perfect eyebrow at the big man's remark. Though it was impossible to say from where they stood, Dishì was sure he saw the faintest of smiles cross her lips, if only for an instant. It was not the sort of smile that made him feel any better.

Then, out of nowhere the wind shifted and the fog washed over the cliff where Frozen stood. A moment later, when it cleared again, she was gone.

"We're close," Yue said, not sounding any more at ease.

"Well that's good, right? Hey! Things are looking up!" Ping said, pushing on past her companions. She got ten steps before the maiden reappeared. She dove through the fog, the icy mists swirling around her as she snatched Ping in mid stride and carried her off into the frozen night.

"Well, that's just typical," Dishì sighed.



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Northern Provinces! *Tianxia: War, Iron, & Stone* details the northern parts of Shenzhou, the setting for Vigilance Press' *Tianxia* role-playing game. While this book is filled with all sorts of fun locations, NPCs, and plot hooks it is not a stand-alone product and requires a copy of *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, & Jade* and the *Fate Core* system to get full use of it.

This book is divided into four sections: a general introduction to Northern Shenzhou, sections detailing the two Northern provinces of Dongzhou and Huangzhou, and a new sample PC and various adventure seeds to help get the GM and players started adventuring in the region. Throughout the book, various sidebars detail certain ideas, optional rules, Lost Techniques, or considerations of plots and campaigns. As always, these are not required but are there to help out the GM and other players who find them interesting, enlightening, or valuable. The following section gives an overview of major landmarks and concepts shared by Dongzhou and Huangzhou, the provinces which make up Northern Shenzhou. Locations, individuals, and concepts unique to particular provinces are detailed in the section for each.

## TIANQIAO MOUNTAINS

The northern part of the range that extends down into Jiangzhou to the south, the Tianqiao ("Sky Bridge") Mountains provide a **NATURAL BARRIER** against invaders and interlopers. **SPARSELY POPULATED**, the mountains are home to hermits, isolated monasteries, and a handful of small villages. These settlements are usually founded around a specific purpose such as mining or goat herding. People living in exile or otherwise requiring or desiring solitude founded most of them. While making up a sizeable part of Huangzhou, the range extends into western Dongzhou as well.

## SNOW MAIDEN GROTTO

This fabled cavern is **ONLY ACCESSIBLE THROUGH A HIDDEN ENTRANCE** somewhere high in the Tianqiao Mountains. Many have died searching for it, falling prey to the elements, wild animals, bandits, or the valley's only inhabitant, the legendary Frozen Flower, the Snow Maiden. Her origins are a mystery and no two stories completely agree. Some think she is a **HUNGRY VENGEFUL GHOST**. Others believe she is a **FORMER WHITE WIDOW ASSASSIN** who was exiled from the sect for some terrible crime. Still others believe Frozen Flower is an **IMMORTAL SORCERESS** who must remain in her valley as a price for her youth and power, or an exiled Princess who is **CURSED TO KILL ALL SHE LOVES**. Whatever the truth the Snow Maiden is a formidable individual who covets solitude and secrecy.

Snow Maiden Grotto is a wondrous place. It is warmer than it should be, given the terrain and elevation, and sports **WARM SPRINGS** and **LUSH VEGETATION**. The plants that grow here range from simple roots to rare flora that have numerous remarkable properties.

## THE SECRETS OF SNOW MAIDEN GROTTO

The exact nature of the Snow Maiden and the secrets she protects in her grotto are left for the GM to decide. The whole place might be a hotbed of magical activity or the hiding place for potent mystical secrets. The herbs and plants that grow here might cure deadly poisons or grant longevity. It might even be a natural cave that houses a dangerous but ultimately mortal woman who has her own rationale to want to be left alone. These reasons could be anything from a tragic love affair to being a lost scion of a former dynasty. In any event, PCs who get involved with the Snow Maiden and her secrets are likely to never be the same again.



## THE GREAT WALL

One of Shenzhou's great architectural marvels, the Great Wall stretches from the Tianqiao Mountains to the sea. A series of **HIGH STONE WALLS** connecting various **WATCHHOUSES AND FORTRESSES**, the Great Wall protects the empire while still allowing trade with the Yi tribes to the north. According to legend, the first Emperor of Shenzhou had the wall built, though nearly every ruler has added or expanded to it. Since its construction, the Great Wall provides an **EXCELLENT STATIC DEFENSE** while not shutting off trade, two very important things for the continued prosperity and safety of the empire.

The wall is **ALWAYS UNDERGOING CONSTRUCTION** somewhere along its length. The current construction involves rebuilding part of the eastern sections further northward to account for some **ANNEXED TERRITORY** acquired during recent dynasties. Skilled masons and engineers oversee thousands of laborers yearly fixing, reinforcing, or even moving sections of wall. **PENAL WORK GANGS** are commonly used for labor along with more law-abiding skilled laborers.

Those in Shenzhou view the Great Wall with a mix of pride and pragmatism. It is certainly a formidable defense, but it is also a **SYMBOL OF IMPERIAL POWER AND NATIONAL PRIDE**. The structure would not exist without a unified Shenzhou seeking to protect itself from invaders. Critics say it represents a desire for isolation and impractical and unsavory ideas of cultural purity. Thus, the wall is both an effective defense that inspires many and a target for forces seeking to invade or influence Shenzhou.

## THE THREE GREAT PASSES

There are numerous **SMALL OR MINOR PASSES** along the Great Wall, but three major ones. Each is a major area of trade and is garrisoned and patrolled by imperial soldiers. These are:

### FIRST HEAVEN PASS

Taking its name from the phrase engraved above its main gate, First Heaven Pass is **HEAVILY DEFENDED**. It is also where the Great Wall meets the sea and is near the northern port of Emperor's Ferry and a short journey to the provincial capital of Shejing. The First Heaven Pass and the sections of the wall near it are active trade areas, with **FREQUENT MERCHANT CARAVANS** trading with the Shusen and other Yi tribes to the north.

### GREAT VALLEY PASS

In the far west is Great Valley Pass. It is near the city of Da Ying and is **NATURALLY WELL-DEFENDED** due to the presence of high hills. Securing the pass is an important duty, and the commander of the garrisons for this section of the wall has great influence in Da Ying and many smaller settlements and trading posts in the region.

### CLOUD GATE

Situated in a mountain valley, Cloud Gate is the nearest of the Three Great Passes to the imperial capital. It is considered not only defensible but a place of **GREAT SCENIC BEAUTY** with shrines and carvings dedicated to various imperial ancestors and gods. It is always **WELL-STAFFED WITH TROOPS** and being assigned to Cloud Gate is seen as a prestigious duty, albeit one that is also often used to keep politically popular commanders away from the intrigues of court.

## BEYOND THE BORDERS: THE SHUSEN

The Shusen are a group of various tribes sharing a common ethnic origin and culture hailing from north of the Great Wall. They are one of many such tribes, which are generally referred to in Shenzhou as the Northern Yi ("outsider") tribes. Unlike some of

their neighbors, the Shusen enjoy fairly warm and close relations with Shenzhou.

Also sometimes called the Jusen, the Shusen are known for their manufacture of **EXPERTLY CRAFTED** wooden bows and crossbows as well as their great

skill in using them. Traditionally, the Shusen give a tribute of arrows to the Emperor of Shenzhou, a sign of their belief in his virtue. As this also means peaceful trade and good relations with the Shusen, the Shenese take this as a good omen



# THE NORTHERN CLANS

The border province Jiangzhou, as presented in *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK, & JADE*, is unique. While an established and important part of the empire, it has few longstanding hereditary power bases beyond the governor and a handful of powerful merchants and syndicates. The Northern Provinces, like much of the empire, have more long-settled and established clans. Each clan is an alliance of various interrelated families and individuals who hold an interest in the region. Many are militaristic, **DESCENDANTS OF WARLORDS AND BRIGANDS**, whose ancestors carved out positions of power and wealth in the early days of the empire. Each clan typically controls an industry as well, either by marrying into a wealthy merchant family or taking and holding important resources by force.

Some clans even claim connection to rulers, past and present. Several clans in the North and other regions trace their ancestry to past Imperial Dynasties or kingdoms long assimilated into empire through war or diplomacy. Clans with such lofty origins hold more influence, though some disenfranchised and fallen families exist, bitter about their lost glory. Some of these clans become **BREEDING GROUNDS FOR REVOLUTION**, filled with ambitious warriors and nobles raised on tales of their clan's former glories.

While most clans have hereditary lines that make up their core membership, they welcome outsiders through marriage or even active recruitment. Powerful warriors, skilled scholars, and brilliant artisans may be adopted into a clan for their skills, while others are recruited for political connections. Over time, this practice transforms clans into groups with a **STRONG FAMILY IDENTITY**, though various factions have unique histories, traditions, and ambitions. The largest clans have sub-clans and offshoots, especially if they were once rulers and dignitaries of a kingdom or former dynasty.

Government and military officials hold much of the official power in the region, but little is accomplished without the support and allowance of the clans. They have **FEUDS AND ALLIANCES** separate from imperial interests, and many stirring tragedies and ballads are

written about great conflicts, friendships, enmities, or romances between those from warring clans. Citizens who are not officially members of a particular clan seek their protection, as powerful friends make life, trade, and advancement much easier. Generally, the Imperial Bureaucracy and Emperor treat clans as valuable but unofficial, only intervening into their affairs when required.

This book details several important clans in Northern Shenzhou, but the GM and players are encouraged to create their own. New clans can replace the ones described here or exist alongside them, whatever works best for a particular campaign.

## CLAN NAME GENERATOR

GMs looking for a bit of inspiration for a clan of their own creation can use the following table. You can randomize these results or simply pick ones you prefer. Examples of each element of common clan names are also included.

Plural usage in clan names is common, but not universal—"Red Swords" and "Red Sword" Clan are both viable names. Many clans have a story behind their name. Animals or colors associated with them often have a tie to their home region, the wu xing, a Kung Fu school associated with the clan, or other important historic and cultural elements the clan favors.

Astute readers may note that many sects, cults, bandit gangs, and other groups follow similar naming conventions to clans. This is not an accident. Many of these groups have ties to or were inspired by clans throughout Shenzhou. Thus, a security company formed from the survivors of a fallen clan may name their organization after that clan, or something very similar.



## FIRST WORD OF CLAN TITLE

Number (Two, Twenty-Eight, One Thousand)  
 Color (Black, Emerald, Red)  
 Emotional or Mental State (Valiant, Serene, Raging)  
 Substance or Material (Iron, Stone, Silk)  
 Supernatural Concept (Devil, Heavenly, Ghost)  
 Direction (Northern, Center, Skyward)  
 Action or Occurrence (Broken, Striking, Singing)

## SECOND WORD OF CLAN TITLE

Animals (Tiger, Crane, Lion)  
 Weapon (Sword, Spear, Blades, Fist)  
 Article of Clothing (Turban, Mask, Cloak)  
 Location (Mountain, Valley, Keep)  
 Deed or Action (Oath, Promise, Triumph)  
 Supernatural Being (Devil, Ghost, Spirit)  
 Element or Natural Event (Storm, Stone, Fire)

## CLANS ACROSS SHENZHOU

While this book details various Northern Clans, it is worth emphasizing and repeating that the clan structure exists throughout Shenzhou. In many places, especially rural areas, the local clan is the primary protector and enforcer of edicts and laws. Often, magistrates and other officials are chosen from influential clans in a region; an informal policy which gives additional authority to such officials. Of course, this practice also promotes corruption, as many officials favor their clan brethren.

As they typically hold considerable power, clans are often the source of regional problems and solutions. Associations with influential clans can help individuals organize the populace, calm instability, and garner support for important policies and projects. Conversely, rival clans can start conflicts that can endanger others and destabilize local order and industry. If the clans in question contain skilled warriors or are wealthy enough to hire dangerous mercenaries, these conflicts can quickly become large and bloody.

Of course, other groups in Shenzhou hold similar power and cause similar problems. Crime syndicates, merchant guilds, and other groups can be at the heart of solving or creating numerous issues across Shenzhou. What makes clans distinct is their **FOCUS ON FAMILY, HEREDITY, AND TRADITION**. A single family may run a crime syndicate, but their core interest is illicit profit. A merchant guild may have members from particularly bloodlines, but industry and trade are their focus. Clans generally focus on families and traditions first, with other considerations like power and profit a byproduct. These **BONDS OF BLOOD** are hard to break, and many clan members aid and defend even clanmates they dislike or despise against outsiders. In extreme cases, enemies within a clan may ally to destroy an outsider or external threat before going back to plotting and battling one another. Such loyalty is the stuff of great songs and tales, but it also leaves many clans vulnerable to attacks from within.







## CHAPTER 2

# HUANGZHOU

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### MILK MONEY

The Centipede Killers were a mix of swagger and hesitation as they surrounded their prey. They liked their numbers. They liked their trophies—locks of hair, bones, trinkets, and other grisly reminders taken from numerous victims—hanging from their belts, weapons, and necks. They liked their weapons, wicked, sharp, and not a blade that was virgin to murder. They liked the exorbitant fee the nobleman in the fancy snow leopard-trimmed robe had given them to kill the old man and take the infant from him. They even liked the brands most of them bore on their faces, hands, and chests; marks of imperial punishment. They liked all these things; they made them feel powerful, strong, important, and dangerous.

What they did not like was Slumbering Hound. They did not like a thing about him, and that gave them pause. They despised his utter lack of screaming and pleading. They disliked his well-worn armor and the faded leather wrap around his saber that suggested years of

constant use. They bristled at how he contemptuously refused to even set down the baby he carried, instead keeping her slung over his shoulder like a sack of laundry. They were sure they hated his heavy sigh and placid stare most of all, a mask of utter boredom he wore while facing twenty armed murders and thieves.

They were wrong about that last hate. It was not the thing they liked the least about him. No, what they liked the least came next.

Slumbering Hound drew his saber and the Fai Brothers were no more. He swung it once and Eight-Fingered Bei became Headless Bei. Another cut and Niu the Knife fell face first into the snow. On and on it went until the last of the twenty Centipede killers lay around the old warrior in a circle, their blood turning the snow of the mountain pass to red slush. Hound said nothing during the fight. Not even when the last of the killers, Dog-Eater Yao, gurgled curses at him as he went. He just looked at dying Yao and sighed.

After it was over, Slumbering Hound went through the killers' pockets. He ignored the morbid trophies, heretic charms, and other trinkets. He turned his nose up at their half-rotten rations, making an exception only to snag Niu's wineskin and take a long drink. He collected their coin and left the rest. Their payment to kill him went into his pouch without a word.

Qi, the baby over his shoulder, began to cry. She had been silent for the whole ordeal, and even now she did not yowl for the carnage around her but for her empty belly. Slumbering Hound pulled the child off his shoulder and held her before him. His blank expression cracked and he gave her a little grin. He held the full pouch in blood-stained fingers and jingled it before her. Just like that, the girl stopped her noise and reached for it. With a bemused grunt, he let her take it and smirked as she gummed at the little leather sac.

"Money for milk," he said. "Now, let's get out of this cold, shall we?" Qi giggled.



**A land of mountain peaks, narrow passes, and bleak  
tundra, Huangzhou (“Golden Province”) is a hard land  
for the unprepared or foolish.**

The furthest northwestern province in Shenzhou, its peaks and manmade defenses protect the rest of the empire from northern barbarians. The province is **LARGELY RURAL** and, compared to other regions, **SPARSELY POPULATED**. More people travel through Huangzhou to trade with the northern tribes or transport goods to the south than live here. It is often said **“FEW COME TO HUANGZHOU WITHOUT REASON.”** It is also said **“NONE STAY WITHOUT CAUSE.”** Both aphorisms are very true.

The province takes its name from the rich gold deposits discovered when the region was the northern vassal kingdom of Cao. After the White Turban Sect rebelled generations ago, the kingdom fell into upheaval. After various regime changes and conflicts, it was eventually absorbed along its peer states into the current empire. Since those days, a majority of the gold in the region has been mined out and rich gold deposits have become rare. In spite of this, the region’s trade, defensive significance, and a modest iron mining

industry keep Huangzhou profitable and important.

Farming in Huangzhou is difficult, though some hardier livestock, including goats, do well here. Most of the local industry is based around mining mineral deposits and trade. The importation of food is critical for the province’s few larger settlements, especially in winter. Constant trade caravans present **TEMPTING TARGETS FOR BANDITS**, and those seeking work as guards or bounty hunters are rarely unable to find it.

The government in Huangzhou is centered on the army garrison along the northern Great Wall and the provincial capital of Da Ying. The military commander of the province serves as “military liaison” to the governor, but in reality the commander’s authority takes precedent in all matters of defense. As this includes protecting trade routes, stopping bandits and barbarian raids, rooting out foreign spies and saboteurs, and anything else that can even loosely be linked to “protecting the empire,” the garrison commander has **AS MUCH POWER AS THE GOVERNOR** in Huangzhou.

### POSITIONS, RANKS, AND ASPECTS

Commanders, governors, and important ministers in Shenzhou usually have an aspect to denote their authority. In many cases, this is part of a character’s high concept. When a character is promoted, deposed, or otherwise removed from their position this aspect is changed. This is a big deal, the equivalent of a significant milestone for PCs. However, this is not the only way to handle titles and ranks.

If the GM wishes to have more transitory titles, especially in intrigue-heavy games, titles or positions may be granted as a bonus aspect (in addition to a character’s normal five). Some titles might even be constructed

more like Lost Techniques (see *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade*, p. 99) or other extras (see *Fate Core*, p. 270). This is mechanically more complicated, but if a campaign focuses on holdings, garrisons, and titles, it may be necessary. This option can be especially appropriate in games set during periods of warring states that occurred at various points in Shenzhou’s history.

*EXAMPLE: GM Jack is running a dynastic game of intrigue and warring factions with nobility and merchants set in northern Shenzhou. Instead of making the PCs use one of their five aspects for a title or position, he grants them all a rank aspect that denotes their position*

*and general authority. PCs wanting additional power or abilities still need to take appropriate stunts, skills, or work with the GM to design appropriate extras, but they receive this aspect for free and can alter it when appropriate with milestones like any other.*

Note that focusing too much on titles, inheritance, industry, and similar themes does detract from the focus on the Jianghu and its unique conflicts and themes. That does not invalidate this approach. The GM must recognize that time spent scheming and plotting or leading large armies is time away from wandering the land engaging in heroic deeds and martial duels with fellow warriors.



# NORTHERN ROAD

The Northern Road splits from the Jade Road to the south and runs north through Great Valley Pass and out to the northern steppes beyond then empire. It is one of the major trade routes in the region, *LARGE MERCHANT CARAVANS* and *FOREIGN TRADE EMISSARIES* are frequent sights. Banditry is common, especially on more remote sections of the road. Various security and mercenaries companies do solid business protecting trade missions along the route.

## THE CENTIPEDE KILLERS

Composed of hardened murderers, thieves, deserters, and other criminals, the Centipede Killers are a gang of particularly cruel bandits who haunt the Northern provinces. The group always numbers at least fifty, giving them “100 legs” to rob, murder, and pillage. Led by Razor Yang, the gang mostly concerns itself with robbing or kidnapping travelers, though they work for anyone with the money and lack of scruples to employ them. In the lean months of the harshest winters, the Centipede Killers are even rumored to resort to cannibalism. Even the least among them has a *RESPECTABLE BOUNTY ON THEIR HEADS*.

The Centipede Killers primarily operate in Huangzhou, raiding along the Northern Road. However, they do range throughout the region, at times even raiding Jiangzhou to the south. This is uncommon, as they usually respect the territory of their peers the Blue Carp Brotherhood and other bandits and pirates to the south.





## RAZOR YANG, LEADER OF THE CENTIPEDE KILLERS

## ASPECTS

*HEAD OF THE CENTIPEDE KILLERS*  
*WORST OF A BAD LOT*  
*CHARISMATIC PSYCHOPATH*  
*DISGRACED EX-IMPERIAL OFFICER*  
*"NO SUCH THING*  
*AS GOING TOO FAR"*

## SKILLS

**Superb (+5):** Provoke

**Great (+4):** Fight, Athletics

**Good (+3):**

Deceive, Physique, Will

**Fair (+2):** Burglary, Chi, Notice

**Average (+1):** Drive,  
Rapport, Lore, Stealth

## STRESS

4 Physical

4 Mental

## JIANGHU RANK: 2

## KUNG FU STYLE

**Stone Monkey, Stone Serpent**

*STONE MONKEY FORM*

*STONE SERPENT FORM*

**Monkey Dances in Moonlight:**

When succeeding on a Defend with style, the character may Create a **DISTRACTING MOVEMENTS** Advantage with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

**Monkey Grabs the Peach:** Add +2 Weapon Rating to an Attack where the character also invokes a consequence the defender has.

**Monkey Rolls Away:** When invoking an aspect or advantage during a Defend roll, gain 2 Armor Rating against the Attack if it succeeds.

**Mountain Does Not Fall:** The

character gets a +2 bonus to Defend against attempts to Create an Advantage based upon unbalancing, pushing, tripping, or knocking over the defender. If a Technique from an opponent instead allows them to Create such an Advantage with free invocations, one less free invocation is granted though the Advantage is still Created.

**Serpent Bites the Hand:** If the character gains shifts on a Defend, he can sacrifice his action next turn to immediately inflict an Attack on his opponent using the shift value of his Defend as his Attack result.

**Serpent Strikes First:** Use Fight to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat.

**Serpent Strikes Twice:** +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to Create an Advantage based upon disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents the character has already inflicted stress on this combat.

**Stone Resists the Blow:** The character gains 2 Armor against any physical Attack of which he is aware.

## STUNTS

**Head Centipede Killer** (May use Provoke instead of Resources for Create an Advantage based upon bandit followers or trophies and treasures taken from his gang's victims)

**Military Training** (+2 bonus to Defend against attempts to Create an Advantage based upon tactics, strategy, or battlefield positioning)

**Utterly Ruthless** (If the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, he can Create a **SHOCKING BRUTALITY** Advantage with a free invocation instead of taking a boost)

*Razor Yang was a talented, mid-ranking, army officer known for his cruelty and violent urges. When he tortured the children of a village elder under a flimsy pretense of "rooting out insurgents," it finally pushed his superiors too far. Disgraced and arrested, he escaped before his execution, killing twelve soldiers and eight civilians as he fled. Gathering a small army of like-minded individuals, Razor Yang formed the Centipede Killers and has plagued the north ever since. A skilled warrior and adept manipulator, Yang rules his subordinates with a mix of cruelty, charm, and fear. He carries a long two-handed saber, the changdao, for open battles and intimidation, though he often uses paired knives for close work.*



# IRON SNAKE VILLAGE

Named for the clan who controls it and the mineral that gives them power and influence, Iron Snake Village is an active mining town. A **HIGH WOODEN WALL** surrounds the town and the Iron Snake clan compound in its center. Little goes on here without the approval and oversight of the Iron Snakes. Clan members or their allies serve as mayor, tax collector, head mine foreman, and numerous other positions. Iron Snake Village is the sort of place where **EVERYONE KNOWS EVERYONE** and many townsfolk are at least distantly related.

Other than mining the area's **RICH IRON DEPOSITS**, locals do brisk business as smelters, ironmongers, and smiths. Iron and steel stamped with the Iron Snake sigil is recognized as **HIGH QUALITY METAL** throughout the empire and among the tribes north of the wall. Local farmers raise enough food to allow the clan and village to survive, but just barely. Because of this, imported rice, meat, and other foodstuffs are a large part of incoming trade. Caravans arrive regularly with food and other goods, leaving laden with metal, tools, and occasionally armaments. During hard winters, **NARROW PASSES** and **DIFFICULT TERRAIN** slows or even stops this trade, making it vital that the Iron Snakes remain profitable and viable during the rest of the year to maintain their business contracts and local power base.

Banditry is a prime concern for the village. The settlement's defenses and many Iron Snake warriors keep it generally safe, but shipments to and from the village and its nearby holdings are prime targets for daring raiders and criminals. The Iron Snakes have a **STANDING BOUNTY** on any known bandit in the region, though the clan prefers to deal with such troublemakers themselves whenever possible.

## IRON SNAKE CLAN

The Iron Snake clan was founded by mercenaries who were granted mining interests as compensation for valiant defense of the region from raiders, bandits, and rebels. Today, it is made up of over a half dozen families, the greatest among them the Yun-She. The

Yun-She run the mine and many related businesses. They maintain a **STRONG MARTIAL TRADITION**, and some of the region's greatest warriors are Yun-She. Their **FAMILY NAME IS UNUSUAL** in Shenzhou since it consists of multiple syllables. Only the foolish bring up this up in a mocking way since it speaks to an important moment in the clan's history, when two feuding families, the Yun and the She, unified through marriage.

The Iron Snakes stick to running their own affairs, but they occasionally hire out clan warriors for caravan protection or assist Imperial efforts to curtail banditry in the region. The clan has a reputation for cunning and ferocity in battle, and their family Kung Fu school is **WELL-RESPECTED ACROSS THE NORTH**. Often called Northern Iron Snake, Iron Snake Boxing, or simply Iron Snake, it is run by Snake Boxer Yong. Yong was a terrifying fighter in his youth, but he's **SLOWING DOWN IN HIS OLD AGE** and has recently **STARTED TO GO BLIND**. Despite this, the **CUNNING CLAN ELDER** remains the ranking **MASTER OF IRON SNAKE BOXING**, a mixture of Iron Serpent and Storm Serpent Kung Fu. Though he once preferred daggers and swords, he has taken to using a staff in battle, finding it also useful to guide him as his vision fails. Yong is related to the Yun-She by marriage, having married the sister of the last clan head years ago. He has no living children, but displays a gruff, parental protection for his students.

The current clan head is Yun-She On, who recently took command following the death of his father, Yun-She Chao. The former clan head was killed in a cave-in. While foul play was suspected, nothing was ever proven. A young bachelor with a fondness for dueling and risk-taking, many Yun-She are pushing On to find a bride and get married so that their clan leader will have an heir. Other influential Iron Snake families are seeking to improve their own positions, either by marriage to On or maneuvering to improve their standing should something happen to him. Either way, **TURBULENT TIMES ARE COMING** to Iron Snake Village.



## YUN-SHE ON, HEAD OF THE IRON SNAKES

### ASPECTS

**DARING YOUNG CLAN HEAD**  
**SURROUNDED BY SCHEMERS**  
**"FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD"**  
**LEADERSHIP PRESSURES**  
**HANDSOME WARRIOR**

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Resources, Contacts  
**Good (+3):** Fight, Athletics  
**Fair (+2):** Chi, Will,  
 Physique, Rapport  
**Average (+1):** Deceive,  
 Drive, Empathy, Notice

### STRESS

3 Physical  
 3 Mental

### JIANGHU RANK: 1

### KUNG FU STYLE

**Iron Serpent, Storm Serpent**  
**IRON SERPENT FORM**  
**STORM SERPENT FORM**

**Flesh Breaks on Iron:** When the character Defends against a Fight Attack with style, he may inflict a 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on his attacker.

**Serpent Bites the Hand:** If the character gains shifts on a Defend, he can sacrifice his action next turn to immediately inflict an Attack on his opponent using the shift value of his Defend as his Attack result.

**Serpent Strikes First:** Use Fight to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat.

**Serpent Strikes Twice:** +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to Create an Advantage based upon disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents the character has already inflicted stress on this combat.

### Storm Shakes the Foundation:

When Creating an Advantage, the character may trade free invocations to remove free invocations from another character's advantage.

### STUNTS

**Charismatic** (Can use Rapport for Attacks with a +1 bonus based upon raw charisma and force of personality)

**Iron Snake Leader** (+1 bonus to Contacts or Resources attempts to Create an Advantage based upon Iron Snake Clan members, retainers, or holdings)

**Snake Whip Sword** (+1 Weapon Rating for Fight Attacks made with the Snake Whip Sword; gain a +1 Fight Attack bonus using Snake Whip Sword if the character's opponent uses Fight to Defend)

Yun-She On is a skilled warrior in over his head as leader of the Iron Snakes. His heritage and raw charisma are holding things together for now, but he does not have the experience with intrigue and politics to fend off every maneuver or plot that the clan factions around him concoct. As a fighter, he is highly skilled but not a Master. He needs allies if he must resort to holding power through force of arms.

His favored weapon is his Snake Whip Sword, an ingenious device that can go from double-edged sword to segmented bladed whip, allowing it to easily slip past or wrap around an opponent's blocks and parries. Use of this unusual weapon is rare outside the clan, and few other than Iron Snake weapon smiths know the secrets of its construction.

## CUTTING THE HEAD OFF THE SNAKE

The mystery of Yun-She Chao's death is left intentionally unresolved. It is a matter for the GM to decide if so inclined. It could be that Yun-She On murdered his father to take over the clan. Alternatively, perhaps it was a member of a rival family seeking to weaken the Yun-She so they can be driven from power. It could be

that Chao was killed by a nefarious cult or criminal organization after discovering their dark secret. It might even have been a simple accident, and any trouble that arises due to Chao's death is due to the power vacuum his demise left behind and not part of any larger crime or conspiracy.

Note that an entire campaign could be based around the Chao's murder and the ensuing power struggle. In fact, it would be simple enough for a PC to replace On in the setting as the newfound clan head. In this case, On could be an usurper, suitor, or a loyal cousin or sibling.



# THE THREE MOUNTAINS SCHOOL

Positioned between three great peaks deep in the Tianqiao Mountains, the fabled Three Mountains School was a legend in the Jianghu until its devastation. Founded four decades ago by the illustrious Grandmaster Faultless Wu, the school now lies abandoned. *CRUMBLING BUILDINGS* and *NARROW MOUNTAIN PATHS* make the area treacherous, and the nearest village is three days away even in the best of weather. The school's isolated location was part of its mystery, as only the most skilled, dedicated, or driven students would travel to study here.

The reason for the school's abandonment remains a mystery. Rumors of a war between the school and another Kung Fu academy are common, but so are tales of a Three Mountain Student who betrayed Grandmaster Faultless and destroyed the facility. Rumors even suggest that the Emperor destroyed the school after Faultless discovered an unstoppable Kung Fu Technique that could be used to train an army of unstoppable warriors. The truth, whatever it may be, is unknown.

What is known is that Three Mountains School no longer accepts pupils and the compound is *OVERRUN WITH WILDLIFE*. Legend tells that Grandmaster Faultless, or his ghost, dwells in or near these ruins. In life or death, the old man haunts the school he founded.





## FAULTLESS WU, GRANDMASTER OF THREE MOUNTAINS SCHOOL

**ASPECTS***GRANDMASTER OF THREE**MOUNTAINS SCHOOL**HAUNTED BY LOSS**"I'M OLDER THAN STONE"**SEEKING THREE MOUNTAINS MIND**CRANKY OLD MAN***SKILLS****Fantastic (+6):** Chi**Superb (+5):** Fight**Great (+4):** Lore, Will**Good (+3):** Athletics,  
Notice, Provoke**Fair (+2):** Contacts,  
Investigate, Physique**Average (+1):**

Empathy, Drive, Rapport

**STRESS**

3 Physical

4 Mental

**JIANGHU RANK: 4****KUNG FU STYLE****Stone Crane (Master)****Stone Dragon (Master)****Stone Tiger (Master)***STONE CRANE FORM**STONE DRAGON FORM**STONE TIGER FORM***Crane Flies Behind the**

**Mountain:** Spend 1 fate point after the character succeeds on a Fight or Athletics Defend with style. In addition to the normal boost or effects from other Techniques, Create a *CRANE STRIKES FROM THE MOUNTAIN* Advantage with two free invocations usable to Defend against, Attack, or hinder his attacker.

**Crane Hides in Reeds:** Add an additional +2 bonus when using Full Defense to Defend the character in combat. If used to Defend others, gain 2 Armor Rating instead.

**Crane Sleeps Standing:** +2 bonus when Overcoming a physical Obstacle based upon obstruction or poor footing.

**Crane Stuns the Carp:** If the character succeeds on a Fight Attack with style, he may Create a *STUNNED* Advantage on a target with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

**Dragon Glides Between**

**Peaks:** Spend 1 fate point to gain a +2 bonus to Defend against all Fight Attacks the character is aware of and +2 bonus on all attempts to grapple, entangle, or lock down a defender. These bonuses only apply against targets that begin their turn in the same zone as him. This effect lasts for a scene.

**Dragon Rules the Fields:** When the character succeeds with style on an Attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of the character's Attack.

**Dragon Rules the Heavens:**

Use *Chi* instead of Athletics in rolls involving entering zones or preventing others from doing so.

**Dragon Sleeps in Mist:** When the character succeeds with style on a Defend, he may reduce the result by 1 to gain 2 Armor Rating against the next Attack in the scene that strikes him in addition to the normal boost.

**Mountain Does Not Fall:** The character gets a +2 bonus to Defend against attempts to Create an Advantage based upon unbalancing, pushing, tripping, or knocking over the defender. If a Technique from an opponent instead allows them to Create such an Advantage with free invocations, one less free invocation is granted though the Advantage is still Created.

**Stone Resists the Blow:** The character gains 2 Armor against any physical Attack he is aware of.

**Stone Weathers the Storm:**

If the character succeeds on a Defend with style, he may remove his physical 1 stress box or convert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.

**Tiger Comes Down from the**

**Mountain:** Spend 1 fate point to use the shifts from the character's last Fight or Athletics Defend roll as a bonus to his next Fight Attack (minimum +3 bonus). This Attack also reduces any Armor Rating the defender has by 2.

**Tiger Moves With Purpose:**

Move at least 1 zone and make an Attack using Athletics or make an Athletics Attack on a target that just moved into the character's zone on their last action. Add 2 shifts to any stress he deals with this Attack.

**Tiger Rends the Flesh:** When the character ties on an Attack using Fight for Defend, he can inflict a 2 point shift physical Attack instead of taking a boost.

**Tiger Rules the Jungle:**

Gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke Attacks.

**Three Mountains****Stance (see p. 24)****Three Mountains****Strike (see p. 24)**



## STUNTS

**Attuned** (Use *Chi* instead of Notice to detect sneak Attacks and ambushes)

### “Everything is Connected”

(+2 to using *Chi* to Create an Advantage)

**Just an Old Man** (Use *Chi* instead of Deceive to appear harmless and feeble. This includes masking his *Chi* energies and internal Kung Fu power if he desires)

**Skilled Sifu** (+2 bonus when Creating an Advantage based upon instructing or training another character)

*There are few names in the Jianghu that garner as much fear and respect as Faultless Wu. Grandmaster of Three Mountains School, there are few who can match the old man for pure martial skill. He is capable of deflecting sword blows with a brush of his fingers and can kill inferior opponents with a single strike. Once a promising young warrior, he devoted himself completely to the study of Kung Fu when a rival murdered his lover many years ago. He then rose to esteemed heights in the Jianghu. Now feeling the loss of his school and advancing age, Wu wishes to complete his life's ambition to realize the final ultimate Technique of Three Mountains School: Three Mountains Mind. As the end of his life nears, he also becomes more impatient and cranky. Wu does not suffer fools, stupid questions, or interruptions to his studies without a very good reason.*





# THE SECRETS OF THREE MOUNTAINS SCHOOL

There are many secret Techniques and cunning fighting strategies known to the Masters and students of Three Mountains School. Two of the Techniques that Grandmaster Faultless created are worth calling specific attention to: Three Mountains Stance and Three Mountains Strike.

## LOST TECHNIQUE: THREE MOUNTAINS STANCE

Developed by Grandmaster Faultless Wu of Three Mountains School, Three Mountains Stance is a series of interlocking forms and movements that seek to always place the fighter in an optimal defensive position. Those who learn this fabled Technique practice defending in all manner of situations, including in the bath, laying in bed, while eating, and being ambushed by their Sifu. Once mastered, those who possess Three Mountains Stance assume a mental state of constant vigilance and defensive awareness that circumvents injury, surprise, or other hindrances. It is rumored that Grandmaster Faultless can use this Technique to Defend against Attacks while asleep or unconscious.

**Cost:** 1 refresh. Must know all the Stone Substyle Techniques. Only Faultless Wu or another Master of Three Mountains School can teach this Technique. Characters who know it should have an aspect or stunt which explains their connection to the school or its founder such as **LAST DISCIPLE OF GRANDMASTER FAULTLESS** or **WAYWARD BROTHER OF THREE MOUNTAINS SCHOOL**.

**Effect:** A character who knows Three Mountains Stance always has 2 Armor Rating against any Attack that can be Defended as long as they are conscious and not completely immobile. Once a character reaches Jianghu Rank 3 or greater, they even gain this bonus while unconscious or otherwise immobile. It does not matter if the character would not realistically be able to dodge, evade, or avoid an Attack normally. Their instincts are so honed and defensive patterns of the

stance are so ingrained that they subconsciously move to reduce or avoid damage. Three Mountains Stance stacks with other Armor Ratings.

## LOST TECHNIQUE: THREE MOUNTAINS STRIKE

Another of Grandmaster Faultless Wu's contributions to Kung Fu, Three Mountains Strike is feared across the Jianghu. What seems to be a single devastating strike actually begins as a series of seemingly minor strikes, slaps, and even blocks leading up to the final blow. These initial motions open the target to a strike that channels all of the user's power into one terrifying blow. Most opponents are either unaware of their defensive openings or are simply unable to adequately close them. Grandmaster Faultless guards this Technique closely; allowing others to assume it is simply a powerful strike. He knows if more knew of the forms and motions leading to the final blow, they could develop better defenses against it.

**Cost:** 1 refresh. Must know all Stone Substyle Techniques. Only Faultless Wu or another Master of Three Mountains School can teach this Technique. Characters who know it should have an aspect or stunt which explains their connection to the school or its founder.

**Effect:** Each time the user succeeds with style on a Fight Attack or Fight or Athletics Defend action, they may Create a **THREE MOUNTAINS PATHWAYS** Advantage with a free invocation instead of gaining a boost. This aspect and its invocations can only be used with a Fight Attack. When invoked against an opponent the user has succeeded with style against, all invocations of **THREE MOUNTAINS PATHWAYS** grant a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2.

Grandmaster Faultless is trying to develop a third Technique to complement these two. He hopes to realize this dream before old age finally takes him. Once he has perfected this Technique, called Three Mountains Mind, he intends to either record this



knowledge or pass it along to a worthy successor. Of course, proving oneself worthy to a man like Wu is a challenge fit only for the greatest Kung Fu practitioners in the Jianghu. If a GM's *Tianxia* setting has any of the Stone substyles known by Faultless Wu as exceptionally rare or unknown, they can swap out other Styles as needed or perhaps decide that Grandmaster Faultless is one of the only surviving Masters of that style.

### LOST TECHNIQUE: THREE MOUNTAINS MIND

The fabled Three Mountains Mind technique does not yet exist. It may, in fact, never exist. It is the idea of Grandmaster Faultless Wu, the realization of which still eludes him. Conceptually it is deceptively simple; a philosophy of movement and engagement with others that allows one to mimic the principles of the Three Mountain Stance in all things. The technique, if created, would place an individual in a state of optimal preparation for any danger, threat, shock, or surprise. Further, it would create a place of internal solace where the wielder could plan, analyze, and contemplate removed from such outside troubles as injury, environmental hazards, or even time. With the Three Mountains Mind, Grandmaster Faultless

could meditate in a hurricane, act regardless of injury or ailment, and otherwise display the strength and constancy of the mountain in all things.

Learning such a Lost Technique would take incredible focus and effort, but creating it so far eludes a Grandmaster. As time goes on, Faultless Wu begins to wonder if he will ever discover the secret to the Three Mountains Mind, but he has come too far to stop now.

If the GM wishes to use Faultless Wu and his quest for the Three Mountains Mind in their campaign, it is recommended they allow players to help shape the exact manifestation of this technique through their interactions with the old man. Perhaps they help him recover an ancient text that provides the final necessary insight to create the technique, or perhaps observing a great deed they perform slides the final piece of the Three Mountains Mind puzzle into place. This does not necessarily mean that the PC heroes can understand or learn the technique. They would still need to study long and hard to do so. However, they could more easily convince Grandmaster Faultless to instruct them in this and other techniques by rendering such vital assistance.

### THAT'S A LOT OF KUNG FU...

A quick glance at Faultless Wu's character sheet gives a general idea just how scary he is. A closer look solidifies this into a portrait of life at the top of the Jianghu. A few high points:

- 4 Armor Rating against any Attack he is aware of and able to Defend against (6 if he Defends another using Full Defense)
- Numerous abilities when he succeeds with Style when fighting, from doing shifts of damage to Creating

various Advantages with free invocations.

- With a handful of fate points, he can boost Defend against those in the same zone, turn Defensive success into damage, and build up an impressive array of Defensive aspects.
- He cannot be outnumbered or ganged up on by anyone who is not also a Grandmaster. So, he is kind of a big deal.

However, impressive as that is, Faultless Wu serves not only as

a single powerful and influential NPC. He is also an example of just how scary things can get at the top of the Jianghu Rank chart. This also means that should the PCs in a campaign ever reach Grandmaster rank like Wu, they operate at a comparable level. This is exciting, but can be a bit intimidating. A GM planning to reach these heights of martial excellence in the campaign should keep in mind just how capable and potent characters like Grandmaster Faultless can be.



# DA YING

The capital of Huangzhou and a major trade center for the region, Da Ying is positioned **A BIT TOO CLOSE TO THE BORDER** for many citizens' and officials' tastes. Fortunately, a strong military presence and the defensive strength of the Great Wall lessen these anxieties. Originally a collection of trading posts, camps, and inns, Da Ying served as the last stopping point before leaving the empire. The city has undergone cycles of decline and prosperity in response to regional fluctuations. With the empire at relative peace, it is now a **MODEST-SIZED BUT VERY ACTIVE** city. On any given day, the city sports half again as many transients and travelers as its population, most of them merchants and mercenaries.

Significant individuals and locations in Da Ying are detailed in this next section. They represent a subset of the personalities and places found in the city. The GM should add, alter, or edit these as necessary.

## WHITE HORSE GARRISON

A **LARGE MILITARY COMPOUND** near the city's northern gate, White Horse Garrison houses the command staff for the imperial military in Huangzhou. The commander of the military makes his home here, while he plans military operations in the region. The compound is **HEAVILY GUARDED**, but over the years **SECRET PASSAGES AND TUNNELS** have been constructed to connect White Horse Garrison to the surrounding area. While most of these routes are known to the current commander and are used for clandestine purposes, some have been forgotten.

Nan Song is the current commander of White Horse Garrison. An **UNAMBITIOUS POLITICIAN** and **GENERALLY LOYAL CAREER SOLDIER**, Commander Nan is mostly guilty of complacency and too-often allowing well-paying smugglers to avoid his patrols. He does still enforce most "important" imperial laws and is **WELL-LIKED BY THE CITIZENRY** for his focus on protection over bureaucracy and his now decades-past reputation as a great warrior. In truth, Song leaves much of the daily administration of his troops to his two children and captains, Nan Tai and Nan Tu. Nan Tai is in charge of defense and military operations while her brother focuses on supply and dealings with the concerns of local authorities.





## NAN TAI

### ASPECTS

*RESTLESS IMPERIAL OFFICER  
MY BROTHER'S THE SCHEMER...  
SKILLED HORSEWOMAN  
EAGER TO PROVE HERSELF  
"I KNOW I CAN DO MORE!"*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Fight, Drive  
**Good (+3):** Athletics, Physique  
**Fair (+2):** Notice, Shoot,  
Provoke, Resources  
**Average (+1):** Chi, Contacts,  
Lore, Empathy, Will

### STRESS

4 Physical  
3 Mental

### JIANGHU RANK: 1

### KUNG FU STYLE

#### Storm Tiger

#### STORM TIGER FORM

#### Storm Shakes the Foundation:

When Creating an Advantage,  
the character may trade free

invocations to remove free  
invocations from another  
character's advantage.

#### Storm Rumbles in Distance:

Make a Fight or Athletics roll  
with a +2 bonus to Create  
an Advantage based upon  
controlling or redirecting  
momentum. If the character  
moves at least 1 zone as part  
of this action, or her opponent  
has moved at least 1 zone  
as part of their last action,  
gain a +3 bonus instead.

#### Storm Flows Around Mountain:

If a target uses Full Defense  
in combat against the  
character, gain a +2 bonus  
to her next Attack against  
them. She gains this bonus  
regardless of whether their  
Full Defense succeeds or not.

#### Tiger Moves With Purpose:

Move at least 1 zone and make  
an Attack using Athletics  
or make an Athletics Attack  
on a target that just moved

into the character's zone  
on their last action. Add  
2 shifts to any stress she  
deals with this Attack.

### STUNTS

#### Action Inspires Loyalty (+1

bonus to Resources and  
Contacts actions involving  
imperial soldiers)

#### Cavalry Officer (+1 Weapon

and Armor Rating to Physical  
Attacks and may use Drive  
instead of Athletics with

#### Tiger Moves with Purpose

Technique when mounted)

#### "Guards!" (Perform a Resources

Create an Advantage  
action. For each free  
invocation earned, instead  
add a mob of 4 Imperial  
Soldiers to the scene)

#### Note: Imperial Soldiers statistics

can be found on p. 157 of  
*Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade*.

## NAN TIV

### ASPECTS

*ENVOIOUS IMPERIAL OFFICER  
MY SISTER'S THE FIGHTER...  
AMBITIOUS SOCIAL CLIMBER  
BUCKING FOR PROMOTION  
"WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?"*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Contacts  
**Good (+3):** Deceive, Notice,  
Resources, Rapport  
**Fair (+2):** Athletics, Fight,  
Provoke, Shoot  
**Average (+1):** Drive,  
Empathy, Lore, Will

### STRESS

2 Physical  
3 Mental

### JIANGHU RANK: 0

### STUNTS

#### Armor of Ambition (Gain

an additional mild  
mental consequence)

#### "Guards!" (Perform a Resources

Create an Advantage  
action. For each free  
invocation earned, instead  
add a mob of 4 Imperial  
Soldiers to the scene)

#### Imperial Supply Officer (+2

bonus to Create an Advantage  
actions based upon imperial  
arms and supplies)

#### Local Connections (+1 to

Contacts and Resources  
actions in Da Ying)

#### Tough Dealer (When invoking

his *"WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?"*  
aspect, add +3 bonus  
instead of the usual +2)

#### Note: Imperial Soldiers statistics

can be found on p. 157 of  
*Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade*.



Tai and Tiu are far more ambitious and restless than their father, seeing their posting as a generally boring assignment with few opportunities for advancement. However, neither can agree on the best way to rectify this issue. Tai wishes to take a more aggressive position on banditry and smuggling, hoping to show the Emperor that she is worthy of a more prestigious posting elsewhere in Shenzhou. By contrast, Tiu seeks to ingratiate himself with the local clan leaders, merchants, and bureaucrats in hopes of being granted command of White Horse Garrison when his father retires. Both siblings grow restless in their current positions. One or both of them are certain to concoct a scheme to improve their lot soon.

### BEAR'S HORN INN

Named for the *ORNATELY CARVED HORN* that hangs over the bar, the Bear's Horn is an older establishment, which caters to merchants and travelers looking for *NO NONSENSE ACCOMMODATIONS* with clean beds and decent meals. The proprietor, Horned Delun, is a *FORMER BOUNTY HUNTER* and *EX-SOLDIER* who earned enough money to set up his inn and retire. Delun is an *AGING MOUNTAIN OF A MAN*, and his staff includes many half-Yi who might not find employment with less open-minded employers. Despite cultural tensions between the Shenese and their barbarian neighbors to the north, Delun *WON'T TOLERATE ANY ABUSE OF HIS STAFF*, something that gets him in trouble when he ejects the wrong patron.

The story behind Delun's horn depends upon his mood and who is listening. If he has an impressionable audience, he weaves a tale of a great horned bear-demon he slew, earning the gratitude of the people and a sizeable reward. If he is speaking to more practical types, he says it was a souvenir he took from the Yi chieftain and raider years ago as part of the bounty that finally let him retire. The second story is more plausible, but only Delun knows what really happened.

### BROKEN KNOT CLAN COMPOUND

The home of the Broken Knot clan is on the southern edge of Da Ying. A heretical Bodhist priest who rejected his vows and married a Yi barbarian princess founded the clan several generations ago. Now,

the clan's members serve as guards, scouts, escorts, and interpreters for caravans and expeditions seeking to travel north of the Great Wall into the barbarian lands beyond. In stark contrast to their ancestor's religious convictions, the Broken Knots are well known for their loyalty and devotion to *FINISH A JOB NO MATTER WHAT*. Because of this, they tend to be *VERY PICKY ABOUT ACCEPTING NEW JOBS*, preferring long-term contracts or dealings with established customers. The clan expects their clients to show them similar loyalty when it comes hiring. Given their reputation and *EXCELLENT RECORD FOR SUCCESS*, they earn repeat business from all but the most fickle clients or temporary business arrangements. Every clan member wears a Bodhist sacred knot symbol somewhere on their person that has been cleaved in two, as an homage to their founder. Inter marriages between the clan and various Yi tribes remain a common occurrence.

Bronze Gan and his wife, Nayan, are the current heads of the Broken Knot clan. Gan is a *GRIZZLED OLD WARRIOR* who *LOST HIS LEFT HAND TO BANDITS* years back and now wears a *HEAVY BRONZE PROSTHETIC* in its place. Nayan is a *SKILLED HEALER* and *EXPERT ARCHER*. Their eldest son, Bronze Bat, recently married the eldest daughter of Mo Fu, the wealthy head of the Red Rat Trading Company. The couple currently expects their first child.

### THE STONE BOAR COMPOUND

Run by the Stone Boar clan, this *MODEST BUT SECURE* compound is located on the northern edge of Da Ying near White Horse Garrison. Primarily hunters and trappers, the Stone Boars do brisk business selling meats and furs. They also make glue and other useful substances from animal bone and sinew. Much of the clan's operations actually extends beyond the city walls. Curing and tanning operations take place northwest of the city along the southern edge of the Great Wall. The Stone Boars often trade knowledge and goods with Yi tribes north of the wall, but the clan originally hails from the forests to the east. They are descendants of poachers and outlaws pardoned and granted land in the north for brave service to a previous Emperor. The Stone Boars are *FIERCELY LOYAL TO THE EMPEROR* out of remembrance.



The clan is known more for being trackers, scouts, and hunters than warriors, but they are far from weak. Many clan members are prominent members of the Jianghu, including the current clan head, Hai Donghai. A **MASTER OF THE LONG SPEAR**, Hai Donghai is also a **CUNNING HUNTSMAN** and **SURPRISINGLY SHREWD BUSINESSMAN**. He happily married the daughter of Mo Fu, head of the Red Rat Trading Company. However, the couple's inability to conceive a child has clan members pushing for him to designate an heir apparent in case he dies childless.

The current favorites for this honor are Donghai's sister Hai Lin-Lin and Donghai's half-brother Hai Hop. Lin-Lin is currently serving as an **IMPERIAL ARMY SCOUT** in the southern provinces, and there is some concern she would be unwilling to return should something happen to Donghai. Hop is a **CHARMING LOCAL BOY** with many friends, but many question his leadership skills. A suitable and skilled spouse for either candidate would go a long way toward pushing the clan to accept one over the other, but so far both candidates are quite happily unmarried.

## RED RAT TRADING COMPANY

Once a modest trading post for furs, metals, spices, and other goods, the Red Rat Trading Company has grown to become one of the wealthiest and most influential merchant houses in Huangzhou. In addition to its trade interests, Red Rat Trading has expanded into banking and mining, often controlling an entire chain of commerce for a particular trade route. The company has its main offices in Da Ying with satellite offices reaching from the Great Wall all the way to the imperial capital.

Relying upon **STRONG ALLIANCES** with the Stone Boar and Broken Knot clans, Red Rat's founder Mo Fu has secured relationships by marrying one of his two daughters into each clan. His eldest child, Zhenzhen, is wed to the heir of the Broken Knots while her sister, Ting, is wed to the head of the Stone Boars. With **PROFITABLE TRADE AGREEMENTS** and **SKILLED CLAN WARRIORS** to protect his caravans, Fu's wealth continues to grow so long as warm relations between the two clans hold.

## MENDER MEI

One of the more unusual and interesting artisans in Da Ying is the seamstress, Mender Mei. A **REMARKABLY SKILLED TAILOR**, she is noteworthy not just for her skill but also her chosen calling. Unlike many tailors and seamstresses, Mei does not take a variety of jobs making numerous articles of clothing. Instead she **ONLY MENDS CLOTHING**. Mei will not make new cloaks, coats, trousers, hats, or any other type of apparel. However, she can and will repair even the most damaged garments, and her skills in doing so are remarkable. She can also alter and improve damaged clothing, adding **SECRET POCKETS**, **WEIGHTED HEMS**, and other alterations.

Mei's shop is an unassuming little building near White Horse Garrison. The location means she does brisk business mending cloaks and uniforms for the soldiers assigned there, though most knowledgeable locals are aware of her skills. Her shop is filled with scraps and partially mended clothing, as well as items dropped off and never recovered. Mei does not generally sell abandoned items, saying "you never know if they might be back for it," though she occasionally will give one to customers she likes.

Mender Mei is an old woman, easily at least eighty years. She wears clothing she has patched and mended for decades, declaring to any who inquire that she likes her "old rags" too much to replace them. She has little in the way of fighting skills, but many local warriors and soldiers she has lent her skills to in desperate times love her.







## CHAPTER 3

# DONGZHOU

### MONKEY BUSINESS

Sun dragged the baby on the cart as fast as his little arms and legs allowed. Baby Qi squealed with delight as the streets of Shejing rushed past her, a blur of colors and lights. Sun was not having as much fun. Even though he was a monkey, the animal was more than clever enough to recognize the murderous glares their pursuers shot them.

"After the little beast!" the head goon yelled. He was still bleeding from his ear where Sun had bitten him, "I want that little monster roasting on a spit!" Sun had not been their target. Their original quarry had been Qi, the doe-eyed infant he now dragged through the streets with speed that, had he not been a panicking blue-faced monkey, would have surprised even him.

However, what he had in speed the little monkey lacked in a sense of direction. In his blind panic, he

nearly flattened himself against the dead end down which he had allowed himself and little baby Qi to be chased. The men pursuing them skidded to a halt and blocked the entrance to the alley in which Sun had been cornered. The leader licked his lips and drew a very large, very ugly blade and slowly advanced, clearly savoring the thought of butchering the monkey and his charge.

Sun for a moment considered scampering up the loose stones in the walls to freedom, but he remembered that his mistress had charged him with keeping the child safe. He grabbed at the infant and pulled. She was not heavy, but to Sun she might as well been an ox. He whined, as if pleading to the great Monkey King to make her lighter or perhaps teach her to fly.

Qi just giggled and reached for him; she thought he was playing

a game. He tried again. Nothing. When he realized it was futile, he turned with a snarl to face his end with the defiance only Sun the Golden Monkey could.

The men did not laugh at Sun. They did not run or attack either. They did not do much of anything except the leader, who was in the process of spitting out half his teeth as he fell unconscious to the ground.

Mistress stood before Sun, still in a fighting crouch with her staff in hand. Behind her the grumpy human she called Slumbering Hound wiped something red off his blade.

"You did well, little ones," Sister Chuntao said to Sun and the infant giggling behind him.

Sun relaxed, his little shoulders slumping in relief and a very monkey-like sigh leaving his lips. Unlike the baby, he was getting too old for this.



Located along the Northeastern edge of Shenzhou, Dongzhou borders the Northern Sea of Shenzhou to the east and the Great Wall to the North. More civilized and populated than Huangzhou, it nevertheless seems wild and unsettled compared to the heavily populated provinces to the south. **THICK FORESTS** cover the landscape, hiding small villages, rich wildlife, and the occasional bandit camp. Both a buffer zone and gateway between the imperial capital province of Zhongzhou and the Yi tribes north of the Great Wall, the people of Dongzhou have a history of **TENSE BUT PEACEFUL** coexistence with their northern neighbors.

Dongzhou takes its name from both its placement and environment. Meaning “Winter Land,” it is named for its **HARSH WINTERS** as well as its northern location, a direction commonly associated with the winter

season. The weather limits trade and travel during colder months, a state it shares with its neighboring province of Huangzhou. Dongzhou relies heavily upon fishing and sea trade from its eastern shores, mostly from port towns. Further inland, lumber is an important trade good, and caravans bringing goods from the north and west are frequent. The majority of materials imported and exported via the sea pass through the warehouses and trading houses of the provincial capital, Shejing. This activity combined with its neighbor Huangzhou’s dwindling natural resources and smaller population combine to make Dongzhou the **RICHEST PROVINCE IN THE NORTH**, though it lags behind wealthier regions in the Southeast and Central Shenzhou.

## GHOST SONG FOREST

This forest in Dongzhou covers much of the wilder areas of the province. It is densest in the north and west near the mountains, having been thinned out to the south and east by land development around the capital and various settlements. The areas of the forest nearest to civilization are a **FAVORITE HIDING SPOT** for fugitives and bandits, though **DANGEROUS WILDLIFE**, **UNIDENTIFIED LIGHTS**, and **STRANGE MUSICAL TONES**

reported by travelers mean few venture too deeply into the woods, and even fewer live there.

Trade routes cut through Ghost Song Forest. Most are fairly active, though some have been largely abandoned due to banditry, harsh weather, and other complications. In some areas where forest growth has overtaken road maintenance, it is **EASY TO GET LOST**.

### THE MYSTERY OF GHOST SONG FOREST

The **UNIDENTIFIED LIGHTS** and **STRANGE MUSICAL TONES** of Ghost Song Forest are left purposefully undefined so that the GM can tailor this mystery to match the campaign. They could be anything from the mundane to supernatural. Some options include:

- A large bandit camp. The lights are hooded lanterns shining through the trees, and the musical tones are horns they use to warn off intruders and scare off the curious.
- Restless spirits of those killed in the forest. All who die here might haunt this place, or perhaps only those

who are killed in a particular way are bound to the region.

- A supernatural beast, whose eyes blaze like fire or that possesses a bioluminescent hide, has a beautiful call that sounds like fine music. This could be one large beast, or several smaller specimens. They could be friendly and wise or ever hungry and demonic.
- A secret headquarters for imperial agents, rebels, cultists, or another covert group hides in the deep forest. The lanterns and musical tones are a complex code used to communicate.

- The White Widow Sect has an outpost in the forest and uses the lights and music to convince visitors it is haunted. They also keep wildlife here as guards.
- The forest is a mystical place where the realms of the spirits, hell, or even heaven can be glimpsed. Those who tarry too long risk drawing the attention of powerful, unearthly forces.

The GM might consider setting up the lights as a mystery using the Bronze Rule (see *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade*, p. 128) if the secret of the forest is particularly complex, shocking, or important.



# THE YUANBEI HILLS

More like a low mountain range than hills, the Yuanbei ("Far North") Hills run along the northeast section of Dongzhou. The Great Wall passes through these hills, forming the northern border of both the province and the empire. The hills continue north of Shenzhou until they reach the great plains of the Yi tribes. The Yuanbei Hills are **HEAVILY FORESTED**

save around the Great Wall, where work crews clear brush and trees for both visibility and construction materials. There are few villages in this area, most of the population of the province lives to the south. However, **ISOLATED TEMPLES**, **SECLUDED MONASTERIES**, and **WORK CAMPS** dot the landscape.

# THE WHITE RIVER

The confluence of five smaller rivers, the White River is much shorter than its larger counterparts to the south, the Silk River and Da Jiang. However, it provides an important waterway from the basin where the provincial capital of Shejing sits to the port of Emperor's Ferry. It partially freezes during the worst winter months but otherwise sees **REGULAR**

**TRAFFIC**. The White River is **VERY SECURE**, passing too close to major cities and military camps to allow for piracy. Smugglers operating on the river must be very careful or very well connected. **SALT MARSHES** border the river where it meets the coast, providing a valuable supply of salt for trade.

# EMPEROR'S FERRY

During the period in Shenzhou's history when Shejing served as the imperial capital, the nearby port town of Emperor's Ferry was the point of departure for the Emperor on naval voyages. The port has seen ebbs and flows of prosperity and importance, but it is currently a **RUN-DOWN COASTAL TOWN** run by imperial ministers and officials who are **POLITICALLY DISADVANTAGED**. This current state of affairs and the fact that most imperial navy actions are centered in the south, means that **IMPERIAL OVERSIGHT IS LAX** and **CORRUPTION IS WIDESPREAD**. While it is too close to the provincial capital to tolerate outright piracy, many gangs of smugglers, thieves, and criminals run their maritime operations out of Emperor's Ferry. Efforts to clean up the town in recent years have failed, with corrupt officials and powerful gang leaders frustrating efforts to bring law and order to the town.

At least half a dozen major gangs or crime syndicates operate in the town, fighting amongst

themselves and with the few brave magistrates or officials who actually try to keep them in check. The worst and most powerful of these gangs are the 555 Devils whose crying devil symbol can be seen on numerous establishments, ships, and shipments around town. Operating under a **THIN PRETENSE OF SEMI-LEGITIMACY**, the 555 Devils act like a hybrid of a clan and gang. The mysterious Jade Devil Mask, a masked gangster never seen in public without his namesake, leads them. He concentrates his operation on smuggling and providing protection for various trade convoys and businesses, whether they desire the gang's services or not. Two of the other gangs in town, the Moon Toads and the Black Sacks, have recently joined with the 555 Devils as affiliates. It seems a bloody push to drive out their rivals or force them to join this growing syndicate is inevitable.





### THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK

The identity of Jade Devil Mask is left for the GM to decide. He is intended to be a potent criminal threat for PCs to fight, deal with, join, or even eventually replace. As such, he should be designed with the PCs and campaign themes in mind. He might be a disgraced pirate hunter turned criminal, a nobleman wanted for treason, a seemingly respectable businessman turned gangster, a deformed madman hungry for power and revenge, an exiled member of the Wayward Court (see p. 41), or one of any number of other options. He could be the long lost relative of a PC, or someone with a very particular reason to hate or hunt them. He does not

even need to be a “he.” Instead, Jade Devil Mask could be a woman or perhaps a eunuch. In campaigns with active supernatural elements, he could be a sorcerer or demon. The only thing for certain is that he should have a reason to wear his trademark mask.

Jade Devil Mask must be dangerous. If he were not, all his secrecy would not have saved him from some ambitious warrior putting a blade through him and taking over. Of course, there may have been multiple Jade Devil Masks over the years, each taking the identity after replacing or removing their predecessor. In higher powered or supernaturally themed campaigns, the mask

itself may pass along some skill or ability to the wearer, making it a highly coveted artifact in Shenzhou’s underworld.

Whatever the truth of the Jade Devil Mask, he is intended to be a threat customized to the power level and themes of individual campaigns. If the PCs are cunning and potent fighters, then Jade Devil Mask is probably even more so. If they are all rookie warriors in a local Kung Fu school, he may be an ambitious fellow student or instructor moonlighting as a crime lord. His anonymity and lack of precisely defined history is a tool for the GM to utilize.



# SHEJING

Meaning “Serpent Capital,” Shejing is easily the most important city in northern Shenzhou. It is also often called Heijing (“Black Capital”). Both names are poetic references to the city’s connection to the north, which in the Wu Xing is associated with the color black and the serpent. In fact, the city has **HAD MANY NAMES** and even served occasionally as a **CAPITAL OF EARLIER DYNASTIES**. It is both a trade hub and a military center, with the city functioning both as the official headquarters of the Northern imperial army and the seat of government overseeing political and bureaucratic activities in Northern Shenzhou. An imperial duke oversees the city, though **NUMEROUS IMPERIAL MINISTRIES** and their officers handle most bureaucratic functions. Compared to cities in Western Shenzhou, Shejing seems far more structured and tied to the inner workings of the empire.

The city’s **HIGH STONE WALLS** and **MANY FORTIFIED GATES**, allow both access and security. In peace, the city is open but with all access points at least nominally guarded. In times of strife, **INCREASED SECURITY** and **REGULAR PATROLS** are the order of the day. Gangs, syndicates, and various criminals still exist, but they must be more careful and discrete than the bold banditry in the wilder areas of the empire.

All around the capital one finds **REMNANTS OF FORMER DYNASTIES** in the form of statues, shrines, and structures dating back centuries. Some landmarks have been repurposed or replaced to suit the needs of the current government, but others remain. This process seems random to outsiders, but local historians and learned scholars often explain to the curious how particular landmarks were preserved, destroyed, or altered based upon the power and influence of their patrons and the subject matter. A statue of a famed general who rebelled against a ruling dynasty may be replaced with a modern rendition of a loyal commander, saint, or patron deity. However, a similar statue of an enemy king who once held the city but fought with honor, showed mercy to his foes, and protected the people in time of trouble might remain, though often with some colorful embellishments on the “official” story of its subject.

## BLACK TORTOISE QUARTER

Housing the headquarters for the Northern imperial army, Black Tortoise Quarter comprises the northernmost section of Shejing. Its area sports several training grounds and barracks, with numerous businesses that cater to the needs of the army and its soldiers operating on the outskirts of the neighborhood. Travel within the quarter technically **REQUIRES SPECIAL PERMITS**, though this is only enforced when the military is on high alert due to rebellion, war, or another calamity.

Ma Rong, often called **THE GREAT GENERAL**, is the current commander of the Northern imperial army. He is a handsome, middle-aged man who has served in the military since his youth and is widely considered to be **THE GREATEST LIVING STRATEGIST IN SHENZHOU**. General Ma remains very popular with both his troops and the general populace. Known as a formidable warrior in his youth, these days he is more focused upon leading troops and military action than personal combat. Unfortunately, Ma’s **POPULARITY IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**. The general’s direct manner and common appeal gained him **MANY BITTER ENEMIES**, some of whom managed to manipulate affairs to get him reassigned to the north, away from the capital where he too often had the ear of the imperial court. Since arriving in Shejing three years ago, General Ma has fended off three assassination attempts and two attempts to sabotage or discredit his command. Only his keen strategic mind and a close collection of allies and trusted subordinates have saved him.

Chief among these subordinates is Lieutenant Li Li Fen. Li Fen was a hapless soldier with a minor disciplinary problem who came into her own when she helped save General Ma from an attempt on his life. She nearly died saving her commander, but as a result of this incident ultimately was appointed to be one of his most trusted agents. Li Fen often serves as General Ma’s bodyguard and assistant. When she is not near him it is almost certainly because she is on a vital mission for her commander.





## LI LI FEN

## ASPECTS

*GENERAL MA'S TRUSTED LIEUTENANT**PROBLEMS WITH AUTHORITY**"EVERY DAY I EARN THE GENERAL'S TRUST"**BORN INTO MONEY**IRON SISTER SABER*

## SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Empathy**Good (+3):** Fight, Physique**Fair (+2):** Athletics, Chi, Notice**Average (+1):** Contacts, Lore,  
Resources, Will

## STRESS

4 Physical

3 Mental

## JIANGHU RANK: 1

## KUNG FU STYLE

**Lightning Crane***LIGHTNING CRANE FORM*

## THE INNER CITY

The central portion of Shejing houses the city's wealthiest and most prestigious residents. *EXPENSIVE MANORS* line the wide, well-paved streets. *SECURITY IS HIGH* in the neighborhood, and only the most upstanding and wealthy businesses can afford the *SPECIAL PERMITS* to operate here.

Not all of the inner city is devoted to wealthy citizens; modest homes for guardsmen, servants, and others who serve Shejing's rich and powerful line the southern edge of the inner city. These individuals are in no way considered equals to their social betters, but they benefit from increased pay, prestige, and security relative to other portions of the city. Because of this, competition for assignments and jobs in the inner city is very high.

## THE THREE BROTHERS

Also known as Three Seas and other names, these three lakes are bound the inner city with the northernmost lake stretching beyond the walls to the north. The shores of the Three Brothers are *EXCEPTIONALLY SCENIC*, especially where the lakes



**Crane Hides in Reeds:** Add an additional +2 bonus when using Full Defense to Defend the character in combat. If used to Defend others, gain 2 Armor Rating instead.

**Lightning Strikes Without**

**Pause:** Gain a +2 bonus to Notice used when determining turn order.

**Lightning Crosses the**

**Sky:** When the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, she may move 1 zone in addition to gaining a boost. If someone or something tries to stop this movement, gain a +2 to rolls to Overcome an Obstacle.

**STUNTS**

**Eye for Trouble** (If the character's Empathy is greater than the highest Deceive skill among her opponents, gain a +2 bonus when determining Turn order)

**Family Fortunes** (Once per session, gain a +4 bonus to a Resource action)

**Stalwart Defender** (Gain an additional minor consequence the character can only use when she Defends others from a physical Attack action)

*Li Li Fen fled a boring life as a rich merchant's daughter to join the army. Unfortunately, the life of a spoiled wealthy aristocrat did little to prepare the young woman for service in the imperial army and she often found herself in trouble for taking shortcuts, slacking off, and only doing the bare minimum required. This changed when she discovered soldiers in her company were part of a conspiracy to assassinate their commander, the Great General Ma. Refusing to go along or look the other way, she helped foil the plot, though it nearly cost her life. General Ma praised her bravery and made her his "personal project," training and teaching her the value of loyalty and*

*discipline. Since then, she has been his tireless defender and trusted agent, though she still has problems with officials and superiors who have not won her respect like General Ma Rong.*

*A bit short and somewhat stocky, Li Li Fen favors well-crafted armor in times of war and functional nondescript clothing when working covertly or off duty. She is trained with various military weapons but favors her saber, a gift from General Ma for her loyal service she has named "Iron Sister." She sports two scars, one along her left cheek and another from an arrow in the back—both from wounds taken defending her commander.*

**Note:** Though an NPC with a defined role and direct connections to the setting, Li Li Fen can serve as an unofficial Sample PC for campaigns centered around the imperial army, the Northern provinces, and the Great General Ma. Give her 2 refresh and she is ready for play.

border the neighborhood's **GARDENS AND SHRINES**. Industry and commercial activities are strictly controlled in these lakes so as to preserve their use for the city's elite, though it is not uncommon to see off-duty ministers, well-off merchants, and aristocratic scholars engaging in **RECREATIONAL FISHING AND BOATING**.

**THE FORBIDDEN CITADEL**

Located in the center of the inner city is the Forbidden Citadel. Once the palace of a past imperial dynasty, it is now a **WELL MAINTAINED AND FORTIFIED MANOR** with a **LARGE INNER KEEP** with **NUMEROUS SECRET PASSAGES**. The structure is now the home of Duchess Zhu Qing. A **DISTANT IMPERIAL COUSIN** and the **DUCHESS OF DONGZHOU**, Zhu Qing rules the province in the Emperor's name, acting as an imperial governor and chief minister for the empire. Numerous ministers, eunuchs, bodyguards, and assistants attend her. Some are sworn to her service, others are spies in the service of influential nobles and officials. Qing is

aware of this reality, though she does not know the identities of every mole and double agent in her employ.

Duchess Qing is **THE WEALTHIEST WOMAN IN SHENZHO**, with Epic (+7) Resources and **Extensive Holdings** (+2 to Overcome an Obstacle and Create an Advantage Resource actions in Dongzhou). She is a keen courtier and political, with Great (+4) Deceive and Provoke. She is **EXTREMELY LOYAL TO THE EMPIRE**. She has not risen to her lofty position by engaging in foolish or dangerous schemes, preferring to let her retainers and agents deal with riskier endeavors. Qing is a widow and is not keen to remarry, content instead to spend her time with numerous lovers. Her three children are fostered with relatives in other parts of the empire, a situation that keeps them safe and helps secure alliances. Qing has a deep respect for General Ma, though the two often clash when military and political needs clash.



### ..... DUCHESS ZHU QING: HERO OR VILLAIN? .....

Qing's status as a generally heroic or villainous figure is left for the GM to determine. She is powerful, rich, and has great influence, but how she uses it is left intentionally vague. She might be a *RUTHLESS OPPORTUNIST* seeking any chance to expand her power or a *VALIANT DEFENDER OF THE EMPIRE* focused upon protecting her subjects and the empire from all manner of threats.

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### THE OUTER CITY

Much of the southern part of the city is home to craftsmen and merchants of respectable but modest means. This neighborhood is far from poor, but its wealth and influence are a pale shadow of the inner city. In addition to businesses and skilled workers, this area houses *TEMPLES AND SHRINES* devoted to various Bodhist saints, minor gods, and honored ancestors. While the very poor and very rich have their own places of business and worship elsewhere, the material and spiritual needs of the middle classes are met in the outer city. In addition, marketplaces, inns, taverns, and other places of business serve both residents and visitors.

The outer city is also the final destination of many retiring gangsters, army officers, and warriors of the Jianghu. Essentially, heroes who were successful enough to retire from such active and dangerous pursuits but could not achieve true riches or exalted social status often dwell here. Consequently, *HIDDEN AMONG THE COMMON PEOPLE* can occasionally be found exceptional and uncommon individuals.

### THE SHRINE OF HEAVEN

This holy site is *CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION* by order of Duchess Zhu Qing. *BUILT ON THE SITE OF AN OLDER HOLY BUILDING*, the Shrine of Heaven promises to be larger and more accommodating to a vast number of visitors and worshippers. When completed it is intended to have multiple buildings, including a central hall and an elaborate altar for official sacrifices to the gods and spirits who rule heaven and oversee the land. Though it is a *DAOIST SHRINE*, its devotion to the glory of heaven appeals to other religions as well. Since it began construction two years ago, rumors of *SECRET CHAMBERS* and

*CLANDESTINE MEETINGS* within the half-completed grounds abound. To date, the officials overseeing the project deny such gossip, but witnesses insist they have seen proof.

### FLAWLESS FORGE

Once a prolific and famed maker of various exotic and masterfully crafted weapons, the woman known as Flawless Forge now lives in quiet seclusion in a modest house on the edge of the outer city. It is said she can learn the secrets of any weapon's making with a glance, allowing her to replicate or repair any armament, no matter how exotic or unusual. However, since her *OWN CHILD DIED BY A WEAPON SHE MADE*, she *REFUSES TO FORGE ARMAMENTS*, instead working on toys for the local children and tools for craftsmen. It is rumored she would make one final weapon for the warrior who could avenge her murdered child, but she has never confirmed this or the identity of her child's killer.

Despite her reluctance to make weapons, Flawless Forge is still a talented smith with Superb (+5) Crafts and a *Discerning Eye* (+2 bonus to Creating an Advantage Lore and Crafts rolls based upon analyzing weapon designs and forging) and is a *Skilled Smith* (+2 bonus when forging weapons, armor, and items). If she were ever to forge another weapon, it would clearly be truly extraordinary.

### ..... FLAWLESS FORGE AND MAKING WEAPONS .....

Exact mechanics are not given for the weapons Flawless Forge could make if properly coerced or motivated, because the utility and use of weapons can vary with the GM and the campaign. Some games might have many weapon related aspects, stunts, or extras. Others might treat nearly every weapon in existence as pure descriptive embellishment. In one campaign such a weapon might be a significant extra with a sizeable Weapon Rating and various bonuses. In another, it might be a colorful aspect or a stunt, which gives a bonus for appropriate uses of Create an Advantage actions. In any event, a weapon made by Flawless Forge must be interesting and dramatic, regardless of its mechanical effects.

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### TEN COFFINS QUARTER

This southeastern neighborhood of Shejing is home to its poorest citizens. Officially known as Ten Officials Quarter for the ten ward bosses that oversee the district, to the people who live here it is known as Ten Coffins Quarter, or simply Ten Coffins. While not completely undefended, this region lies outside the well-maintained defenses of the inner and outer city. As Shejing stretches south and east, the buildings and inhabitants become noticeably less affluent, well-maintained, and secure. From laborers eking out a living to homeless beggars, **LIFE IS HARD AND CHEAP** in Ten Coffins Quarter. Gangs of thieves and criminals operate here, hidden among the honest poor from guards and magistrates who do not have the inclination or means to strictly police this district.

Due to its placement and lack of security, Ten Coffins is also a **HAVEN FOR SPIES**. Entering the district is easy, and hiding there even easier. While there is little in Ten Coffins for spies to investigate, it makes an excellent base of operations for those seeking to infiltrate and inform on goings on elsewhere in Shejing. Many spies operating out of Ten Coffins are engaged in domestic espionage for nobles, sects, and factions. However, foreign agents also seek the secrets and weaknesses of Northern Shenzhou and its most important city.

### WHY TEN COFFINS?

In the Shenese language, the word for "coffin" and the word for "official" sound similar. There are many such associations in Shenese culture using words and numbers whose pronunciation or association, pop up in the setting material in this and other books. For another example, the 555 Devils gang in Emperor's Ferry uses the crying devil as their symbol because the spoken word for the number 5 is believed to sound like weeping when repeated aloud. Knowing such number and word associations are not necessary, but a bit of research can amuse and impress fellow players!

### THE BONE OWLS

This criminal gang runs various illicit operations out of Ten Coffins Quarter, including smuggling, assassination, gambling, and prostitution. The Bone Owls are **RUTHLESS KILLERS** and **UNREPENTANT THIEVES**, but they have one scruple that sets them apart from many other gangsters; they do not engage in slavery. Even the courtesans that work in their brothels or debtors who owe their loan sharks have their freedom, if not always their well-being, protected. Their leader, Unfettered Zi, punishes any violation of this edict harshly. Even previously trusted and esteemed lieutenants have met their end after breaking this rule. The gang's aversion to slavery serves them well, widening the number of magistrates and officials willing to take bribes to look the other way as they run their other criminal operations. The Bone Owls are not heroes, but the populace and authorities have come to see them as **A NECESSARILY AND PALATABLE EVIL**. Their **OWL HEAD PENDANTS**, charms, and other trinkets carved from ivory and bone usually identify the gang members. They mark their territory with similar images, carved into posts or painted on walls. When they must operate covertly, Bone Owl enforcers wear owl-like masks of bone to conceal their identities and frighten the superstitious—the owl is a messenger of death and misfortune in Shenese culture.

### THE OWL'S NEST

The Bone Owls have **HOLDINGS AND HIDEOUTS** in Shejing, chief among them the Owl's Nest. Originally called the Hawk's Nest Trading, this **MULTI-LEVEL TRADING COMPANY** was seized years ago from a merchant who borrowed heavily from the gang and could not repay his debts. The Bone Owls took the building as payment on the loan, renamed it, and now use it as their base of operations. To add to their security, the Bone Owls rent out the lower levels of building to various criminals and fugitives. For a hefty fee, they offer **PROTECTION FROM THE AUTHORITIES**. Tenants who possess useful skills often pay their way with services instead of coin. Anyone foolish enough to assault the Owl's Nest finds themselves facing not only the gang's warriors, but warriors, killers, and bandits **PAYING THEIR RENT WITH BLOOD**. As one might expect, there is a strict **NO SLAVERS ALLOWED** policy at the Owl's Nest. Any slaves who can pay to stay here are protected from efforts to reclaim them.



## UNFETTERED ZI

**ASPECTS****RUTHLESS GANG LEADER****"I WILL NEVER AGAIN BE WEAK"****UTTERLY DESPISES SLAVERY****NEVER FORGETS A DEBT****SKILLS****Great (+4):** Will**Good (+3):** Athletics,

Contacts, Fight, Stealth

**Fair (+2):** Physique, Provoke,

Resources, Burglary

**Average (+1):** Chi, Deceive,

Empathy, Notice, Rapport

**STRESS**

3 Physical

4 Mental

**JIANGHU RANK: 1****KUNG FU STYLE****IRON DRAGON****Iron Dragon Form****Dragon Rules the Fields:**

When the character succeeds with style on an Attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of her Attack.

**Dragon Sleeps in Mist:** When the character succeeds with style on a Defend, she may reduce the result by 1 to gain 2 Armor Rating against the next Attack in the scene that strikes her in addition to the normal boost.

**Flesh Breaks on Iron:** When the character Defends against a Fight Attack with style, she may inflict a 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on her attacker.

**Iron Body, Iron Mind:** +2 bonus to Create an Advantage relating to resisting or coping with pain, intimidation, or fear.

**Iron Cleaves the Stone:**

Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an Attack to inflict physical stress.

**STUNTS****Bone Owl Leader** (+1

bonus when using Contacts or Resources in Bone Owl territory)

**Cull the Weak** (When using an invocation on an opponent's consequence, gain a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2. If the character uses the invocation on an Attack action, also add 1 Weapon Rating to the Attack)

**No Chains** (+2 bonus to escape physical restraints, bonds, and imprisonment)

**Will to Survive** (The character may use Will to Defend against physical Attacks once she has taken a moderate or severe consequence)

*Born into slavery, Unfettered Zi won her freedom at age twelve by leading a revolt that killed her Masters. Fleeing to the North with a handful of followers, she eventually set herself up in Shejing first as a minor gang boss and eventually as the undisputed leader of the Bone Owls. A hard life filled with loss and pain stripped any tenderness and compassion from her, though she still despises slavery and never denies another's freedom. However, given her willingness to rob, kill, and extort others to grow her power and protect her interests, she is a hard person to admire. Still, she has become an unlikely patron to those seeking liberation from enslavement, forced labor, and even arranged marriage, though her assistance comes with a hefty price. She wields her saber and sharpened shield with deadly proficiency.*



### THREE SWORDS CROSSING

Found near the center of Ten Coffins, this intersection of three major streets is a common gathering spot for beggars, peddlers, street performers, and other denizens of the region. The region is named for the three streets that intersect here: Golden Sword Road, Broken Sword Way, and Silent Sword Street.

Three Swords Crossing is most notable for two things. First is the *ANCIENT WILLOW* that marks the center of the crossing. The tree is *PROTECTED BY IMPERIAL DECREE*, and is traditionally considered the

precise spot where a local lord sacrificed himself to save the Third Emperor of Shenzhou. The exact lineage and identity of the lord is subject to vigorous debate, with many local families and dignitaries claiming it was their ancestor who saved the Emperor. The existence of this protected tree and the high traffic this region usually sees leads to its second noteworthy element: it is considered to be *NEUTRAL GROUND* by all of the gang, syndicates, and other factions in Shejing. Violations of that agreement could lead to massive reprisals from many different groups.

### THE SHADOWS OF SHENZHOU: THE WAYWARD COURT

The Wayward Court is a group of vagabonds, beggars, and wanderers banded together for mutual protection and benefit. Many members also belong to the Jianghu, protecting weaker and less capable members with their martial prowess. While the Wayward Court does not universally shun money and material gain, members are expected to value charity, personal growth, knowledge, and spiritual and physical betterment far more than wealth and luxuries. Most members only work, beg, or trade for what they need to survive. It is a rare member who owns more than they can carry.

Given their nature and the tendency for many to ignore the poor, members of the Wayward

Court make excellent spies, messengers, and agents. They also often aid those in need; particularly people unable to help themselves. For the more capable, securing the Wayward Court's assistance is not always easy, and they commonly request *VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE* or *ACTS OF EXCEPTIONAL CHARITY* as payment.

The Wayward Court is organized into a loose collection of titles and positions, which simultaneously parodies and emulates the nobility. The *KING OF THE WAYWARD COURT* technically rules the group, but in truth he is more respected and influential than slavishly obeyed. The identity of the King and many of the higher-ranked members are secret to

all outside the group and many within it. Nobility often travel in disguise and wear masks at Wayward Court gatherings.

The skill and danger that the King and other lords of the Wayward Court present is up to the GM. They should not be pushovers, but their Kung Fu is depends upon their use in the campaign. If they are heroic underdogs in need of the PCs help, they are less powerful than if they are a major force in the Jianghu to be courted, battled, and respected. Generally at least the King and his best subordinates are Masters of at least one Style of Kung Fu, but that is not required. There can be more or fewer skilled fighters among the organization as necessary.



## THE MENDICANT DUKES OF SHEJING

These two masked vagabonds operate out of the poorest sections of Shejing, coordinating and directing the Wayward Court's actions in the North. They also work as the Wayward Court's liaisons to warriors, criminals, and other potential rivals and allies. Little is known of the pair, save that they are both **DUKES OF THE WAYWARD COURT**, placing them highly in that brotherhood of beggars and wanderers. Each of the Dukes is known for the distinctive masks they wear. Duke Jinwu ("Gold Crow") wears a golden raven mask and carries a metal crutch. Duchess Yutu ("Jade Rabbit") wears a jade rabbit mask and carries a long-handled stone pestle. Each of the Mendicant Dukes is a skilled fighter and cunning trickster. They gained their title and authority purely through effort and skill, not hereditary inheritance or purchased influence. The presence of these two mysterious figures is the reason the Wayward Court sometimes calls Shejing the "City of Three Dukes"—Duchess Zhu Qing plus the two Mendicant Dukes.

The duo's relationship is difficult to pin down, often appearing to be old friends, lovers, ex-lovers, husband and wife, brother and sister, bitter rivals, or some combination of these at once. Their motives and goals are similarly mysterious, though they generally prioritize the wellbeing of the Wayward Court, the people of Shenzhou, and the empire in roughly that order. They are often **HELPFUL BUT CRYPTIC** to those they decide to aid, setting **ODD TASKS** or posing **STRANGE RIDDLES**, which reveal valuable insights or secrets. Many of the pair's more elaborate quests can be created using the Bronze Rule as Kung Fu Challenges (see *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade*, p. 129–130).

## WHO ARE THE MENDICANT DUKES?

Like their less flamboyant but similarly humble peer in the west, the Beggar Abbot (see *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade*, p. 53) the identity of the Mendicant Dukes is left for the GM to develop. Some possibilities include:

- Noble-born twins who have rejected their privileged upbringing to join the Wayward Court and use their connections and wealth to keep the group safe. When not operating as Duke Jinwu and Duchess Yutu, they are "spoiled and decadent" imperial cousins who are currently "slumming" in the north.
- Husband and wife Kung Fu Masters who ran afoul of powerful forces in the empire and now live as beggars, hiding from their enemies and teaching any worthy their arts.
- There are actually many two Mendicant Dukes. Various agents of the Wayward Court use the identity when dealing with others, especially heroes of the Jianghu or agents of the empire.
- The Golden Raven and Jade Rabbit are two powerful spirits who serve the gods of the sun and moon. They observe heroes whose destiny is important to the Will of Heaven.

Like the Beggar Abbot, the Mendicant Dukes are formidable fighters and highly skilled. Notably, the Beggar Abbot could be another member of the Wayward Court, a sympathetic ally, or an agent of a rival organization. There could even be a **WAR IN THE SHADOWS** between the Wayward Court and factions who dwell unnoticed among the lower classes of Shenzhou.



## THE BLACK SERPENT DENS

A series of catacombs, tunnels, and hidden chambers are beneath the southern part of Shejing. In earlier times, the most accessible stored supplies and foodstuffs in case the city was besieged. However, flooding and disrepair caused the Empire to abandon these subterranean storehouses in favor of above-ground structures. Most of the entrances to the catacombs were walled up or collapsed. Over time, vagrants, criminals, and other “undesirables” ventured into the dark places beneath Shejing’s streets. Many perished or eventually left the city, but some still remain. The remaining sections, from *HALF-FLOODED TUNNELS* to *ABANDONED CATACOMBS* to *VAST UNDERGROUND STOREHOUSES*, became the Black Serpent Dens; the literal underworld of Shejing.

Most who dwell in the Black Serpent Dens are harmless. Beggars and disenfranchised souls who have nowhere else to go find security in *SMALL UNDERGROUND SETTLEMENTS*. Several families and makeshift clans have lived there for generations, even developing their own customs and dialects. The rest of Shejing generally does not care about these denizens of the Dens. Many surface dwellers even reject they exist at all. The Wayward Court holds some sway in the Black Serpent Dens and see the poor there as kindred cousins in poverty and societal disregard, but most of the beggars and transients who make up their ranks are disinterested in settling there, preferring travel and life on the surface streets.

The Black Serpent Dens are a popular locale for slavers and other criminals. Those seeking a ready supply of slaves or human bodies for nefarious purposes find *LIFE IS CHEAP UNDERGROUND*, and the authorities never ask any questions—even if a whole settlement of den dwellers vanish. In truth, the magistrates and officials on the surface are rarely aware of such happenings.

In addition to forgotten underground settlements and roving slaver cabals, there are *CONSTANT RUMORS AND LEGENDS* of other things dwelling in the dark

corners. Disappearances are common and some insist they cannot all be attributed to slavers or mundane dangers such as collapsing tunnels. While few can agree on what exactly lurks in the dark, most agree someone or something is there, taking the weak or isolated for its own ends.

## THE SECRETS OF THE BLACK SERPENT DENS

What dwells in the dark of the Black Serpent Dens, preying on those who eke out a living far below Shejing’s streets, is left for the GM to decide. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- A secret society of bored and corrupt nobles hunt the tunnels for sport. They grab locals and release them into areas of the underground prepared as their *PERSONAL HUNTING GROUNDS*.
- Demons and hungry ghosts of long ago lurk in the dark, seeking revenge upon the living. Perhaps the name Black Serpent Den is literal, and a great black-scaled Ba She, dwells below the city. Those wishing to explore this option will find numerous monstrous and sorcerous threats in *TIANXIA: SPIRITS, BEASTS, AND SPELLS*.
- A clan of inbred and twisted Kung Fu practitioners live here, led by a crazed master who long ago discovered the secret of great power, at the cost of performing terrible acts in the dark to cultivate *CORRUPT BUT POWERFUL CHI ENERGIES*.
- A *SECRET STRONGHOLD* for a rebel group such as the Red Banner Brotherhood, who plot in secret to destroy Shejing from below.
- A *SECRET PRISON* where the Empire keeps some of its *WORST TRAITORS, REBELS, AND CRIMINALS*. Depending upon the themes of a campaign, this could be the setting for a heroic jailbreak or the origin of a new threat escaping from years of just imprisonment.







# MASS COMBAT RULES & SAMPLE CHARACTER

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## RECOMMENDED READING

Slumbering Hound regarded Ma Wei Sheng standing beside him carefully. He would not admit it now, he might never admit it, but he could see some of the young swordsman's father, the Great General Ma Rong. Unfortunately, Ma Rong was not there. Which was a shame, because they could use a thousand men with formal military training right now, as well as was Shenzhou's greatest strategist. Hound looked around at the fifty nervous peasants, ten mercenaries, Wei Sheng's ragtag collection of traveling companions, and thought that he should have taken up gardening.

With an intentionally bland expression, Slumbering Hound looked out over the plain at the opposing force advancing toward them. There were at least a five hundred, likely double that. One thousand crazed cultists led by a

heretical Bodhist Kung Fu Master calling himself Lord Naga, who believed that charity, loyalty, and sacrifice were sins to be stamped out. If they won today, they would put the village that Hound and the others were fighting to protect to sword and fire. That would not do at all.

"So, you have a plan?" Slumbering Hound asked the young Ma Wei Sheng.

"Yes..." Wei Sheng said, adding after a moment, "Sort of."

Slumbering Hound did not say anything. He just cocked an eyebrow at the young man.

"Well, it's not my plan. It's my father's. He used it during the Third Red Banner Uprising. He detailed it in *Analects of War*."

"How did that work out for him?" Hound asked. That campaign had been in the south more than ten years ago. Hound had been on

garrison duty in the west back then, fighting bandits and river pirates in skirmishes between long bouts of boredom.

"With it he and a hundred men routed two thousand."

"Losses?" Hound asked, again taking a look around at what passed for their army.

Wei Sheng did not say anything for a moment, and then whispered, "Heavy," as if the word itself weighed a ton.

"I see. *Analects of War*, huh?" Slumber Hound asked.

"Yes," Ma Wei Sheng said, nodding as if to say *this is going to work*. Hound saw that resemblance again. *Kid is as brave as his old man. I hope he is as lucky, too.*

"Never read it," Hound admitted as he drew his saber. Then he nodded at the approaching army and added, "Let's hope they haven't either."



# MASS COMBAT & ARMIES

The following rules are for running larger scale battles and mass combats in *Tianxia*. They allow PCs and other important characters to assume the roles of commanders, strategists, and heroes in such conflicts, as well as enabling higher-powered characters to serve as a one-person unit and engage whole armies at once. This section includes rules, examples, and even some sample units from *Shenzhou*.



## ARMIES AND LEADERS

An **army** consists of a number of **units**. The army is represented as a character, with a skill pyramid, aspects, a stress track, and consequences. Each unit has a rating, equivalent to Jianghu Rank. Higher-ranked units likely have a form.

The rank scale for units runs from 0 (barely organized peasant rabble) to 4 (highly skilled troops). It is possible, though *extremely* rare and only in exceptional circumstances that warrant it, for a unit to have a rank higher than 4. Such units are often made up of master combatants, many of whom would be heroes if fighting individually. In addition to unit-rank, a unit of rank 2 or higher also has a form, analogous to a Technique from a PC's Kung Fu style.

It is important to note that rank primarily represents fighting skill and does not necessarily equate to unit size. Theoretically, a Rank 5 unit called **THE TEN TIGERS OF GUANGZHOU** might include ten exceptionally skilled warriors kicking ass on much more populous units—each an individual of exceptional Jianghu rank when working alone. This makes allowance for epic battles between tens of thousands of combatants but also enables elite units to face an alarming number of lesser foes on equal terms. It is all a matter of redefining a unit in that context.

Each army relies upon two important leadership roles: a **general** and a **strategist**. The general's principal duty is to lead, command, and inspire their troops, while the strategist formulates strategies for their army by planning and observing the battlefield. If the general is the public face of the army, then the strategist is its brain. While every soldier in an army is well aware of their general—they may even be fighting solely *because* of their general—the strategist is a subtler figure, possibly more scholar than soldier, who may be a total unknown to the rank-and-file.

The key skills for a general are Provoke and Will. They are strong-willed leaders capable of stirring great passion within those under their command. The key skills for a strategist, on the other hand, are Empathy and Lore. Their knowledge of history is a weapon, and they can read a battlefield as if reading the mind of the opposing army's strategist.



The general and strategist of the PCs' army should themselves be PCs. A single PC could even take on both duties, but that is often less than ideal. Consolidation lets one PC have all the fun when it comes to leading an army. It also leaves the army more vulnerable to assassination or sabotage. A single strike could throw the entire force into disarray. Thus, it is usually better to spread these roles between two PCs to get their players involved in different ways. Let the players decide which PC assumes each role. If none of the PCs is willing or able to be the general or strategist, a significant NPC must assume the responsibility. Every army needs its leaders.

Any PC or notable NPC who is neither a general nor a strategist is called a **hero**. Yes, even the "bad guys!" It is all relative.

**EXAMPLE:** Faced with a large army of bandits and slavers united under the villainous Ten Whip Chao, the PCs organize an army to defend the local populace. All the PCs are heroes in the battle to come, but they need to select a general and strategist from among their ranks or important NPCs. Discussing it, the group makes Lauren's PC swordswoman, Gracious Fox, the general and Jason's scholarly yet irreverent monk, Monkey Liu, the strategist. The opposing army has Ten Whip Chao as its general and Branded Spider, his wicked and deceptive lieutenant, as its strategist. All other PCs and notable NPCs are treated as heroes.



## THE GENERAL-STRATEGIST

Sometimes a PC or NPC is built around the concept of being an exceptional general and strategist. Such is the case with the "Great General" Ma Rong, who leads the imperial army in Northern Shenzhou and is widely regarded as one of the empire's greatest living military minds. Such characters have skills and aspects to reflect their dual purpose and are likely focused on mass combat and leading armies.

For example, Ma Rong (see **The Black Tortoise Quarter**, page 35), is both *THE GREAT GENERAL* and *THE GREATEST LIVING STRATEGIST IN SHENZHOU*—suggesting he is excellent at both leading armies and planning battles. When Ma and others like him take the field, they are often the ultimate head of an army, serving as both general and strategist for a battle.

If a PC wishes to go this route, and no players feel left out, the

GM should encourage them to take on both roles and ignore the advice of splitting the roles. This is especially appropriate in PC groups where only one player is invested in the idea of leading armies. Other PCs can still serve as heroes in a battle, perhaps being instrumental in numerous victories through prowess and acts of heroism. In the end, do whatever works best for the PCs and their concepts.



## ARMY SKILLS

The height of an army's skill pyramid is equal to its general's Provoke or Will rating, whichever is higher. If the general has Great (+4) Will and Fair (+2) Provoke, then the army's maximum skill under this general caps at Great (+4). An army gets one skill at the top of this pyramid and then an additional skill at each rank below it. Any skill not listed is considered to be Mediocre (+0). Generals, strategists, and important heroes organizing an army should assign these skills as they see fit, but some in-setting justification is required. For example, if the enemy has spent considerable time and energy before a battle limiting access to horses, then it is highly unlikely that army has a particularly high Drive skill.

Army skills can be reassigned and rearranged with a minor milestone after they are set or at the GM's discretion if sufficient time has passed. At each minor milestone, a general, strategist, or hero attached to the army can swap one skill at a particular rank for another skill. This is an additional effect of milestones involving armies, it does not replace existing uses of milestones on a PC level. NPC army skills are reorganized between battles at the GM's discretion and based upon what best fits the current state of the army, war, and any other factors.

Armies have less need for a variety of skills than PCs. An army's skill list is limited to the following:

- ✱ Athletics (infantry movement)
- ✱ Deceive (feints, ruses)
- ✱ Drive (cavalry movement)
- ✱ Fight (Attacking and Defending against enemy units in the same zone)
- ✱ Notice (vigilance, spotting troop movements)
- ✱ Physique (brute force, endurance)
- ✱ Provoke (intimidating enemy units)
- ✱ Shoot (Attacking enemy units at range)
- ✱ Stealth (moving undetected, laying traps and ambushes)
- ✱ Will (withstanding intimidation, Defending against ranged Attacks).

**EXAMPLE:** *Gracious Fox has a Good (+3) Will so her army's skill pyramid caps at +3. She may take one skill at +3, two at +2, and three at +1. Thinking about upcoming battles, she gives her army Good (+3) Will,*

*Fair (+2) Fight and Athletics, and Average (+1) Shoot, Stealth, and Notice. As a result, her army is devoted to fighting, decent in close combat and navigating the battlefield, and has some skill at ambushing, scouting, and ranged combat. However, they are essentially unskilled cavalry, not very intimidating, forceful, or skilled at deception.*

## BUILDING UNITS

A unit is composed of one or two aspects and a unit-rank.

First, decide the unit's purpose, then give it an appropriate name. Make it straightforward and descriptive, like "Heavily Armored Cavalry," "Sneaky Skirmishers," or "Fast Moving Archers." A unit's name is also an aspect.

Unless its name references mounts or is otherwise known to fight from horseback, the unit is assumed to be infantry. (This matters later, when rolling Athletics or Drive.) Likewise, assume the unit Attacks using Fight if its name states or implies it is a melee unit, or Shoot if its name indicates it is an archery unit. A unit can only use skills in actions relating to its purpose and concept. Thus, even if an army has Good (+3) Drive, an infantry unit cannot use this skill. On the other hand, anything that hinders the use of cavalry, chariots, or other Drive-related actions does not affect it. This is the reason most armies include a mix of ranged, melee, infantry, scout, and cavalry units.

Next, assign the unit a rank. **The total of an army's unit ranks cannot exceed twice its general's Provoke or Will rating, whichever is higher.** For the purpose of total unit ranks, two rank 0 units count as a single

 RANK 0

 RANK 1

 RANK 2

 RANK 3

 RANK 4



rank 1 unit. The GM might also place limitations on unit formation based upon setting and situations. Sometimes these are the result of compels, but they can be logical extensions of the situation.

**EXAMPLE:** Lauren's character Gracious Fox is the general of a peasant army facing Ten Whip Chao and his force of slavers. Gracious Fox's Will is Good (+3) so she can have a total of 6 ranks of units in her army. Jack, the GM, offers her a compel on the campaign's **ONLY HEROES CHAMPION THE DOWNTRODDEN** aspect to reflect that skilled help is thin on the ground, if she limits herself to no units above rank 2. She accepts the fate point and organizes the people into the following units:

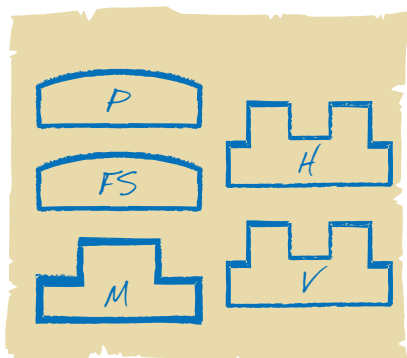
**ARMED PEASANTS** (Rank 0): untrained farmers and craftsmen armed mostly with farming implements.

**FREED SLAVES** (Rank 0): slaves whom the heroes liberated earlier in the campaign. Weak and ill-equipped, but ready to fight.

**GREEN MILITIA** (Rank 1): newly recruited, undersupplied, and scared militia forces.

**HUNTERS AND SCOUTS** (Rank 2): skilled archers and hunters organized into a force of effective skirmishers.

**AGING VETERANS** (Rank 2): retired military officers and infantrymen using old but still functional arms and armor.



That is 6 ranks total and constitutes all of Gracious Fox's army, with the 2 rank 0 units counting as a single rank 1 unit for purposes of total ranks. Not the greatest force ever assembled, but that is why it is so important for the PC heroes to lead them against the enemy.

## POETRY OF WAR

While it is recommended to give units easily understood names, it can be fun to give them more poetic or allegorical names. An all-female unit of spear-wielding warrior maidens might be the **RED SPEAR SISTERS**. An elite group of cavalry recruited from the most prestigious families in the empire might be the **1ST GREEN DRAGON CAVALRY**. Such titles give a lot of flavor to an army and the battles they fight.

However, this only works if the GM and players recognize what those fancy titles mean. A unit's title is also an aspect, meaning it can be invoked and represents significant elements of its purpose. If a flowery name restricts its mechanical utility, skip it, or give units functional and poetic names, such as **RED SPEAR SISTERS (MEDIUM SPEAR INFANTRY)**.

## AS GOES THE GENERAL, SO GOES THEIR ARMY

If a general's Provoke or Will increases or a superior general is chosen, the army becomes more effective using new skill ranks to determine units and skills. If a less competent general takes control, the reverse happens. Changes in army effectiveness may take a bit of time or happen immediately. Happening over time is more realistic, but allowing an army to "level up" when their general does models the dramatic and hero-centric way that movies, books, and TV shows treat military forces in *wu xia* and Kung Fu action.

**EXAMPLE:** After a long campaign against the slavers, Gracious Fox leaves her army in the command of a slave whom the PCs liberated, so they may protect the region from any remnants of Ten Whips' forces. The new general is capable, but not as skilled as Gracious Fox. He possesses a Fair (+2) Will. This means that should they need to battle again, the army is less effective. GM Jack considers how this would likely occur and notes that the two units of Rank 0 peasants and ex-slaves disband, as do the rank 2 **AGING VETERANS**. However the rank 1 **GREEN MILITIA** are now rank 2 **REGULAR MILITIA**. With a new skill pyramid capping at Fair (+2), Jack decides the



army has Fair (+2) Will, and Average (+1) Fight and Shoot. This force is much smaller and less effective than under Gracious Fox, but they are not completely incapable of taking the field if necessary.

## UNIT FORMATIONS

Units with a rank of 2 or higher can have a formation. Analogous to a Kung Fu style for a unit of soldiers, formations represent maneuvers, arrays, or tactics they have been trained to use together. The more skilled they are, the deeper their connection and the more powerful their formation.

Formations are created much the same as styles for PCs but are more limited. A rank 2 unit's formation has only one element. For every rank above that, the

unit gains another element for its formation, to a maximum of three elements.

Limiting formations this way serves to keep any one unit from having an unwieldy number of mechanics. Implementing the Bronze Rule and thinking of an army like a character, units are just where that character's styles "live." Formations are detailed later in this section.

**Example:** *Gracious Fox's army has 2 units that are rank 2. Each of these units gets a single element of a formation. She gives the Hunters and Scouts the Wings of Death element under the White Eagle formation while the Aging Veterans get Fangs Break on Shell from the Black Tortoise formation.*

# DETERMINING DOMINANCE

After creating units, but before anything else, each army's strategist takes an Overcome action using Lore to determine which army is the **dominant army**. If a strategist succeeds with style on this roll, he earns a boost, as usual. Ties go to the army with more total unit ranks, then to the strategist with the higher Lore rating. If those are also tied, determine dominance randomly—when such forces are equal, Heaven decides. The dominant army has a huge advantage in that they get to choose where the battle takes place; see **Defining the Battlefield**, page 52.

**EXAMPLE:** *As the forces of Ten Whip Chao and Gracious Fox gather to do battle, both strategists take a Lore Overcome an Obstacle action. Chao's strategist, Branded Spider, manages only a +2 result and is soundly beaten by Gracious Fox's strategist, Monkey Liu, who scores a +5 and succeeds with style. As the battle begins, the PCs get to determine important aspects and zones in the battle, plus they receive a boost.*





## THE ROLE OF STRATEGY

All is not lost for the losing strategist! Simply for being strategists, each gets a situation aspect of **STRATEGY**. For every two shifts above Mediocre (+0) they got on their Lore roll for dominance, each strategist gets one free invocation on their **STRATEGY** aspect. **STRATEGY** is a special aspect. In addition to the usual +2 or reroll, a strategist can invoke it (freely or not) to let their general activate an additional unit on their next turn. Moreover, a strategist can also invoke **STRATEGY** for a number of different effects during a battle, as shown below. None of the following special invocations can be invoked more than once per battle per strategist.

- ✿ Use the general's Will instead of the army's Fight or Shoot for one roll.
- ✿ Use the strategist's Lore instead of the army's Athletics or Drive for one roll.
- ✿ Use the general's Will instead of the army's Provoke or Will for one roll.
- ✿ Use the strategist's Empathy instead of the army's Deceive or Stealth for one roll.
- ✿ Change one unit's rank to that of the general's Will rating for one round.
- ✿ Change one unit's rank to that of the strategist's Lore rating for one round.
- ✿ Give one unit a Weapon rating equal to the general's Provoke rating for one Attack against a hero.

- ✿ Give one unit an Armor rating equal to the strategist's Lore rating to Defend against a hero's attack.

- ✿ Move a unit one zone, regardless of the presence of enemy units.

See **Using Units** (page 53) for more on the implications of these special invocations.

Either strategist can take a Create an Advantage action with Lore or Empathy on their turn to add free invocations to their **STRATEGY** aspect. The other strategist opposes this using the same skill. On a tie, the active strategist gets a boost, but not a free **STRATEGY** invocation. Likewise, a strategist can take an Overcome an Obstacle action with Empathy to remove free invocations from the other strategist's **STRATEGY** aspect. On a success, remove one free invocation; on a success with style, remove two. On a tie, the *opposing* strategist gets a boost. Trying to second-guess a skilled strategist is a risky proposition. When the battle is over, remove each strategist's **STRATEGY** aspect from play.

**EXAMPLE:** With the battle nearly upon them, Monkey Liu and Branded Spider check for their **STRATEGY**. Aided by the boost he received on his last roll, Monkey Liu manages an impressive +6 result while Branded Spider manages a +3. As a result Monkey Liu beats the Mediocre (+0) difficulty by 6 shifts, receiving 3 free invocations on his **STRATEGY** aspect in the coming battle. By contrast, Branded Spider's 3 shifts only scores him 1 free invocation.

## NAMED STRATEGIES

Strategists are welcome, even encouraged, to rename their **STRATEGY** aspect to reflect the plans and methods they employ in battle. This does not have an impact on how **STRATEGY** is used mechanically, but battles where a strategist's plans are central to victory or defeat may become known by such titles. Others may

even emulate popular or successful strategies. Often, **STRATEGY** names refer to particular tactics, geography, or are given names with strong cultural significance. It is also quite likely that scholars and historians name the plans of various strategists after the fact.

So a strategist might call her **STRATEGY** aspect where she plans

to employ fast-moving, lightly armored troops to harass her foes the **DANCING WASP STRATEGY**. Her opponent, defending with heavily armored infantry and a static defense, might use the **BEAR IN WINTER STRATEGY**. The mechanics do not change with the names, but such touches can add wonderful flavor to the battle.



# DEFINING THE BATTLEFIELD AND PLACING UNITS

The dominant army chooses how many **zones** the battlefield contains and their configuration. The number of zones must be equal to at least the number of units in the dominant army and is limited to twice the number of units in the dominant army. If the dominant army has more units, they may select a large battlefield that lets them spread out more. If fewer, they can fight in a more intimate battlefield that provides bottlenecks and limits their foe's opportunities to outnumber and surround.

**EXAMPLE:** As the dominant army, the forces of Gracious Fox can determine the configuration of the battlefield where they meet their foes. Her army has 5 units, so she may have a battlefield that has anywhere from 5 to 10 zones—anywhere from the number of units to twice that. Discussing it with the other heroes, Gracious Fox chooses a battlefield with seven zones, two on one side, a row of two more providing a bottlenecked area to funnel their foe's superior numbers through, and three zones on the other side. Knowing she gets to place units first, Gracious Fox plans to put her army on the narrow end of the battlefield, forcing her foes to come to her.

The dominant army also gets to give one or two zones an aspect—one if the strategist's Lore roll for dominance was a success, or two if it was a success with style. After that, the two armies take turns assigning zone aspects starting with the army whose strategist has the highest Empathy—use Lore as a tie-breaker if both strategists' Empathy skills are the same. Zones can be assembled as a configuration of index cards (if using a miniature or token to represent each unit) or sheets of paper (if using index cards to represent units) arranged between the players and the GM. A zone aspect does not necessarily indicate its size—just an idea of what its terrain is like. When assigning a zone aspect, the zone must be adjacent to a zone that

already has an aspect, and the new aspect has to make sense in that context.

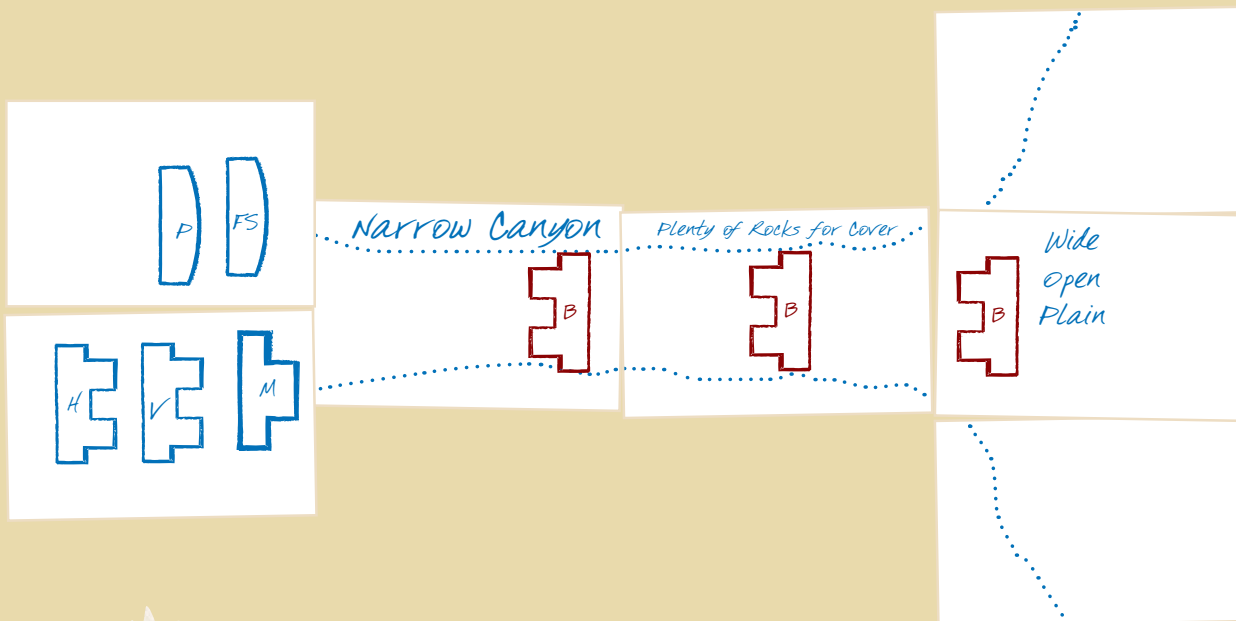
**EXAMPLE:** As Monkey Liu succeeded with style when determining dominance, Gracious Fox's army can assign two zones aspects before taking turns. As Liu's Empathy is also higher than the enemy strategist, Branded Spider, she also gets to go first in placing aspects. To best make use of this significant advantage and with the help of the other players, she places a **NARROW CANYON** aspect in one of the narrow bottleneck and **PLENTY OF ROCKS FOR COVER** on the other. Then she places a **WIDE OPEN PLAIN** in front of the bottleneck away from where she sets up. After this the rest of the zones are filled in. The end result is a battlefield with some sparse forests and cover, but a narrow canyon in the middle and an open plain devoid of cover to the side.

After defining the battlefield, the armies take turns placing units into zones. The dominant army goes first, then armies alternate after that. **Each army must place units in the zone farthest away from the enemy.** If more than one zone is equally distant, then they can choose any of those zones.

**EXAMPLE:** Happy with the battlefield zones and aspects, Gracious Fox begins placing her units on one side of the **NARROW CANYON**, away from the **WIDE OPEN PLAIN**. Her foe has to contend with her placement and dangerous terrain to bring their superior numbers and more powerful troops to bear.

The GM should feel free to push battlefields and zones into shapes that make sense for the established setting, terrain, and other factors. In many cases, alterations or limitations on placement are compels, though at times they might simply be what makes sense given established setting elements.





## USING UNITS

On their turn, a general can **activate** one unit in their army. In addition to moving one zone (with a few exceptions), an activated unit can take one action on the general's turn. The list of common actions below is not meant to be exhaustive, but it should give a good idea of what a unit can do.

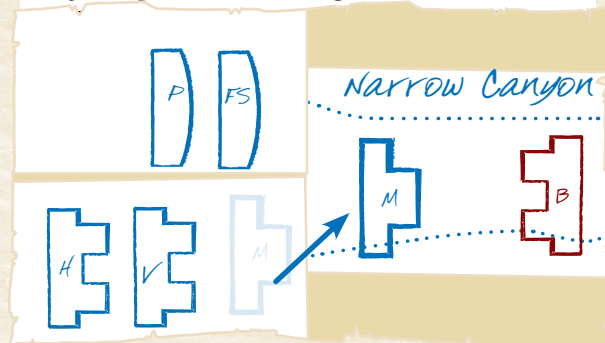
### ATTACK

Activated units use Fight to Attack units in their zone, or Shoot to Attack units in an adjacent zone. The defender uses Fight to Defend against Fight or Will to Defend against Shoot. A unit can also use Shoot to Attack a unit more than one zone away, but each zone beyond the first gives the defender a +2 bonus to their Will roll. If a zone's aspect makes it seem like it might be impossible for a unit to Attack a unit on the other side of it, like **MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN**, then it cannot.

When a unit defends against a unit that has a lower unit-rank, the defending unit gets a bonus to its Defend rolls equal to the margin of difference between the two units' ranks. For example, a rank 3 unit defending against a rank 2 unit would receive a +1 bonus to its Defend roll.

Likewise, when a unit attacks a unit that has a lower unit rank, the attacking unit gets a bonus to its Attack rolls equal to the margin of difference between the two units' ranks. For example, when that rank 3 unit above attacks that rank 2 unit, it receives a +1 bonus to its Attack roll.

**EXAMPLE:** In the first turn of the battle, Gracious Fox activates the rank 1 **GREEN MILITIA**. She has the unit move up to the zone with the **NARROW CANYON** and Attack the nearest enemy unit, a rank 2 **BANDIT INFANTRY**. Being 1 rank better than the attackers, the **BANDIT INFANTRY** gets a +1 bonus to Defend against the incoming Attack.



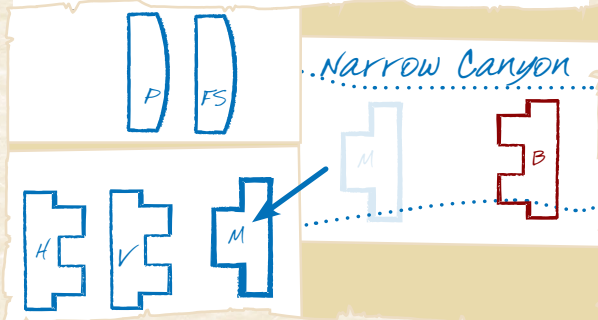
See **Battle Damage** for more details.



## MANEUVER

An activated unit can use Athletics or Drive to Create an Advantage by getting into a better position, and putting a situational aspect into play to represent that. Situational aspects created by maneuver actions can be anything that makes sense for the battle and terrain.

**EXAMPLE:** Next turn, Gracious Fox has her Green Militia pull back, hoping to draw the enemy with them as they go. If they succeed in Creating an Advantage with this action, they Create a **TACTICAL RETREAT** situational aspect with a number of free invocations based upon how well they do on their roll.



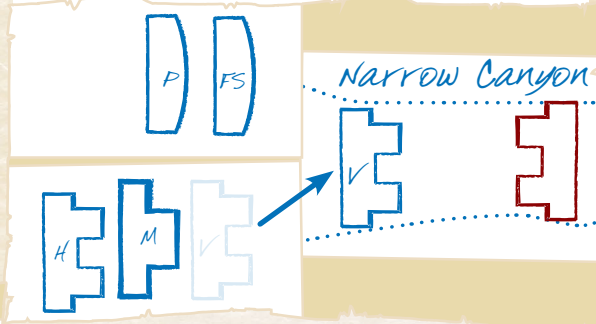
## DIFFICULT MOVEMENT

Normally, an activated unit can move one zone without needing to make a skill roll. However, if an enemy unit is in the unit's starting zone, or if their movement would take them into a zone containing one or more enemy units, this requires an Overcome an Obstacle action using Athletics (for infantry) or Drive (for cavalry). Add together the unit ranks of all enemy units in the zone. That is the difficulty for the roll.

Moving through multiple unoccupied or friendly zones is an Overcome an Obstacle action using Athletics or Drive, against a difficulty of Mediocre (+0). For every two shifts obtained on this roll, the unit can move one additional zone.

However, if the unit passes into a zone with a zone aspect that seems like it would impede movement, the unit needs to succeed on an Overcome an Obstacle action using Athletics or Drive to move through it. The normal difficulty of this roll is Fair (+2). If the zone aspect makes moving through it seem nearly impossible, such as **YAWNING CANYON**, the difficulty is Great (+4). In either case, the opposing general or strategist can also invoke that aspect (or any relevant situation aspect) to increase the difficulty by +2.

**EXAMPLE:** Gracious Fox wants to move her **AGING VETERANS** into the middle of the fray, entering the zone where the advancing enemy now resides. The difficulty for this Athletics Overcome an Obstacle action is Fair (+2), equal to rank of the **BANDIT INFANTRY** that is now in that zone.



## SUBTLE MOVEMENT

Using Stealth, an activated unit can attempt to move without being noticed by enemy units in adjacent zones. This is an opposed Overcome an Obstacle action using Stealth against Notice.

An activated unit can also set an ambush using Stealth. To do so, it cannot be in plain sight of an enemy hero or unit in its zone or an adjacent zone. If the unit has not concealed itself via subtle movement but the zone has an ambush-friendly zone aspect, such as **MOUNTAIN SHADOWS**, the unit's player can invoke that aspect to attempt to set an ambush. Invoking the aspect this way does not grant the usual bonus or reroll; it is merely justification for making the Stealth roll in the first place. This is a Create an Advantage action that generates an appropriate situation aspect like **LYING IN WAIT** or **AMBUSH!**

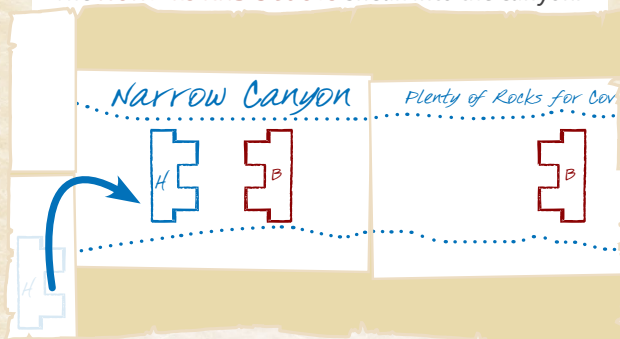
Enemy units in its zone or adjacent zones can use Notice to oppose this roll. Otherwise, the difficulty of the roll depends on the zone aspect. If the zone has an appropriate aspect, such as **THICK FOREST** or **ROCKY OUTCROPPINGS**, the difficulty is Mediocre (+0). If it does not, the difficulty is Fair (+2). If it has a zone aspect that makes an ambush more difficult, like **FEATURELESS PLAINS** or **PLACID LAKE**, the difficulty is Great (+4).

If the adjacent zones contain more than one enemy unit, each can Defend using Notice. Enemy units whose Notice rolls fail are unable to Attack or otherwise target the unit until the unit takes an action that breaks its Stealth, such as Attacking or attempting

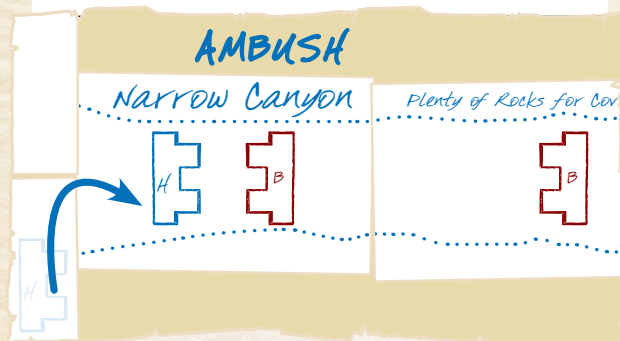


to Strike Fear. The unit can attempt to move subtly again while so concealed, but must make another opposed Stealth roll to do so—which, naturally, may result in revealing its position.

**EXAMPLE:** While the other units are fighting, Gracious Fox has her **HUNTERS AND SCOUTS** sneak into the **NARROW CANYON** to surreptitiously advance without the enemy in the canyon noticing. Lauren rolls her army's Average (+1) Stealth vs. the enemy army's Mediocre (+0) Notice and gets 2 shifts—a success! The **HUNTERS AND SCOUTS** sneak into the canyon.



**EXAMPLE:** Later, when Lauren activates the **HUNTER AND SCOUTS** again, she decides to set an **AMBUSH** for the enemy. Once again she rolls her army's Stealth against the enemy's Notice, this time to Create an Advantage. She gets 4 shifts, a success with style, and puts an **AMBUSH** aspect into play with two free invocations.



## STRIKE FEAR

An activated unit can Create an Advantage using Provoke to intimidate a unit in the same zone or an adjacent zone (but in the latter case, the unit gets a +2 bonus to their Will Defense). Normally, Provoke can only be used to Create an Advantage—never to Attack.

## FEINT

Using Deceive, a unit can falsely present its capability or strength. The army must have one or more consequences to attempt a feint. Choose a consequence, then make an Overcome an Obstacle action using Deceive against a difficulty equal to the consequence's value: Fair (+2) for mild, Great (+4) for moderate, or Fantastic (+6) for severe. If the roll succeeds with style, remove the consequence and get a free boost. On a success, just remove the consequence. On a tie, the consequence stays. On a failure, the feint backfires—the opposing army can invoke the consequence for a +3 bonus instead of +2. A feint can only be attempted once per battle. No general is going to fall for that twice.

**EXAMPLE:** Later in the battle, things are not going so well for Ten Whip Chao. He has **FORCES IN DISARRAY** moderate consequence he wants to remove by performing a feint. He has his rank 3 Honor Guard push forward with an Attack designed to give the rest of the army time to rally. The difficulty is Great (+4) for the severity of the consequence, but success removes it and strengthens Chao's army. Either way, this is Chao's only feint this battle—so he better make it count.



# HEROES ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The following rules address concerns and special situations for when heroes interact with units and armies in a large-scale battle.

## MOVEMENT

Heroes can use an Overcome an Obstacle action with Athletics to travel through a zone occupied by enemy units, against a difficulty equal to the sum of the unit ranks of the enemy units in that zone. For example, if there are two rank 2 units and a rank 3 in a zone that is between a hero and the zone she wants to reach, she has to roll Athletics against +7 to get through those troops. The GM might narrate this as entire units acting in concert to form a wall of humanity, or as the hero running lithely over the tops of their helmeted heads.

Note that this makes it fairly difficult to traverse zones filled with many units. This is intentional. While heroes are often capable of rushing through a battlefield to engage other heroes and enemy commanders, they must often deal with the intervening mass of troops in their way. It takes great luck or skill to circumvent such obstacles.

## ZONES AND BATTLES

Generally zones in battles are bigger than zones in other types of scenes and encounters. However, as heroes in *wu xia* and Kung Fu action films are capable of navigating long distances with their amazing athleticism and training, heroes in battle use their normal rules of zone movement. What keeps heroes from rushing over several zones is the difficulty in bypassing the units within those zones, not the distance itself.

## COMMANDING UNITS

As long as a hero is in the same zone as an allied unit, they can attach to it and become its **commander**. This is a free action on the hero's turn and carries two potential benefits:

If the hero's Jianghu rank is higher than the unit's unit-rank, increase its rank by +1 as long as the commander uses their action to command the unit.

Whatever skill the unit uses, if the hero's rating with it is higher than the army's, the unit gets +1 to that skill as long as the commander uses their action to command the unit.

Note that as attaching oneself as a commander to a unit is a free action, it is often logical to then use the character's turn to rally their new subordinates by Creating an Advantage with Provoke or even Fight.

The general, however, can act as the commander for one unit each round as if they *were* attached without actually *being* attached, as long as they are not actually attached to any other unit. It is assumed they have some means of quickly relaying orders, like signal flags or a hundred soldiers shouting the general's orders in unison. But:

- ✿ The unit in question has to be in the same zone or an adjacent zone, or multiple zones away as long as the zones in between contain allied units but no enemy units.
- ✿ The unit cannot already have a commander.
- ✿ The general cannot Defend on the unit's behalf (see **Hero versus Unit**).
- ✿ No enemy unit can be in the general's zone.



# ACTUAL FIGHTING ALREADY

Let us now examine how the rules of unit versus unit, hero versus unit, and hero versus hero combat work together. These conflicts become the centerpiece of every battle.

## UNIT VERSUS UNIT

Units fight each other as normal, Attacking and Defending. Skilled units of higher rank get certain benefits when engaged with a unit of lesser rank. These benefits are:

- ✱ One free invocation on the unit's name aspect.
- ✱ Enemy units cannot benefit from the usual teamwork rules against the higher-ranked unit unless their combined unit-ranks *exceed* the higher-ranked unit's. (So yes, three rank 2 units are a genuine threat to the rank 5 *TEN TIGERS OF CANTON*.)
- ✱ A bonus to Attack and Defend against the lower-ranked unit equal to the difference between the two units' ranks.
- ✱ If a unit has a commander, the player controlling that character rolls and makes the choices for that unit. Otherwise, the general rolls for all units without a PC commander.

## HERO VERSUS UNIT

Heroes and units can engage each other in battle. There are some requirements and special rules to facilitate this.

A hero's Jianghu rank must equal or exceed a unit's rank to be able to use the Attack action against it. If the hero's Jianghu rank *is not* equal or greater than the unit's rank, the hero can only Create Advantages when interacting with that unit—they cannot Attack

it. They are just not skilled or formidable enough to meaningfully engage the unit beyond assisting allies.

If the hero's Jianghu rank *equals or exceeds* the unit's unit-rank, they can Attack and Defend as if the unit were a NPC.

If a hero is attached to a unit, they can Defend the unit using their own skills instead of the army's—but if they fail, they take damage as described in **Battle Damage**.

Units can attack heroes as though they were another unit, including the free invocation and teamwork restriction noted above. However, they do not receive an Armor or Weapon rating bonus for Attack or Defend actions against heroes with a Jianghu rank lower than their unit-rank.

## OPTIONAL RULE: MORE REALISTIC BATTLES

If the GM and players want more realistic battles where one lone hero has more difficulty fighting a whole unit of soldiers, then require that a hero must exceed, not just equal, a unit's rank with their Jianghu Rank. This means that a competent rank 2 unit cannot be engaged by a Master of a single style (Jianghu Rank 2) and that a Grandmaster cannot face an elite rank 4 unit on their own. If this is desirable in a campaign, use this option. If not, stick with the existing rules.

## HERO VERSUS HERO

When heroes collide, it is just regular combat, but with stakes that can turn the tide of the battle (see **Battle Damage**). "Hero" here means "a commander or individual of similar importance, typically with a Jianghu Rank."



# UNIT FORMATIONS

Each unit of rank 2 or above can learn special abilities called Formations. Formations are like Kung Fu Styles, but they are unique to units and are not used by heroes—though some heroes may have stunts that allow them to affect or engage with units in new and interesting ways.

Each formation has three elements, which function like Kung Fu Techniques. A unit learns its first element at rank 2, then another at rank 3, and the final one at rank 4. The rare rank 5 units may increase the bonuses of two of their elements by 1 each—turning a +2 bonus into a +3, for example. Elements may be selected in any order as the unit gains rank.

The most common formations are detailed in this section, though the GM and players may design their own using these as a guide.

## BLACK TORTOISE FORMATION

This formation favors defense, steady movement, and controlling ground. Using terrain and skillful manipulation of shields and armor, the unit protect themselves even in the thick of battle. It is popular with heavily armored infantry, but not exclusive to such units. The elements of the Black Tortoise Formation are:

**Iron Shell:** Gain a +2 bonus to Defend against ranged attacks of which the unit is aware.

**Tortoise Dams the River:** +2 bonus when attempting to prevent enemy units from moving through a zone the unit occupies.

**Fangs Break on Shell:** The unit cannot move to another zone this turn, but gains a +1 bonus to Attack and Defend against all enemy units in its zone until its next activation.

## RED HORSE FORMATION

This formation favors speed, aggressive charges, and maneuverability. It is popular with cavalry, but effective infantry and archery versions exist as well. The elements of the Red Horse Formation are:

**Horse Tramples the Unready:** May use chief movement based skill (Drive or Athletics) in place of primary combat skill (Shoot or Fight) for the first Attack against a unit during a battle. This Attack has +1 Weapon Rating. If a unit's Shoot or Fight is superior to their Drive or Athletics, take a +2 bonus and +1 Weapon Rating instead.

**Racing the Wind:** As long as the unit has moved at least 1 zone on its activation, it gains a +2 bonus to Defend rolls until its next activation.

**Horse Leaps the Hedge:** Terrain-based aspects invoked against the unit yield only a +1 bonus instead of the usual +2.

## JADE VIPER FORMATION

The Jade Viper Formation favors stealth, misdirection, and navigating terrain effectively to gain an edge in battle. Scouts, light infantry, and mounted archers favor the formation, but other units can employ it, especially those engaged in combat in urban environments. The elements of the Jade Viper Formation are:

**Viper Hides in Brush:** +2 to Stealth bonus actions when a terrain-based aspect is invoked—either side may invoke the aspect for the unit to gain a bonus.

**Viper Bites the Ankle:** When attacking an enemy unit not aware of the unit's presence, gain a +2 bonus to the Attack roll.

**Viper Passes Unseen:** May use Stealth instead of Athletics when trying to move through occupied or obstructed zones. If Athletics is greater or equal to Stealth, gain a +2 bonus instead.



## THUNDER DRAGON FORMATION

Thunder Dragon Formation balances speed and power to provide a versatile force that lacks overwhelming strength but sports few weaknesses. A great formation for rank and file infantry, it can represent canny veterans or well-drilled troops of any type. Elements of the Thunder Dragon Formation are:

**Scales and Talons:** When engaged with a unit of equal rank, gain a +1 to all Attack and Defend rolls.

**Dragon Holds the Line:** +2 bonus to Defending against Provoke-based Attacks.

**Dragon Makes Its Luck:** When using a boost from success with style or invoking a unit aspect, the unit gains +3 instead of the usual +2 bonus.

## WHITE EAGLE FORMATION

This formation favors attacking from a distance. It is very common with archery units, though melee-based infantry and cavalry units can employ a skirmishing version of the formation focused upon harrying opponents with thrown weapons, taunts, and rapid attack then retreating patterns that capitalize upon range and mobility. The elements of White Eagle Formation are:

**Wings of Death:** If the unit doesn't move on its activation, it gains a +2 to its Shoot roll to Attack. If the unit does move, it gains a +1 bonus to its Fight roll to Attack for every zone it entered since being activated.

**Eagle Soars Away:** If retreating from a zone occupied by an enemy unit, gain a +2 bonus to checks to successfully withdraw.

**Eagle Hides in the Sun:** If a unit succeeds with style on Defend or movement-based Overcome an Obstacle actions, they gain a *SUPERIOR POSITION* aspect with one free invocation instead of the normal boost.

## GOLDEN BEAR FORMATION

Golden Bear Formation exploits intimidation, ferocity, and overwhelming force. Strict ranks and discipline are secondary to strong, powerful charges and shock attacks. Heavily armored infantry and cavalry often use this formation, though it is not unknown among ranged or lightly armored units, especially those with a reputation for ferocity in battle, such as savage, barbarian tribes. The elements of Golden Bear Formation are:

**Roar to Shake the Heavens:** Defenders in adjacent zones do not receive the normal +2 bonus to Defend against Provoke Attacks by this unit.

**Bear Breaks the Barriers:** +2 bonus to Physique Create an Advantage actions.

**Claws of Iron:** Gain a +1 bonus to Attack with Fight against lower-ranked units.

## OPTIONAL RULE: MIXING AND MATCHING FORMATIONS

Units are limited to one Formation as a matter of expediency and to keep things from becoming too confusing. However, if a GM and players are up for the extra bookkeeping, they may assign multiple formations to a unit and split element picks between them. Even with this option, a unit can only use one formation at a time. This is the chief challenge in allowing multiple formations, in fact—keeping straight which formations are active in a given turn for each unit.



# BATTLE DAMAGE

Damage in battle is done to the army, not the specific unit. Units do lose effectiveness when damaged, but the goal of the battle is to damage and defeat the whole force, not merely one unit within the army.

## UNIT VERSUS UNIT OR HERO VERSUS UNIT

If the Attack succeeds, decrease the defender's unit-rank by 1 and deal 1 damage to the army.

If the Attack succeeds with style, decrease the defender's unit-rank by 2 and deal 2 damage to the army.

When a unit engages with a hero whose Jianghu rank is lower than its unit-rank, the unit gains a bonus to its Attack and Defend rolls equal to the margin of difference.

A hero's Weapon rating is immaterial when attacking a unit. Extra damage from a Weapon rating isn't the same as additional shifts achieved on the attack, so a Weapon rating can't turn a success into a success with style.

## HERO VERSUS HERO

Run combat as normal.

When a hero is defeated, their side takes damage equal to the hero's Jianghu rank. The bigger the hero, the bigger the blow. Killing an army's heroes can potentially take out that army without *also* actually taking out any units. It is not likely, but it could happen! Plus, it encourages PCs to go after enemy heroes.

In a duel between heroes, surrounding soldiers may become involved as mobs or their commanders might Attack as a hero in their own right. More often, personal codes of honor and expediency of play has the duel occur with minimal outside interference.

## UNITS AND DAMAGE

When a unit's unit-rank is reduced to zero, remove it from the battlefield. If its unit-rank begins at zero, it is removed as soon as it takes damage.

An army has a stress track equal to its number of units, and consequences dependent upon the unit-ranks of its units.

- ✿ For every rank 3 unit, it has one mild consequence.
- ✿ For every rank 4 unit, it has one mild and one moderate consequence.
- ✿ For every rank 5+ unit, it has one mild, one moderate, and one severe consequence, if it does not already have one severe consequence slot already. An army can have no more than one of severe consequence slot.

Once acquired, the only way to remove a consequence during a battle is with a Feint, as described earlier (see **Using Units**, page 53). Other than that, the best one can do is Create an Advantage to put more aspects into play and hopefully counter the effectiveness of the consequence. If an army takes a severe consequence, after the battle its general must alter one of its aspects to reflect the personal effects of this crushing loss.

When an army is unable to reduce a hit via its stress track or consequences, it is defeated. If it still has units on the battlefield, they are routed.



# ADVICE FOR RUNNING BATTLES

With the rules for running armies and mass combat established, there is still the matter of how best to use them. There are a few things for the GM to consider when running large-scale conflicts that exist outside the mechanics but are nonetheless very important.

## TERRAIN IS IMPORTANT

Battles do not take place in vast featureless spaces. Even if two armies meet on the *VAST PLAIN*, there are still details, geographic formations, and other elements of the location worth considering and describing. Not only can such terrain provide important scene aspects, it gives flavor to the conflict. It is far easier to imagine and enjoy playing out a clash of great armies on the *SNOWY TUNDRA* or at the *EDGE OF THE WHITE WIDOW FOREST* than a battle that takes place in a gray and formless void.

## WEATHER IS IMPORTANT TOO

Weather can have a major practical effect on how a battle is fought. While the limitations of rain, snow, and wind mean less in *wu xia* and Kung Fu action inspired *Tianxia* than more realistic and grounded settings, weather still matters. *FIERCE ICY WINDS* or *BLISTERING HEAT* can become important scene aspects in a battle, ones that any keen general or strategist knows how to exploit. Of course, often armies seek to fight in the most pleasant and unexceptional weather possible, especially when they have superior numbers or other advantages over their foes. Whether this is possible is another story.

## FOCUS ON THE PCs

The PCs should always occupy the heart of a battle's action. If an army is commanded by NPCs, consider letting the PCs help roleplay or guide their actions unless it is important to do differently. When the PCs become skilled enough to face large forces either single-handedly or with minimal assistance? Let them. It is fun, dramatic, and very genre appropriate.

Note this approach usually involves focusing on heroes and smaller scenes occurring within the battle as a whole. Do not be reluctant to narrate large sections of a battle in which the heroes are not involved—the inspirational media for *Tianxia* is filled with examples of massed units doing very little but clashing with their counterparts while great heroes such as the PCs perform actions which decide the ultimate outcome.

## CONSIDER SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL EFFECTS

Any battle beyond the smallest skirmish has a major impact on local, regional, and possibly national politics. It is studied, recorded, and discussed by everyone from the poor peasants to the esteemed scholars and court officials. With larger battles it is a far bigger deal that the conflict happened at all—to say nothing of the impact of its actual outcome. This also means the GM should avoid having battles just for their own sakes. Gathering an army and fighting a battle is far too costly and dangerous to be done lightly. When it occurs in a campaign, it should be a significant event.



## REMEMBER THE WAR

While a single battle can certainly occur, most are part of a larger military campaign. Armies rarely fight until the last soldier is dead. Supplies, prisoners, and holding territory presents their own challenges. A whole campaign could be based around a single military conflict, with the PCs forming armies, training troops, fighting numerous battles, and then dealing with the numerous effects of a prolonged war. Lasting consequences on heroes, generals, strategists, and armies can be used to reflect these effects, as can changes to scene or even campaign aspects.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Considering the above factors, as well as adding any other considerations due to PC action, setting and campaign themes, and genre conventions, helps the GM and players plan and play engaging battles in their campaigns.

**EXAMPLE:** Jack is planning to include a large-scale battle in an upcoming Tianxia session. Knowing the conflict broke out between warring clans over an assassination plot the PCs failed to stop, he intends to place the PCs in significant roles on one side of the conflict and considers what factors are important. He decides the enemy, having successfully eliminated the head of the clan head with whom the PCs were working, rushes to attack their rival's stronghold before winter arrives. Jack chooses to resolve this scenario with a furious assault against the defender's fortifications. **AUTUMN STORMS** and **ROCKY TERRAIN** become important factors. He also draws up the attackers plan to sabotage their enemies' defenses, and that this plan succeeds unless the PCs intervene. Regardless of who wins, outside interference from imperial forces or the allies of either clan are delayed by an early winter. However, he also leaves open the idea that this battle could be only the first in a long and bloody conflict.

Slumbering Hound, the character on the following page, is designed as a sample player character. While a bit gruffer and more world-weary than his compatriots presented in *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK & JADE*, this iconic hero is ready for play.

## RUNNING NAVAL BATTLES

While the rules in this section focus on running large-scale land battles, they can be easily adapted to naval battles as well.

- Units are warships of various sizes, or groups of smaller ships.
- Action and movement take place through a combination of naval combat and boarding actions.
- Drive becomes the default movement skill, reflecting the skill at which a ship maneuvers and sails around the waters of conflict.
- If the battle takes place in open waters, simply lay out a grid of index cards to represent the area. With no land around to impede movement, placing index cards individually makes little sense. If the battle takes place along a coastline, however, follow the standard procedure—especially if one side of the conflict has land-bound units.
- The movement of heroes on the “battlefield” is greatly altered. Heroes can move from one allied ship to another within the same zone as part of their activation, but treat boarding an enemy ship in the same or an adjacent zone as Difficult Movement. Heroes can leap over open water, but never more than one zone—and if there is not a ship in their destination zone on which to land, they are in the drink! If you like your wu xia heroes able to run on water, treat it as Difficult Movement with a default difficulty of Great (+4) instead of Mediocre (+0).
- Terrain focuses on currents and weather instead of landmarks.
- A GM who wants to render the skills of admirals and ship captains distinct from their land bound counterparts might restrict how characters without marine battle experience use aspects and stunts. Keep in mind, however, that Tianxia assumes PCs and important NPCs have broadly applicable skills and abilities by default.



## SLEEPING DOG

### ASPECTS

**OLD SOLDIER TURNED PROTECTOR**

**"I'M GETTING TOO OLD FOR THIS..."**

**BEN THERE, DONE THAT...THAT TOO**

**GRUFF AND LACONIC**

**LITTLE BABY QI**

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Fight

**Good (+3):** Physique, Will

**Fair (+2):** Athletics, Lore, Provoke

**Average (+1):** Chi, Drive, Notice, Contacts

### JIANGHU RANK: 1

#### KUNG FU STYLE

**Iron Crane, Stone Tiger**

**IRON CRANE FORM**

**STONE TIGER FORM**

**Crane Hides in Reeds:** Add a +2 bonus with using Full Defense, giving the character +4 when Defending himself or +2 when Defending others.

**Iron Mind, Iron Body:** +2 bonus to Create an Advantage relating to resisting or coping with pain, intimidation, or fear.

**Stone Weathers the Storm:** If the character succeeds on a Defend with style, he may remove his physical 1 stress box or convert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.

**Tiger Rules the Jungle:** Gain a 2 Armor Rating against Provoke Attacks.

### STUNTS

**Baby On Board** (+2 bonus when Defending or protecting his infant ward, Qi)

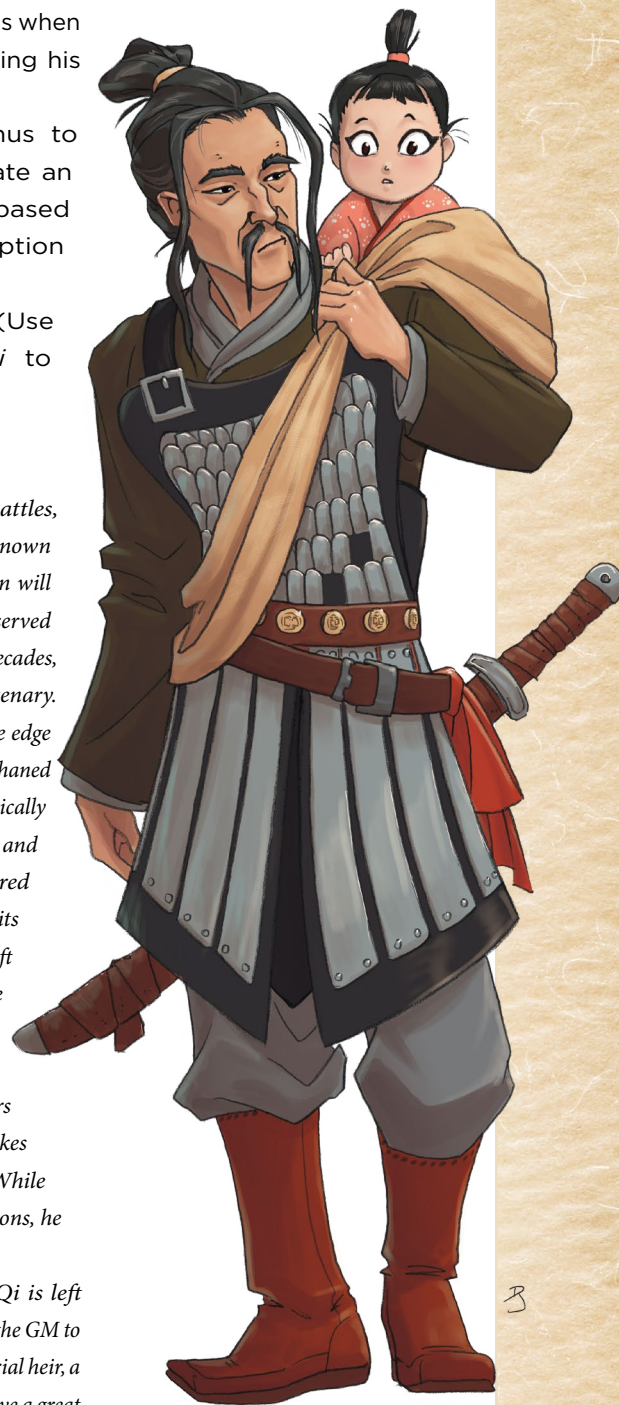
**Battle-Savvy** (+2 bonus to Defend against Create an Advantage actions based upon martial deception and misdirection)

**Too Stubborn to Die** (Use Will instead of Chi to generate **CHI ARMOR**)

### REFRESH: 1

A veteran of countless battles, Sleeping Dog was well known by his fellow soldiers for his iron will and pragmatic sensibilities. He served in the imperial army for two decades, then nearly another as a mercenary. While fighting barbarians at the edge of the empire he found Qi, an orphaned baby girl and was uncharacteristically touched by the child's innocence and need for protection. When hired killers, mercenaries, and bandits came to kidnap the child, he left military service and took to the open road. He now wanders Shenzhou, trying to stay one step ahead of the child's pursuers and perhaps discover what makes his little ward so important. While familiar with a variety of weapons, he favors his trusty old saber.

**Note:** The secret of baby Qi is left deliberately open for players and the GM to explore. She might be a lost imperial heir, a "golden child" prophesized to achieve a great destiny, the sole survivor of an ancient clan, or another possibility.



### STRESS

4 Physical **1** **2** **3** **4**

4 Mental **1** **2** **3** **4**

### CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild

2 Mild

4 Moderate

6 Severe







## CHAPTER 5

# SEEDS OF SHENZHOU & INSPIRATION

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### MISSING LUNCH

"He's mine you...you...hussy!" Wang Li snarled, launching herself at Han Ping. The young woman narrowly avoided a blow from the woman's long axe by diving past her to another section of scaffolding.

"Hussy? Really? Who even says—" she began to speak but cut her comment short as Wang Li hooked her foot around one of the scaffold's bamboo supports, redirecting her attack to follow Ping as she moved. "A little help here!" Ping yelled, hazarding a glance down at her companions as she ducked Wang Li's attack. Below in the meadow outside the city walls, she could see Smiling Ox and Wolf-Eyed Yue. They looked so small down there, but she was pretty sure they were having lunch.

"You're doing great!" Smiling Ox yelled from below, "We'd only be in the way!"

"Just think of your fiancé!" Yue added. Ping was pretty sure she was laughing.

"He's not my fiancé! We just met! He's not even my type! Really!" she threw this last comment at Wang Li, who had launched into a flurry of attacks that pushed Ping to the edge of the scaffold.

"Liar!" The young woman screamed, "Gan Zhi saw you two together!"

"Wait, who?" Ping was not good with names normally. Balancing on a construction apparatus of suspect stability did not improve her memory.

"My brother, he saw you two... together!" she emphasized the final word with a shout and a swing of her axe.

"I haven't even met your brother! How could he have seen anything?" Ping protested, blocking the blow by catching Wang Li's arm in mid swing with her palm.

"So! There was something to see!" Wang Li said with a mix of anger and triumph.

"Wait, no. No. Nope! I'm just saying your brother couldn't have seen anything."

"Are you calling my brother a liar?" Wang Li eyes narrowed and Ping swore she could almost see the woman's blood boiling.

"Oh no," she said, dropping under another sweeping attack which she avoided only by falling backward and dropping onto a cross beam several feet down. She hooked her knees around it and hung upside down. Ox and Yue appeared inverted as she stared down at them.

Smiling Ox hefted a pheasant leg with a smile, "You've got her where you want her now!"

Ping swore softly to herself before swinging backwards and up, carrying herself into the air above Wang Li. She shot out with her foot and pushed off the nearby wall. Twisting in midair, she launched herself back at her opponent, fist first.

*They better save me some lunch,* Ping thought as her fist collided with Wang Li's face.



**This chapter contains a series of adventure seeds to use in *Tianxia* campaigns, especially those set in the northern provinces as well as recommendations for a few more sources of inspirational media.**

## SEEDS OF SHENZHOU

The following plot hooks and seeds can be used for adventures or to start a campaign arc. They are all centered around the northern provinces of Shenzhou and the places and individuals found there.

### FIRST AMONG THE SNAKES

The PCs find themselves embroiled in the politics of the Iron Snake Clan and the efforts of their young leader Yun-She On, to keep some of his independence and curtail rival family influence by selecting a bride from beyond the clan's territory. He has set his sights on one of the PCs and is seeking to woo her with his charm, Kung Fu prowess, and wealth. Various rivals seek to marry On as well, and several would-be brides and their relatives seek to scare off, fight off, or simply kill off On's chosen! Of course, the PC herself might not want to marry Yun-She On either, but her "competition" is not inclined to take any chances. Can the PCs arrange a marriage with another, more enthusiastic, suitor? Could the PC develop feelings for the handsome young clan leader? Does the PC have existing suitors who might show up to get in on the action?

The best way to handle the antagonists in this adventure seed is to determine the best themes to focus upon involving this situation and make NPCs to fit them. A Kung Fu satire of unhealthy relationships might have an overly clingy suitor, an extremely selfish suitor, a suitor who wants to change her mate, a suitor who enables harmful behavior, or one who is very controlling. By contrast, a sweet romantic comedy could introduce a passionate suitor who truly loves Yun-She On but cannot seem to get him to notice her until the PCs play matchmakers. There is no right or wrong way to handle this, pick the approach that works best for the group.

**Note:** It is pretty easy to change On's gender or sexual preference before he is introduced if running this adventure seed differently. A change that results in a same-sex relationship raises an interesting question of a biological heir. This might create some special tensions with certain factions in the clan, but otherwise not much needs to change unless the GM and players want.

### RAIDING THE NEST

A dangerous killer is hiding among the Bone Owls at their headquarters in Ten Coffins Quarter. The killer, Mangler Min, murdered the favorite courtesan of a wealthy merchant. She wants justice and is willing to pay for it. The PCs need to infiltrate the Owl's Nest and either eliminate or retrieve Min while dealing with Unfettered Zi and her Bone Owls, as well as any other criminals currently inhabiting the place.

For Mangler Min, use the Big Brute statistics in *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, & Jade* (p. 152) adding the **COLD-BLOODED MURDERER** and **"I LIKE TO USE MY HANDS"** aspects with the **Very Dangerous** stunt (Treat as Jianghu Rank 1 despite lack of Kung Fu). Additional killers, criminals, and threats can be added as needed. It should not be easy to go into the fortress of one of Shejing's major gangs and extract a hulking killer.

A GM looking for inspiration on how to turn an assault on a single building into a whole campaign arc should check out the Indonesian martial arts actioner *The Raid: Redemption* (2011). Not only does it have some jaw dropping action and serve as a good example of how to divide up various building levels and areas into distinctive zones, it also shows how to throw interesting twists and turns into what is seemingly a straightforward adventure.



## SAVING GENERAL MA

Another of General Ma Rong's enemies wants him dead or disgraced. A conspiracy of Red Banner Brotherhood rebels seeks to weaken imperial forces in the north. They are antagonizing a usually peaceful Shusen tribe that has integrated into Shenzhou. The Red Banners have been raiding Shusen settlements posing as imperial troops, an act which is not only stirring up the Shusen but is also angering their cousins north of the wall. Desperate to avoid rebellion and possible all-out war with longtime allies, General Ma has agreed to meet with the heads of the Shusen settlements and a noble of the tribes north of the walls, Prince Rao. The meeting is to take place in secret near the edge of the empire. To maintain secrecy, General Ma is taking only a handful of troops and a small number of capable and trustworthy warriors from outside the usual chain of command. He has selected the PCs for this honor, offering them payment and possible future favors if they agree.

Unfortunately, the Red Banners have gotten word of the meeting and seek to kill General Ma and the Shusen leaders to weaken the empire and start a war. Can the PCs protect the greatest living general in Shenzhou and save the empire's barbarian allies, preventing a bloody conflict that might grow the power of the Red Banner Brotherhood? Do they find an ally or enemy in the Shusen prince? Are there any other forces who know of this meeting? Even if they escape the initial ambush, can they escort the General and any survivors to safety?

The Red Banner Brothers statistics in *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, & Jade* (p. 154) can be used for the rebels, along with appropriate mobs. The GM should customize the default Red Banner Brother to create a number of villains who challenge the PCs' abilities well. For the Prince Rao, use the Barbarian Chieftan statistics (p. 151), adding the **SHUSEN PRINCE** and **SKILLED MARKSMAN** aspects, swapping Fight for Shoot, and adding a stunt that allows using Shoot in place of Fight with Kung Fu.

## FLAWLESS LIVES, PEERLESS DEATHS

Grandmaster Faultless Wu of the fabled Three Mountains School has been poisoned! A rival and former student of Wu's, Peerless Ai, seeks her old master's death for casting her from the school after she killed a student during training. Peerless has plotted and trained for years, seeking the right time to destroy her former teacher and build a new school, the White Mountain Sect, under her direction.

The PCs, if they do not know Grandmaster Faultless already, are called to his aid by Chang Chang, a spirited young girl who has just begun studying under the aging Grandmaster. Chang Chang has learned little Kung Fu so far, engaging mostly in manual labor and menial chores she does not yet realize are designed to build her body and focus for later training. As such, the young lady is wholly unprepared to face a corrupt master of Kung Fu and save her sifu without assistance.

The poison used on Wu is created from the dreaded **SEVEN-PETALED LOTUS**, a purplish white flower that only grows in the most remote corners of the Tianqiao Mountains, specifically the fabled Snow Maiden Grotto. The only known antidote for the poison is derived from the same flower, requiring any who wish to cure Grandmaster Faultless to undertake a quest to a Snow Maiden Grotto deep in the mountains, braving bandits, Peerless's assassins, and possibly the Snow Maiden herself!

After the heroes retrieve the flower and cure Wu, they need to deal with Master Peerless. Depending upon the campaign, they may fight alongside the famed Grandmaster or have to defend him from Peerless's assault. It is even possible the fever-dream near death experience of this adventure causes Faultless Wu to finally realize his elusive Three Mountains Mind technique. He might eventually teach its secret to worthy PCs!

This adventure is epic, and should be tailored to the PCs and their capabilities. Master Peerless's abilities are great, but they are not quite to the level of Grandmaster Faultless. Still, if the PCs face her directly she should be designed using Faultless Wu as a base, reducing Skills and Techniques until she is a devastating but manageable foe. Chang Chang on



the other hand, is quite weak. She is just starting her training and is more of an extra or sidekick than a real boon at this stage. The Snow Maiden, should she be encountered directly, will be styled according to the themes and tone of individual campaigns. In mystic, high level campaigns she may be a fairy maiden of great skill and power, as seen in *TIANXIA: SPIRITS, BEASTS, AND SPELLS* (p. 56). If a campaign focuses on more mundane threats she is a potent Master of Kung Fu, possibly even a Grandmaster.

Master Peerless no doubt has underlings, students, and subordinates to assist her and harass the PC heroes as they attempt to save Faultless Wu. Again, their potency depends heavily on the campaign and individual group. A starting group should face NPCs drawn from the Antagonist chapter of *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK, AND JADE* (p. 149). More experienced groups can face masters and skilled warriors modeled after numerous foes in the Tianxia line such as the Three Motherless Killers (see *TIANXIA: BLOOD, SILK, AND JADE*, p. 48) or Twelve Golden Butchers (see *TIANXIA: TWELVE GOLDEN BUTCHERS*). While Faultless Lives, Peerless Deaths is an adventure seed, it can be expanded into a whole campaign.

## FEAST OR FAMINE?

In the middle of a *PARTICULARLY HARSH WINTER*, a small village on the Northern Road suffers a devastating raid. The local bandit gang, the Centipede Killers, have looted the village's food stores, leaving the village starving and without any chance to survive the winter. The villagers do not have much, but they offer all they possess to any heroes who can reclaim their food or safely transport new supplies through the *TREACHEROUS WINTER PASSES* of the Northern Road.

It is up to the heroes how they choose to assist the townsfolk. They can seek to locate and raid the Centipede Killers, reclaiming the stolen food and likely liberating numerous other stolen goods gathered by the gang over the winter months. If they seek to secure more food, they can buy additional supplies at various trading posts and towns further down the road. The route is icy, cold, and bandit-laden, but with luck and skill, more supplies could be brought to save the town. Paying for the supplies is another matter—the town does not have much left, though they can scrape together just enough to purchase sufficient food to barely survive until spring.

Both solutions give rise to new issues for the area. Recovering the food from the bandits leaves the village well supplied, but it pushes the Centipede Killers to become more desperate themselves. They turn to more aggressive raiding and even cannibalism to survive—unless the heroes wipe out the gang, of course. Bringing in more supplies means the village survives, but only barely. Many weak and ill citizens perish, and all the while the Centipede Killers feast and grow. By spring this results in a weakened village and powerful well-fed bandits hungry for profit and violence.



# ADDITIONAL INSPIRATION

Readers interested in new inspirational media to provide ideas for their *Tianxia* games should consider the following. As always, this is not an exhaustive list, just a sampling.

## FILMS

### SAVING GENERAL YANG (2013)

Director Ronny Yu (*Bride with White Hair*) returns to Chinese period piece action in a big way. This wonderful epic tells of a famous and brilliant general and his seven sons who due to politics and vendetta find themselves on their own against a larger force. The action is a great example of how mass battles could work. A solid cast of young talented Chinese actors play the brothers, led by now-*wu xia* veteran Ekin Cheng. Various weapons, fighting styles, and environments are showcased and Vic Chou almost steals the show as Third Brother in a role that shows why one should never discount the guy with the bow.

### KILLER CLANS (1976)

With this book introducing the clans into the background and environment of Shenzhou, it is hard to find a better movie to point to than the Shaw Brothers aptly named classic. Though almost forty years old, this holds up remarkably well. The fights are still impressive and the plot centering around two rival clans and a wandering assassin is surprisingly complex and well-crafted. Many of the weapons and character concepts scream "Make Me an Aspect!" here. The various sets and scenes could be liberally borrowed for any *Tianxia* campaign. Note: there is some brief sex, nudity, and one particular scene of sexualized violence here. Nothing extreme or particularly explicit, much more is implied than shown. It is noted because not everyone expects that in older Kung Fu films.

### DEADLY BREAKING SWORD (1979)

Another Shaw Brothers film, this movie was not a huge hit, but it has a solid plot revolving around two martial arts Masters, a wicked physician, a young hero, and a spunky heroine. This is a solid example of how to put a lot of elements into the same story, with a mix of tension, action, intrigue, mystery, slapstick humor, and even a touch of parody that somehow manages to work. The action is solid, if not jaw-dropping, but it holds up well on close inspection due to solid pacing and chemistry between the actors. What this film really shines for in terms of inspiration is all the little touches: a fighter who always brings a coffin for his opponent, a swordsman whose weapon gets shorter each time he beats someone, "evil" medicine, and other fun elements.

## BOOKS

### DREAM OF THE DRAGON POOL

There is precious little English *wu xia* fiction, and even less full-length well-written novels by Western authors. Fortunately, this is one such work. Author Albert Dalia manages to balance approachability with genre faithfulness admirably in this *wu xia* tale with heavy Daoist influences. His other novel, *Listening to Rain: The Adventures of Shaolin Blade Tanzon* is also worth reading, though it is the first book in a trilogy that has not yet had a second volume.



# WAR RAGES IN THE ICY NORTH!



## THE LANDS OF THE ICE AND SNOW

*TIANXIA: WAR, IRON & STONE* expands the world of Tianxia, detailing the two Northernmost provinces: Huangzhou and Dongzhou. Discover the Great Wall, Ghost Song Forest, Emperor's Ferry, and more!



## WHEN TWO TRIBES GO TO WAR

In a world where kung fu is king, even wuxia heroes sometimes face battles too large to fight alone. Mike Olson's martial-arts-infused mass combat rules add a new dimension to the world of Tianxia!



## FRIENDS, FOES, AND FAULTLESS WU

Within these pages you will encounter many new faces from the world of Tianxia. From Grandmaster Faultless Wu of the Three Mountains School, to Frozen Flower, snow maiden of the North. Prepare to encounter many new, iconic characters who will breathe new life into your campaigns.



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